



**East Tennessee State University  
Office of the President**

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**2013 Spring Gathering Remarks  
April 26, 2013 - 2 p.m.  
Amphitheatre**

Thank you, and good afternoon. Iqra, if you would please remain here with me for just a moment. As all of you know, Iqra just completed her term as president of the Student Government Association and she will walk across the stage and receive her degree in just a few weeks. Over the past year, I have used the phrase campus and community engagement with great frequency. In my opinion, Iqra embodies the ethos of the word engagement. She has been a member of SGA since her freshman year and was the longest-serving senator in the SGA. During her tenure at ETSU, she has been a member of the Honors-in-Discipline program, President's Pride, Admissions Ambassadors, the Gospel Choir, and the American Medical Student Association. She co-founded the ETSU Model United Nations, served as a mentor for the "Rise Up" program, was the committee chair for "Relay for Life," and represented ETSU at conferences in Singapore, the Netherlands, and Vancouver. Somehow, she still found time to teach a cycling class at the CPA.

In addition to her service to the university, she has excelled in the classroom. As a student researcher, Iqra utilized computer software to create a three-dimensional, simulated world to study the spread of infectious diseases. In fact, just before she arrived on stage this afternoon, she successfully defended her honors thesis. It has been a true honor to serve with you over the past year. Your school spirit, passion, and love for ETSU are inspiring. Thank you for all you do for ETSU.

It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to the 2013 Spring Gathering. I know this is an extremely busy time of year, and today, in particular, is no exception. Our faculty and students are getting ready for dead week and finals. Right now, our Student Affairs staff is actively preparing the Dome for tonight's Train concert which I am proud to note is open to the public. Our Department of Music is preparing for a weekend of recitals and concerts, our men's baseball team is gearing up for a three-game home stand against Kennesaw State, and our Registrar's Office is finalizing plans for Commencement, which is just two weeks from tomorrow.

For the next few minutes I would like for all of us to pause, exhale, and take a respite from the hectic close of the academic year. In our time together on this beautiful spring afternoon, let's

celebrate ETSU and our students, faculty, staff, and everyone in the community who has contributed their time, energy, and talents to make this a vibrant, energetic, and rewarding place to study, teach, work, treat patients, and conduct research. I hope that this afternoon we can enjoy the company of our colleagues, some refreshments, as well as the talents of our world- renowned bluegrass pride band. Performing today are:

- Cory Wharton on guitar
- Heather Twigg on fiddle
- Zach Carter on banjo
- John Goad on bass
- and Professor Daniel Boner on the mandolin.

Let us give them a round of applause.

Music has been part of our history since the day East Tennessee State Normal School opened its doors. If President Sidney Gilbreath hosted a spring gathering in 1914, he probably would have asked the Normal School Quartet and Band to perform. These musicians became well-known as they traveled across the region, appearing in churches and old schoolhouses. They performed songs, but they also talked about the need for better schools and improved teaching facilities. The United States Bureau of Education later hailed the efforts of the Normal School Quartet and Band as “The Greatest Educational Campaign in America.” Consider the profound presence the arts have on this campus today: from music to theater, dance, film, art and design, poetry, storytelling, and digital media. Consider the many ways that the Mary B. Martin School of the Arts and visionaries such as Mr. James Martin have transformed the arts. This impact extends beyond our mountains and has garnered the attention of the Governor, who earlier this year provided Mr. Martin with the prestigious Governor’s Arts Award. Jim, thank you for all that you do for ETSU.

The enhancement of the arts at ETSU through the creation of a performing arts center is a dream shared across the region. In fact, it is a dream that was identified more than a quarter-century ago as we celebrated our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and planned for the Centennial in “Turning Toward 2011: A Report by the Commission on the Future of East Tennessee State University.” Today, we have the opportunity to move that dream forward. The Tennessee Board of Regents and Governor Haslam have authorized us to begin the planning process for the new facility and this work will occur over the course of the coming academic year.

This is the first step toward what we trust will be full funding for the facility in the 2014 legislative session. The fundraising for this facility is part of our Arts Initiative, which we unveiled on February 14<sup>th</sup>. As I have stated on numerous occasions, the Arts Initiative is East Tennessee State University’s number one fundraising priority. While the \$9.5 million goal that we announced on Valentine’s Day is our immediate goal, the initiative is more than just a fundraising campaign for a building – it is an initiative to expand our collective work in the arts. This campaign will grow over time as we deepen scholarship support for students, create endowed chairs and academic support for faculty, and examine venues through which we can expand programs and further improve our existing facilities. I would like to thank Dr. Stanton for his continued service to ETSU as he leads the campus as chair of our arts initiative.

The arts touch us all. The arts unify the campus, bringing together diverse disciplines from across the university to celebrate our culture, heritage, and the talents of our students – students such as Brock Cooley, a junior theater major who was one of eight student directors from across the country selected to participate in a fellowship program at the Kennedy Center last week in our nation’s capital.

The initiative allows us a chance to celebrate students such as Will MacMorran. Will has been playing the bagpipes since he was nine years old. If you attended graduation last December, you saw Will leading the commencement processional playing the bagpipes. Having the opportunity to work with the Celtic program is one of the reasons why Will is at ETSU.

When I think about the arts at ETSU, I also think about Mo Sabri. Mo is an honors student at ETSU and plans to go to medical school. Mo is *also* a renowned rap star. His recent song and video, “I Believe in Jesus,” earned him an invitation to attend the National Prayer Breakfast with President Obama and members of Congress.

Today, I have the pleasure of announcing a new campaign that provides each of you with the opportunity to make the arts initiative your own. The campaign is called “Now Seating,” and allows you to name a seat in one of the auditoriums or concert halls in memory of a loved one, special friend, or mentor. These seats can be purchased as a one-time gift or through payroll deductions. Jeff Anderson and his University Advancement staff have a table set up here today with additional information and details related to the “Now Seating” initiative.

In addition to affirming our commitment to the arts, I also hope that we can re-affirm our commitment to the faculty that provides the collective heartbeat of ETSU. The salary equity enhancements that we announced last fall were just one phase of a multi-year commitment and it is my intention to do everything possible to make another equity adjustment this year. We must reward our faculty and staff for the outstanding work that you do each day in the classroom to shape the lives of tomorrow’s leaders.

During last year’s spring gathering, I announced that we would begin a conversation of dreaming a new future for ETSU. That conversation became known as **125**. Throughout the fall and spring semesters, the campus and community came together and dreamed collectively about where we wanted ETSU to be in the next five to ten years, and ultimately in 2036 as we celebrate our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This visioning process was driven by one question: “What if?”

The Committee for 125 challenged the entire campus to dream big and to never feel that any dream was too big. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you here today who took part in this process. I thank you for your feedback, your insights, and the time and energy you gave to your ETSU. I thank you for your passion and your vision for this institution and how we can influence the lives of our students and the people of this region. I encourage each of you to spend time on the 125 website and continue to share your dreams for ETSU. In the coming weeks we will hold additional roundtables and feedback opportunities as we move to the close

of the 125 process. Later this summer, I look forward to sharing with the entire campus community a draft of the final report and recommendations from the Committee for 125. These recommendations will provide a roadmap for the paths our institution will take in the months and years to come.

I would like to thank Mr. Louis Gump for his leadership of the Committee for 125 and Jeremy Ross for his exemplary staff work and progressively responsible role and support of the 125 process.

One of the recurring themes throughout the 125 process centered around ETSU's presence in an increasingly competitive higher education marketplace. Last fall, a national consulting group began a process of extensive research related to the perceptions of ETSU among our current students, faculty, and staff as well as by others across the region. The consultants interviewed and surveyed high school counselors, parents of ETSU students, current high school students, and community leaders.

I would like to share with you some of the comments included in the final report:

- ETSU was described as being “on the rise” and “a hidden gem.”
- The campus community was termed as being “like a family.”
- There were numerous comments talking about the beauty of this campus and how the campus proper attracted people to ETSU.
- In addition to the natural beauty of the campus, students reported that they were drawn to ETSU because of our affordability and the friendliness of the people who comprise the ETSU family.
- Our Honors College was cited as a major strength of the institution and was described as being “on par with the best in the nation.”
- People were surprised by how much we have to offer. They came to campus knowing very little about us and were amazed to find out what is available.
- Other respondents noted that “ETSU offers private college benefits and public institution access.”

While there was a great deal of positive feedback in the survey, we also received feedback indicating we have much room for improvement and growth. In particular, the survey noted that we must make improvements in technology, our web presence, branding, marketing, and outreach. In response to these findings, I am asking Jennifer Clements and the marketing leadership team to determine what revisions and enhancements are needed for our marketing and branding efforts, and to have this information and recommendations available by our faculty convocation in the fall. These recommendations will spark a campus conversation in the fall that will clarify and define a new look for ETSU, unifying a campus that now has more than 100 diverse logos.

The feedback from this marketing study reminds us that there is so much to be proud of at ETSU. Did you know that...?

- Our ROTC cadets placed first among 40 teams during a regional championship event last fall, and were at West Point this past weekend competing in the Sandhurst games, an international challenge competition?
- Our academic health sciences center is one of only a few in the nation to have the diverse range of health care services available under one roof at the Johnson City Community Health Center?
- We had a record number of students participate in our student research forum earlier this month – an increase of 20 percent from last year?
- One of our advertising professors, Dr. Stephen Marshall, was just named “Educator of the Year” by the American Advertising Federation?
- ETSU has the largest nursing enrollment of any institution in the state?
- Less than a year after it was formed, the Gatton College of Pharmacy’s Generation Rx student organization received a second-place award in a national competition?
- We have a High Performance Computing Center that has, so far, accomplished 1.3 million hours of computation—something that would take 150 years by conventional means?
- Veteran enrollment at ETSU has increased by 300 percent since 2004, or that earlier this year we opened a Veterans Success Center, and next month we will have a major announcement related to student veterans that will further enhance the level of access and services available to the men and women who have served our nation?
- Of those in the region who have a college degree, 85 percent are ETSU alumni?
- Our physicians at the Quillen College of Medicine provide medical care for over 45,000 patients each month?
- Under the leadership of head coach Yasar Zaatini our men's tennis team won its seventh consecutive A-Sun Championship last weekend, taking down top-seed North Florida at our new Tennis Complex?
- Earlier this week the *U.S. News & World Report* released its annual high school rankings and our University School received the ‘Silver’ medal award. UH was ranked 12th in Tennessee and was the highest ranking school in Northeast Tennessee.

Finally, and this one I am extremely proud, did you know that over the course of the academic year we have been engaged in a campus discourse related to civility? This conversation began at our fall faculty convocation with our Labels video, which was masterfully produced by Marty Fitzgerald. Throughout the year we challenged each other, and engaged in a collective journey enlightened by thought leaders such as Cornel West, Diane Rehm, and Soledad O’Brien. We celebrated our commitment to diversity with the dedication of the fountain in Borchuck Plaza to the brave men and women who desegregated our institution, and we continued to push boundaries throughout civility week.

There have been moments this semester when we vigorously debated issues. In fact, that debate marks the beauty of all that is higher education. While we may not always agree on issues, the fact that we can come together and debate, discuss, and communicate exemplifies what transpires in our classrooms every day. You teach our students to question themselves,

question society, and ultimately to become critical thinkers. In a nation whose political discourse is wrought with acrimony and discord, I am proud to be part of an institution that practices civility on a daily basis.

However, I feel that we have much room to improve as it related to creating an open and inclusive environment across campus. As we move through the summer and into the fall, we will examine opportunities to become more transparent and inclusive. We will examine the development of structures that facilitate communication, enhance efficiency, and remove confusion inherent in our budgeting processes, and other areas, so that we can better serve our students in pursuit of their educational goals. As I noted at this time last year, we must be willing to test and stretch ourselves. We may not reach all of our goals, but we cannot be complacent. There is no upward limit on the power of this institution and our faculty.

Let us now turn our attention to the individuals and values that helped build this great institution. I am fond of saying that at ETSU, we serve the hard-working people of Tennessee. We are not a city on the hill; we are the people who built the hill. We are an institution of dedicated individuals who work quietly to create a better future for our students. Today, we celebrate their service, and honor those who are committed to the life of the mind.

I would like to take a moment to thank someone who has tirelessly supported this institution over the past year. This individual has been a de facto single mom, has served on numerous public boards, given countless speeches to groups across campus, and is a tireless champion for women's health issues. She has the patience of a saint and is honored to serve as our first lady. Donna, thank you for all that you do for me and ETSU.

Over the course of the Spring semester, we have sought nominations for Bach Servant Leadership Award, an award focused on dedication and service to our students. This award is named in recognition of Dr. Bert C. Bach, someone who has dedicated his life to higher education and creating an environment in which we strive to go above and beyond the call of duty to help students persist to graduation. Our recipient of this year's award has led a program near and dear to Dr. Bach, the Roan Scholars program, and I am proud to note that over the past few weeks significant funds have been provided by donors in recognition of Dr. Bach's long-standing commitment to the program.

At this time, I would like for Dr. Bach to come forward. It is with great honor that I announce that Ms. Kathy Feagins is the recipient of the 2013 Bach Servant Leadership award. Kathy will receive a new 2013 Honda Civic for the next two years. The car is located across the lawn.

Spring is a time of renewal and reflection. In the days to come, we will celebrate the successes of our students. From here they become our alumni. Our students are the passion that drives us. I encourage our students to become engaged. You get out of this journey only what you put into it. Do not take it for granted. Enjoy the life of the mind and enjoy your time at college. Your ability to define a better future for yourself is predicated on your dedication to yourself and your community.

I thank each of you for taking time to attend this celebration today, and may God bless each of you as we travel on this transformational journey together. Go Bucs!