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For Immediate Release:

EIU FACULTY LAUREATE KORY ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO DIVE INTO EDUCATION

CHARLESTON – Fern Kory's advice to incoming Eastern Illinois University students about their college education can be boiled down to one sentence: "You get out of this what you put into it."

Kory, an EIU English professor from Champaign, is happy to have the chance to impart that advice in her role as EIU's 2005-2006 Faculty Laureate.

As the university's official spokeswoman on the importance of a general, liberal arts education, she will speak during EIU's Fall Convocation, a welcoming ceremony for new students, at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 30, in the Grand Ballroom, Martin Luther King Jr. University Union.

"Every class is only as good as the student lets it be," she said. "Some students don't figure that out until it's too late. That's the thing about this (being named Faculty Laureate). It's an opportunity to talk to people at the beginning of their journey and tell them a couple things that might help them get more out of their experience here."

That experience starts with general education courses, which Kory counts as an extremely important facet of a university education.

"It would be tragic to just offer people job training instead of a broader, liberal arts education," she said. "General education courses give you a sense of what your choices are. Nobody really knows what's going to turn out to be relevant in the future. People really do have to have a range of interests, and they should follow up on their interests and see where they lead them."

One of the main purposes of a general education is to prepare students from all fields of study to think for themselves, Kory said.

"It's just real clear to me that what happens in English classes and other general education courses is connected to what students do in their personal and professional lives, and connected to decisions they'll make in the real world as citizens," Kory said. "I just think people need to be equipped so there's something inside of them that says, 'I know there's another side to this.'"

Kory said she also wants to make sure students realize the wealth of resources available to them on campus, including the Writing Center, for which she serves as assistant director.

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And although now, more than ever before, students have the opportunity to seek out information on their own, Kory wants to make sure they don't underestimate the importance of interaction with professors and fellow students.

"What goes on in class isn't just about passing information along," she said. "It's about figuring out what to do with it and how to understand it.

"The faculty here will do just about anything for the student who wants to learn. Not enough people are asking us to do that. If they would make my life harder, I would be happier."

But not much could make her happier this year than learning she'd been chosen by her peers to serve as Faculty Laureate.

"I was abashed, and I'm pretty hard to abash," she said. "I truly see this as a great honor, and I take seriously the job of representing the faculty," she said, adding that as a member of University Personnel Committee, she knows that EIU has a "remarkable" faculty.

Kory, who has been teaching at EIU since 1990, will be on sabbatical this fall, when she will serve on three book-award committees.

Her publications include articles on Ernest Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises" and "The Brownies Book" (an early 20th century magazine for African-American children), as well as dozens of reviews of books for children and young adults.

Her service at EIU has included serving on the NCA Self-Study Committee, which prepared for the accreditation visit earlier this year; the Council on Academic Affairs; and the Women's Advocacy Council, for which she coordinates the annual essay contest and Women of Achievement awards.

Kory received her bachelor's degree from California State University at Fullerton, and her master's degree and doctorate from the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Kory lives in Champaign with her husband, Mike. They have two children near the age of most new EIU students – Rose is a high school senior, and Paul is junior in college – so "it's a nice moment for me to talk to people going to college," she said.

At the same time, she appreciates all of the transfer and nontraditional students, "who really add so much to the mix, adding different perspectives," she said.

That diversity of ideas, combined with individual effort, helps to make EIU's liberal arts education one of the best experiences a person can have.

Kory plans to spend this academic year sharing that opinion as much as she possibly can.