



**East Tennessee State University
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Faculty Convocation Address
“Beyond Vision to Action”

Friday, August 19, 2022
Martin Center for the Arts

Brian Noland
President

Good morning. It is my distinct honor and privilege to welcome you to the start of the fall semester on the beautiful campus of East Tennessee State University. This morning we gather in anticipation of a new academic year and the promise therein. The magical cycle of the fall has captured the imagination of our campus for the past 111 years.

This fall contains an extra layer of magic and I would like to thank our staff in the Offices of Admissions, Financial Aid, Housing and Residence Life, the Graduate School, as well as all of our faculty who have helped with our recruitment initiatives. Yesterday we welcomed more than **1,700** students to campus who are participating in PREVIEW. This is the largest PREVIEW class in the history of the university. Over the course of the next few days, more than **3,000** students will move into our residence halls, which are at full capacity. Each of these students brings with them hopes, dreams, and aspirations yet some degree of trepidation about the journey before them. The keys to their future, as well as to unlocking their dreams, rest in your hands.

Given our strong freshman class, coupled with the hard work of our faculty and staff to drive a culture of student success and engagement, our enrollment is within budget projections. Subsequently, I anticipate no budget revisions for the upcoming year and look forward to recommending at least a three percent across the board salary enhancement to our Board of Trustees for their approval later this semester.

The university has made multiple investments over the past decade targeted at improving faculty and staff salaries. However, much work remains to be done if we are to meet our salary goals. To that end, we have been working with colleagues from the Huron Group to explore opportunities to assess policies, processes, and organizational structures to realize efficiencies that will allow us to reinvest scarce resources into faculty and staff salaries. As we move through the fall, we will keep the campus informed of this work, engaging in a rich dialogue around next steps.

Over the course of the past year, we have been actively engaged in a strategic visioning process that refreshed the work of the Committee for 125. This work was guided by asking “what if” questions and allowed us to think beyond our everyday activities and open our imaginations. As we approach the new semester, it is time to move BEYOND VISION and transition from planning to action. In fact, implementation of a number of the initiatives outlined by the Committee for 125.2 are already underway. Our partnership with HURON is central to this effort as we make needed changes to our budget model, transition our campus data systems from Banner to Oracle, and deepen our commitment to our service mission via our Quality Enhancement Plan.

Throughout the strategic visioning process, there was a clarion call to deepen our commitment to the institution’s research mission. In addition to the foundational work of the ETSU Research Corporation to build relationships with business and industry such as BlueCross and BlueShield of Tennessee, Dr. Nick Hagemeyer and his staff have worked to strengthen the culture of research on our campus. As part of this effort, I am pleased to announce that we have been accepted to full membership in the **Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities**, one of the nation’s preeminent post-secondary research organization. I have long stated that we are the land grant university for central Appalachia and our acceptance into APLU formalizes our role and affirms our historic mission of improving the quality of life for the people of our region.

As we continue to experience the fallout of the pandemic, it is evident that our region needs us more than ever. We have seen college going rates drop **10 percent** in Washington County and as much as **25 percent** in some of our more rural counties. If we step back and look at the educational pipeline holistically, we optimistically see that for every 100 ninth graders only 80 graduate from high school. Of those, 40 go onto college, and of those only 20 graduate. I will contend that those numbers are optimistic

for we know that the graduation rate for many colleges in our region is below 20%. Furthermore, this overall number masks the equity gaps across demographic groups. For many sectors of the population, the 100 – 20 pipeline is in the single digits.

As we reflect upon our stewardship of place mission, I feel that we must take aggressive and purposeful steps to ensure that more of the youth in our region have the opportunity to realize their full potential. At the core of this work will be our faculty, who through their teaching, research, and service, change lives on a daily basis.

Central to the ability of the faculty to actualize the academy's tri-partite mission is academic freedom. We recognize that the world we live in is a function of history and we must be students of history in order to appreciate both our current state, as well as what lies on the horizon. As Laurence Levine noted in his work *The Opening of the American Mind*, the academic history of the United States has not been a long and happy voyage in a stable vessel characterized by blissful consensus about which subjects should form the indisputable curriculum. It has been marked by prolonged and often acrimonious struggle and debate, not very different from that which characterizes the nation in our own day.

A former president of the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper, once noted that some universities are deaf to the cry of suffering humanity; some are exclusive and shut up in themselves; but the true university, the university of the future, is one in which the motto will be: service for mankind wherever mankind is, whether within scholastic walls or without those walls and in the world at large.

One example in which our faculty are working to change the future beyond the walls of our campus is happening in Chattanooga, where the BLUESKY initiative has come to life this fall. I hope that everyone will take a moment to learn more about our partnership with BlueCross and BlueShield of Tennessee, which can serve as a model for the academy. It reinforces the need for us to be adaptive and responsive with our curricula, but also to recognize at the center of curricula change is our faculty.

The upcoming year will be a time of listening and a time of learning, and re-learning, to understand each other. I recognize that there will be issues happening around the nation that may cause tension in our classrooms. Don't confuse noise with reality, or give credibility to falsehood because of the volume

of the voice. Let us use this as an opportunity to teach students how to interact with others while also being kind, compassionate, and resilient. A university campus should be an uplifting place. Let us continue to build a university where, around every corner, there is something to inspire us.

Today's theme is about *going beyond* vision to action and moving forward together. In that spirit, I am excited to announce a major new initiative that will affect the entire campus community. This summer, ETSU was selected to participate in EAB's Moonshot for Equity initiative — an effort to not simply close equity gaps but to eliminate them entirely. Through this effort, which will be led by our Vice President of Equity and Inclusion, Dr. Keith Johnson, ETSU will commit to taking a comprehensive look at our campus culture, systems, structures, and processes to integrate equity-minded practices into everything we do.

This initiative is not just “another thing” the institution is undertaking. In many ways, it is THE thing that will drive all we do in the coming year and beyond. Historically, institutions of higher education have approached the problem of inequitable outcomes with a deficit mindset — meaning that we often develop interventions focused on remediating or “fixing” the student.

The Moonshot initiative focuses instead on removing systemic barriers for students through 15 best practices that increase access to higher education and, more importantly, ensure long-term student success. Moonshot will push us to expand our perspectives, our business practices, and our teaching. It will mean building stronger partnerships across the P-20 pipeline.

In the coming weeks, we will share more about this initiative. We are working with Drs. Johnson and McCorkle to develop a comprehensive communications plan to keep you updated, and some of you may be asked to participate in working groups and committees to help guide this initiative. Each person on this campus, no matter their role, will have the opportunity to support the Moonshot. And, during the spring semester, we will begin expanding this work beyond our campus to engage stakeholders and institutions across the region.

I hope each of you will embrace this opportunity to shoot for the moon. Together, we can make Northeast Tennessee a beacon of hope for a brighter and more equitable future.

At this juncture I had intended to introduce Dr. Kimberly McCorkle, our Provost and Senior Vice President for Academics. Dr. McCorkle came to ETSU a little more than a year ago following a national search. Someone involved in a major national search for a campus leader once told me that their greatest fear was that the search would yield a turkey, but once it concluded they captured an eagle. That is what I feel that we have in Dr. McCorkle ... someone with the vision, passion, temperament, and quiet fortitude to lead us into new horizons.

Due to an unfortunate turn of events, our eagle is grounded today. We send her well wishes and I will now welcome Dr. Rob Pack to the stage. Dr. Pack recently began serving in the role of Executive Vice Provost and will provide comments on behalf of Dr. McCorkle.