April 14, 3:30 p.m. Campus Forum Summary

About 20 people attended the 3:30 pm forum at Riverpoint to discuss the Work Group reports. Each Work Group presented recommendations and encouraged questions and comments (see the Work Group reports for complete information).

In response to Group 1’s presentations on resource and enrollment growth, it was suggested that there are opportunities for growth in graduate programs and also in service to non-traditional students. It was also noted that improving our quality is not always dependent on getting bigger—we could get smaller and improve as well. Rick Romero, the co-chair, noted that getting smaller may be appropriate for individual programs, but not institutionally. In order to weather cyclical downturns, we need to continue to grow.

In regard to Group 2’s discussion of how to improve EWU’s retention rates, the Provost said that Sylvia Hurtado at UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute has developed a model for entering freshmen based on a range of variables—from economic background to high-school history—that allows universities to predict the expected graduation rate of the cohort. We could use that information to determine whether EWU’s retention rates are nationally comparable and develop strategies to address specific needs.

One participant also commented on the importance of teaching that will best serve our students. He talked about a university where he had previously served which had a mandatory year-long teaching course that all new faculty (regardless of experience level) were required to take. Such a course at EWU could also be used to communicate Eastern’s values and culture. Faculty agreed on the importance of responding to students in ways that are effective for them. It was noted that so many of our students work and study full time and that we need strong advising to caution them from taking on loads that are unrealistic.

One participant also noted that our tuition schedule which is not strictly per-credit, encourages students to take a full load even when they shouldn’t because they think they get the last few credits “free.” Another concern was students repeating classes so they can get a better grade—which does not always happen and which may affect their financial aid. Advising is critical for these issues.

Group 3’s call for encouraging more integration across disciplines and engagement with community partners received a caution from one faculty member who noted that some disciplines are more restricted by accreditation guidelines than others in recognizing faculty service or teaching as well as scholarship and research.
Participants had a range of suggestions for Group 4 in how to “do more with less resources.” They included encouraging faculty to start non-profit organizations to manage their consulting efforts and to give them more flexibility, making classes larger, charging for community service work, charging for department newsletters, purchasing equipment through soft money sources. A faculty member encouraged other faculty to be entrepreneurial in attracting dollars for the university.

There were concerns about Group 4’s suggestion to re-structure in support of General Education. Participants cautioned the Group to move slowly and thoughtfully with change. A faculty member with accounting expertise also asked if the university could improve its financial records system, which currently makes it difficult to access information. Tesha Kropidlowski, co-chair, assured him a new system is currently being implemented that should address that problem.

In response to Group 6’s presentation it was noted that we need to recognize the different accreditation demands on faculty in different disciplines and encourage broad flexibility in faculty workload.