In the last few years, the “Chronicle of Higher Education” has printed several articles questioning the future of regional universities. Whether it is sagging enrollments, the decline of the liberal arts, or lagging state support, the future of public regional universities has been called to question. This does not have to be the situation for Eastern. I believe that Eastern Washington University has a great future if it recognizes and makes its mission the needs of the people in our region.

As a regional University, Eastern will be measured by how well it brings real value to the constituencies and the communities it serves. My vision of Eastern Washington University as the “People’s University” rests on four guiding principles:

1. A People’s University should take a student centered approach to achieve the “liberation of the personality” for each member of the University community;

2. A People’s University should emphasize both a strong liberal arts and a career preparation focus through an interdependent approach to its curriculum;

3. A People’s University should sponsor applied research relevant to the economic, political, social and health well-being of the region; and

4. A People’s University should foster collaboration with the variety of communities that make up the Inland Northwest.

Career preparation and the liberal arts become one -
The second principle concerning integration of liberal arts and career preparation means that in my vision of the people’s university, career preparation and the liberal arts become one. The role of the University in being responsive to the career preparation needs of the region is clear and widely accepted. Interdependence across disciplines is valued and rewarded. Acquisition of specific skills is balanced throughout the curriculum with more general generic problem solving skills such as communication (both written and verbal), conceptualization, coordination and the ability to analyze. Reintegrating the liberal arts and professional programs is an attempt to enhance the strengths of both and minimize the limitations of each. The liberal arts and sciences teach us valuable lessons about the nature of the human experience; whereas the professional schools teach us how to apply these lessons to the needs of our regional constituents. Applied methodologies and applied settings will be broadly distributed throughout the curriculum. While the mission of the University continues to focus on baccalaureate and master’s degrees, the University will offer five applied doctoral degrees, most of which are in cooperation with another doctoral granting university.

A residential campus with more meaningful ties to the region -
The third principle – applied research relevant to the region – means that Eastern will be a residential campus with more meaningful ties to the region. The...
Cheney campus is clearly established as the heart of the University. The University will be a significant contributor to the enhancement of the economic, political, social and health conditions of the Inland Northwest through an appropriate balance of basic and applied research activities. Applied research will connect faculty and students to specific problems facing businesses and communities throughout the region and provide opportunities to test theory and practice. Total sponsored research activity will have grown to $20 million annually.

The University takes its obligations to the region seriously -

The fourth principle—collaboration with the variety of communities that make up the Inland Northwest—means that the University takes its obligations to the Region seriously. In my vision, the University will have fully embraced collaboration with the various communities in the region. Building upon the initial successful efforts with the community of Cheney, the University will expand its efforts to enhance the economic and social fabric of communities throughout the region. Collaboration efforts will be built upon the principle of equality, with the University and the various communities acting as partners sharing a common goal. Promotion and tenure policies and practices have been modified to reward faculty for participating in community service, action research and service learning.

How do we achieve the vision -

How do we achieve this vision of the people’s university? I believe there are four important steps we will take in the future.

Creating excellence in a state-assisted University –

First, we will create excellence in a state-“assisted” University. The state will continue to support the basic needs of the University through incremental funding of salaries and enrollment growth. We will build a stronger foundation by completing the first comprehensive campaign in the history of the University – raising $32 million for targeted programs and scholarships and fellowships. State funding will be used to leverage grant and contract funding which, combined with Foundation funds, results in regionally and nationally recognized centers of excellence.

All technology contributes to educational environment and career preparation -

Second, we will enhance and expand the technology for the educational environments and career preparation. Technology has become an essential element of all programs. Using technology, faculty will engage their students and mirror the workplace environment. Administrative systems will be cutting edge and used in teaching to further demonstrate the workplace environment as well as to enhance services to students and faculty and the state.

A strong residential campus -

Third, we will develop a strong residential campus in Cheney. With the exception of health sciences, baccalaureate programs and traditional students will be located in Cheney. The University will have consolidated its Spokane-based programs at Riverpoint. The College of Business and Public Administration will continue to grow its graduate programs on the Riverpoint campus, building off the business and government infrastructure located in Spokane. Cooperation and collaboration with Washington State University on the Riverpoint campus is firmly established. Baccalaureate and master’s degree programs for non-traditional students are implemented in Spokane as demand is demonstrated. Selected baccalaureate and master’s programs are offered throughout the state based upon the needs of communities and the unique capacity of the University to deliver those programs. Upper division baccalaureate degree completion programs in health sciences and technology are offered on community college campuses in Moses Lake, Greater Seattle, Tri-Cities, Vancouver and Walla Walla.

A larger University - tightly knit In a community of living, learning and service -

Finally, the University will have grown to 12,000 FTE students, of which 70 percent are traditional residential students residing on campus or in the community of Cheney. Enrollment has shifted slightly toward a larger lower division enrollment than upper division. Graduate enrollments continue to run at 10 to 12 percent of the total enrollment. To accommodate growth, the University put first priority on supporting the development of private sector housing in the community and second priority to expanding on-campus housing. Course scheduling has expanded to fully utilize the 8 a.m.-4:00 p.m. capacity. Evening, weekend and mediated courses will now make up 15 percent of the total credit hours generated by the University.

A merging of ideals -

The notion of a people’s university is somewhat paradoxical. As philosopher and Eastern Founder’s Day speaker, John Searle stated, higher education by its very nature is elitist. It is an elitism based on knowledge, intelligence and competence. A people’s university is a merging of the demands of the elitism of knowledge with the needs of the people. It assumes and even demands that both be attained.