

Inaugural Address
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania

Great Expectations

Saturday, April 6, 2013
Marcia G. Welsh, Ph.D.

Thank you. President Bob Caret for being here and for your comments. I loved working with and for you; to my family members who have already been introduced but who have come so far to be with me today. One son is missing, Nate Terracio who was unable to join us but is with us in spirit.

To my friends and colleagues from ESU and PASSHE, of course, but also from University of South Carolina, Adelphi University, Towson University, and New York University. Although that is where I met you, some of you have moved on to other institutions, but our ties have remained strong.

The ESU Council of Trustees, especially our chair, Pat Ross, as well as Harry Lee, who along with Professor John Hauth, co-chaired the Inauguration Committee. The Inauguration Committee...those creative people who dared to imagine this fabulous week of activities. Professor Darlene Farris-Labar for the logo that has made us think about the interconnectivity of the relationships of our many parts.

Mr. Pichini, Chair of the PASSHE Board of Governors, and Chancellor Garland. And most importantly, my husband Lou Terracio...my colleague, my best friend, and the love of my life.

I am very proud to be standing here as the first woman president of East Stroudsburg University. And I do stand here with Great Expectations for this wonderful institution. The theme Great Expectations comes from the classic Charles Dickens' novel about ambition and self-improvement. To quote from Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*:

"Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence. There is no better rule." Let us raise our expectations and make evident our intention to be great!

ESU is a wonderful university with tremendous potential to be even better. Achieving that potential depends on the collective intelligence, creativity and energy of many individuals in this room today—on our hopes, our ambitions, our willingness, and our courage to preserve and strengthen what is best about our university and to change and redesign what evidence and imagination tells us will assure a better future for our learning community and region.

I have great expectations for ESU as an institution as we work our way through both the positive and less positive forces that challenge higher education today— funding for education, the potentially disruptive force of technology, access, and national and state expectations. How do we meet the needs of our students, ensuring their life-long success?

I have great expectations for our faculty and staff as we work together to continue to build a progressive institution of higher education that ensures quality student learning, and longevity in the value of a degree from ESU.

Great expectations for the community in which we live, and the partnerships we must have to ensure we are fulfilling our role as a public institution with a responsibility to serve, and to significantly and positively impact the regional economy.

Great expectations for our alumni who are proud of their alma mater and must be there for our students to help with internships, jobs, mentoring, and support, and sometimes critical evaluation, of all that we do.

Great expectations for our students. For what they accomplish while with us, and for what they become when they leave us.

I grew up in a small town in Nebraska with a population of about 500 where very few high school graduates went on to college. Our parents owned the local grocery store where we were all expected to work. The store was 100% family owned and operated. And for the kids, my siblings and me, there were never excuses. I will never forget the many New Year's Eves when the store would close for business and we would all be there to do inventory. A New Year's Eve date...work faster. No one could leave until we were done.

Our parents did not go to college until our mother went back part time, it seemed for years, and actually graduated from college on my 16th birthday. But they had great expectations for all of us. We *would* go to college, we *would* excel in everything we did. My parents firmly believed that education was the foundation to success.

As you might expect, our memories of our parents are different. The four of us have talked about this a lot. Our relationships with them were based on our individual personalities. For me, my mother was loving and forgiving, but my father was demanding and mostly unforgiving. When I came home with an A on my report card, he would ask me what I had missed, why didn't I get an A+? My teachers were never blamed for my failures or my mistakes...only me. When I asked for some help to buy clothes when I was preparing to go away to college, he bought me a used Singer sewing machine he had purchased for \$10 and said I could make the clothes...and I did. I got my work ethic from my parents. But no matter what else we did in life, we were all going to college. And that we did. When we did something well, our father raised the bar and said next time, do better. When I received my Ph.D., my parents asked me about going back to college for my next degree!

More than 311 million people call our country home, and we are the fastest growing of the industrialized nations. We face, however, a strange confluence of factors. We are arguably the most creative of nations with an astonishing increase in productivity, but at the same time, we struggle with the steepest decline in educational attainment among industrialized nations, and sadly, no amount of innovation and hard work can get us where we need to go as a nation as long as we fall behind in the education of our citizenry.

President Obama outlined the critical elements of a pathway to success for our country in early 2009. He said quite clearly that in order for our nation to be successful, America must once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. He also stated that we must reclaim our leadership in math, science, technology and engineering. I agree with him and firmly believe higher education fuels both personal and societal success on many fronts. Whether the changes needed to improve educational attainment in America will be made, either by individual colleges or universities or by higher education as a whole, depends on the thoughtfulness, energy, creativity, and vision with which we manage change.

As a public comprehensive masters institution, what is East Stroudsburg University's role in educating America's youth and providing continuing education and new academic opportunities for students of all ages? What is *our* role in scholarship and research, in identifying the needs for new fields and professions, in service to our community and region?

I believe ESU will have to be a university with an unparalleled combination of academic excellence and commitment to our social, economic, cultural, and environmental setting. High standards and quality, access and impact are integral to our mission as an exemplary, comprehensive, public institution. While we face significant challenges, we also possess the opportunity and the potential to dramatically change the face of higher education in our region and serve as a model nationally. But we have a significant choice to make as an institution: Will we be courageous and step up to face the challenge? Or will we sit back and argue that "we've weathered storms like this before and this too shall pass. We're already good and no one or nobody can make us change."

We are a public university, and we have a public purpose. We need to play multiple roles in our region, and these roles must include teaching, research, service, economic development, and a commitment to being a partner in regional success. How do we do this? How do we meet the public's high expectations?

First, we need to change our campus culture. We need to develop a sense of community trust and respect that will enable all of us at ESU to be partners in identifying ways to be more productive and cost-effective and in making better use of data to inform our decisions and support our new ideas and innovative programs.

Second, we need to take genuine pride in our history, those deep roots that make us who we are today and inform the realistic but lofty aspirations we have for our tomorrow. We need to step back and think about what we do, how we do it, for whom, and for what purpose...and find solutions that uphold the values and traditions of our history.

Third, we need to leverage where we are, and who we are. Leveraging place means having a commitment to where ESU is situated and offering the highest levels of academic excellence to a very broad cross-section of the students in our region. Other than being located in northeast Pennsylvania, we are situated as a public comprehensive university, and we are increasingly dealing with a larger proportion of historically underrepresented groups, including students of color, students who are physically challenged and students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families. With underserved students rapidly

becoming the majority in higher education, we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to implement high-impact practices that couple rigorous academic programs that do not short-change our students with innovative and systemic initiatives that result in higher levels of student success.

Fourth, we need to leverage our location in northeast Pennsylvania, specifically in the Poconos. We need to be sure we are offering degree programs and opportunities to serve our region, to provide a solid workforce to the region by offering those academic programs that encourage entrepreneurship and economic development, and where possible, use our region and its many attributes in our curriculum. It is our location—not only our own campus but our entire region—that ultimately differentiates us from many other comprehensive universities. We must consistently and effectively communicate not only our own university's successes but those of our neighborhood and region.

And fifth, we need to engage our students in conversations about their responsibilities as citizens. Benjamin Franklin eloquently spoke of and creatively acted on the need to make higher learning available to the citizens of our country. The original goal of American higher education was to educate citizens who would be able to understand current issues, vote and comprehend what they were voting for as citizen leaders of our country.

We seem as a nation to have lost sight of Franklin's vision, of seeing education as a public good and not just a personal gain. We need to refocus our obligation to educate our students to prepare them with the knowledge, skills and experiences they will need in a volatile and complex world. We must educate them to be good citizens.

My vision for our ESU community is that we will be a place that embraces high expectations and celebrates academic attainment. Our focus will be on student success, making retention and completion a campus priority, finding creative ways to fund both scholarships and new learning initiatives for our students and sharpening our focus on every single possible way that we can help our students to attain our goals and their dreams. One size will not fit all. We will need to identify new strategies to attract a nationally and regionally shrinking pool of traditional students, to provide seamless transfers for students from community colleges (which provide access to students who might otherwise never have considered application to a university) and to create new opportunities for adult students as we have already done with our Philadelphia and Lehigh Valley programs

East Stroudsburg University traces its lineage to a regional teaching academy established in 1893. Up until 1960, the University offered only degrees in education but we have since then maintained our heritage while expanding our offerings and expanding our reach. I see us continuing to grow and indeed expanding our range of influence. We need to start by picking a few goals that we think are attainable, a few areas where we think we could create some quick models that will catalyze others to move in new directions.

Nothing should stand in our way. We cannot allow some of our administrative academic differences and areas of distrust to hinder what we need to do as a community, and I believe strongly that we can reestablish this trust by working together in creative and

dynamic ways and by owning innovative designs for change. My goal is to create an environment in which change is not only possible, but a natural part of our definition of what a learning community is. Civility, building community in the biggest sense, both as an institution and as a region, must be our goal.

In addition to retention and academic attainment, I envision ESU as a partner in the realization of great expectations for our local community and greater region. I want us to be good neighbors. I want our University to be the go-to place when the community needs expertise, when they need help, when they need a partner. Whether you are a student, faculty or staff member, alumna, or alumnus, we need to show our community appropriate respect and to commit ourselves to being a better neighbor.

I also envision ESU as an institution that understands how much we, too, can learn from our neighbors, to be service learning focused. In fact, a piece of this dream will soon come true with the opening of a service learning office to help faculty with the academic side of service learning, applying it to their classroom work, and to be a place where community members go when they have projects that can use the help of our very talented students and faculty. In addition, although we have had services for our nation's veterans for many years, we are bringing them together in one place this next week when we officially open our ESU Veteran's Center. It is a work in progress.

I see ESU as a stimulus for economic development in the Poconos. We should as a University consider entrepreneurship to be the process of innovation and the spirit of creative risk-taking that first generates knowledge and ideas internally but then tests them and brings them to scale externally, as our contribution to spurring social development and economic competitiveness in our region. ESU is committed to embedding the paradigm of entrepreneurship into the fabric of our institutional culture through a supportive infrastructure of resources to inspire students, faculty and staff, and to provide them with the necessary skills to turn their ideas into reality. I am committed to partnership whether it is with the local school districts, our regional community colleges, or local businesses and non-profits, regardless of their size. Together we can move the Pocono Mountains to new heights.

All communities must continually update and refresh or they become stagnant as the world around them changes. We need to maximize our ability to compete and grow in this world—both as a university and as a community—and in order to do this, we need to think strategically and comprehensively. Developing a plan for ESU's future will be our primary goal for the coming year, and this will involve both members of our own campus community as well as leaders from our surrounding communities and region.

Our strategic plan must be built upon the values we have as a state institution. A public university cannot provide a solid general education without an understanding of its values, because these guide the institution's decision-making—how time and dollars are spent, how our roots as a provider of teacher education informs who we are, how we develop an enlightened citizenry, how we partner with other institutions in our region, and how we encourage our students to be risk-takers who can make a difference in the world. As part of our planning, we will need to define how best to embed those values into everything we do. Some of the questions we will need to ask ourselves are:

- **What are our roots and how will they inform our future success as a public institution?**
- **How will we cross some of the damaging dividing lines on our campus that keep us from growing a better learning environment for our students, a better environment for faculty and staff, and a better partnership with our community?**
- **How will we ensure that all students develop both a rich understanding of the world they inherit, through studies in the humanities, arts, social sciences, and sciences, along with the practical knowledge and capacities they will require in order to help solve the difficult problems they will confront in the workplace, in their own lives, and as active citizens in the nation and the world?**
- **How will we respond to the challenge to develop a more competency-based curriculum, one that truly demonstrates mastery rather than the completion of a certain number of credits?**

AAC&U Board Chair and Ursinus College President Bobby Fong recently said “Educational opportunity should be available to students regardless of background or circumstance. Educational attainment should be characterized by rigor and achievement, not simply by accumulation of credits.” More and more we are hearing about competency-based education. Although the debate surrounding MOOCs, which stands for Massive Open Online Courses, may appear to be most top-of-mind in relation to access and competency-based education, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) is having just as robust a conversation about changes in the medical school entrance exam and changed expectations from credits to competency. They no longer care if you have the right number of credits in chemistry, biology, or physics; the focus is now on the student learning outcomes that result from exposure to those disciplines. We are being appropriately challenged.

And now I’d like to talk directly to the students who are here. I want to address how you can make a difference, how you can help us to become more knowledgeable about how to ensure your success. You need to fully understand the challenge of changing tired traditional systems and leveraging energized novel technologies. There are many faculty around the world working tirelessly to innovate in the hopes of inspiring and better enabling your learning. Their voices, my voice, however, are not enough. The voice that will push real change is yours. Indeed, if you—the students—are willing to accept a set of key educational responsibilities as you stand up for your core educational rights, you might be the real game changer we need in catalyzing next-generation learning.

First, you need to *own*—that is to really take responsibility for—your learning and work hard to demonstrate that you do not expect to be spoon fed or to have getting a degree so easy that anyone can do it. You then need to make the demand that, if you fulfill your side of the learning equation, you expect your claim to your educational rights to be taken seriously. Simply put, you doing these two things—having responsibility for your learning and demanding a strong education-- could change the conversation completely.

You, the students, need to know the answers to the following questions: Who are you doing this for? What are your goals? What is your vision of how your credential will serve you? What is your overall purpose? Moreover, you have to own this purpose—it cannot

be a dream borrowed from a parent, spouse, boss, or faculty member. It will be far too easy to quit if that is the case. Learning is not an accidental journey. Knowing your larger purpose enables you to do what comes next.

Engagement means literally transforming the way you think and committing yourself to building those skill-sets you do not currently possess. It is a transformative process, and transformations are rarely easy. Your purpose will help, but you have to be committed to working hard to attain that goal.

You must be willing to get away from the predictable but not necessarily effective model of memorizing and taking multiple choice tests. When innovative faculty try something new and really try to engage you in learning, to do something that requires a higher level of engagement, do not punish them in evaluations because they are breaking your all-too-predictable pattern. If you want an innovative education that really brings next-generation learning to life, you—as students—have to engage at a higher level and demand more “out of pattern” experiences.

Expect the best from us. You should expect to be challenged; you should expect to be stretched. You have the right to demand that our classes, our programs, and our credentials are timely, relevant, and useful.

In conclusion, what kinds of values do the best academic communities exhibit? I believe they exhibit a learning and teaching-centered culture; an historic commitment to underserved student populations, both non-traditional and diverse; a dedication to scholarship and creativity that advances their region’s economic progress and cultural development; and a commitment and courage not only to support their strengths, but also to admit and deal with their weaknesses.

My family has a very personal movie, for reasons that would take too long to explain. It is *Finding Nemo*. At the end of the movie, *Finding Nemo*, Dory (a fish) is trapped in a net with other fish and is being hoisted up to a boat. To save Dory, Nemo has to work to get all of the fish to swim in the same direction...down away from the boat. It takes some convincing, but when the fish all start to swim together, they break the net free from the boat, and find their own freedom...and of course Nemo, Dory and Nemo’s father, Marlin ...live happily ever after. We all need to swim in the same direction.

Thank you all for being here to share this day with me and with my family. Yes, I have high expectations that all of us here will leave knowing that this is not just another day in the life of East Stroudsburg University. It is a memorable day. As Charles Dickens writes:

“That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But, it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day.”

Thank you all for having great expectations of us.