Good Afternoon! It’s great to see so many of you here today for this welcome reception and some great food.

I consider myself to be very privileged. Not because I was born to a wealthy family. I was not – my dad worked as a machinist and he and mom had to work extra hours and sacrifice to make it possible for me to be the first in my family to attend college. But in the course of my life, I’ve been able to live in many parts of this wonderful country. I grew up in Buffalo, NY, where I lived on the lands of the Seneca. I played youth hockey with Tuscarora and even learned to play some box lacrosse from the Iroquois – very big and very fast Iroquois.

I went to college at Hamilton College, first established as the Oneida Academy – a school for the Oneida. While there, I enjoyed the rolling hills of the Onondaga.

I lived in South Florida where I was privileged to enjoy the original lands of the Seminole and to visit the Miccosukee. And for the past 10 years, I’ve had the pleasure of enjoying the lands of the Spokane, the Coeur d’Alene, the Kalispell, the Colville and other peoples of the Northwest. I am grateful for the stewardship and care that all these peoples and nations have exercised to preserve the beauty and productivity of all of these lands I’ve traveled.

Just two weeks ago, I had the pleasure of visiting the Yakama Nation and meeting with members of the tribal council. I was able to visit their wonderful cultural center and view their historic artifacts, including their treaty.

I have just begun reading a book by Jane Jacobs, a noted urban economist, called *Dark Age Ahead*. I’ve read and enjoyed other books by Dr. Jacobs, a professor at the University of Toronto. In this book, at least the initial parts that I’ve read, she looks at the phenomenon of “dark ages.” Yes, such a time occurred in the Middle Ages of Europe. But her definition of a “dark age” is of a time in which a civilization is lost, its values and character forgotten. In fact, it occurs, she argues, when a people even forget that they’ve forgotten about a civilization.

As I thought about coming to visit you today, it occurred to me that you students are working hard to make sure that you do not contribute to a “dark age.” The work you do with your families, your communities, with each other and our faculty here at the university, is the noble work of preserving the past, your values and your culture. This is very important work.

As you know, the work of preserving your culture can sometimes put you at odds or into conflict with the prevailing culture. You have experienced such conflict over the past couple of years here at Eastern. Unfortunately, events often overtake your efforts. Individuals and groups will
seize upon your cause to further their own agendas, even while appearing to be in support of you.

We as a community must recognize that your work of carrying on your culture is difficult and that respecting and supporting your efforts and you as individuals requires conscious attention. I cannot speak for all who involved themselves in your efforts over the past couple of years, and particularly last spring, but for any hurt caused you or lack of respect shown to you and your culture, this community is truly sorry and apologizes.

We must learn from the past, but we need not repeat it or constantly relive it.

My vision now is that, first and foremost, you are successful as students. I want you to leave this university with a degree and memories that this was the best time of your life. At times it will be difficult, but those challenges are what you can turn into learning experiences. As Dr. Almeida noted in her remarks, many of you rose to that challenge and displayed uncommon bravery and leadership in standing up for your positions and yourselves. It is that entire university experience, the positive and the difficult, that you should look back on as helping to form your character as adults.

And I want not only that you yourselves should feel that way about your Eastern experience, but that you share it with other. That your younger brothers and sisters will come to Eastern and feel the same way, as will your nieces and nephews, your neighbors, and yes, your children and grandchildren.

I was talking with Scott Wheat, your instructor, before our presentations. He said that he spends most weekends on the Spokane reservation and that he would like to tell everyone there that the Indian Studies program is doing great things. I replied that I want even more. I want the Spokane and all of your peoples to not only feel that this program is doing great things but that Eastern is their university and that they are doing great things in and because of Eastern Washington University.

Have a great start to the fall quarter and a great year ahead!