



CPE REPORT

Eastern Kentucky University News for the Council on Postsecondary Education



EKU COMMEMORATES NEW VETERANS MEMORIAL DURING RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY

Eastern Kentucky University celebrated a significant moment on Nov. 4 with the formal ribbon-cutting ceremony for the relocated Veterans Memorial. The new memorial, now situated in Carloftis Garden near the intersection of Lancaster and Park Drive in front of Martin Hall, continues to honor ECU's fallen veterans and allows visitors to have designated parking and a more spacious venue to remember those who have served.

The memorial features key elements from its previous location in Powell Plaza, including the American flag and service flags representing military branches, a granite slate inscribed with the names of fallen service members, dedicated benches and the Fallen Soldier Cross sculpture.

The ceremony, attended by over 150 people, included speeches from ECU President David McFaddin, U.S. Congressman Andy Barr, Richmond Mayor Robert Blythe and ECU alumna Cathy Robinson.

"I have never seen or heard of a university that prioritizes military and veteran families more in the entire United States than Eastern Kentucky University," said Congressman Barr. "As further evidence of ECU's prioritization of veterans and honoring

the 82 fallen members of the ECU family who have served and paid the ultimate sacrifice, moving this to the front door of ECU again underscores the importance that this institution places on our veteran students and families."

ECU has earned notable recognition for supporting student veterans, service members and their families, which constitutes more than 10% of the student body. Ranking first in Kentucky and No. 4 in Appalachia in the 2023 Best for Vets: Colleges, ECU also earned the No. 3 national ranking for Military Friendly® Schools and No. 2 for Military Spouse Friendly® Schools.

ECU President David McFaddin highlighted the institution's commitment during the ribbon-cutting ceremony, stating, "Serving those who have served us is not just what we do; it's who we are."

ECU's dedication to serving the veterans community extends to affordable housing with Kit Carson Commons Scholar House and various support programs such as the Yellow Ribbon Program and the Service to Scholars Peer Sponsorship Program.



DR. AARON THOMPSON RECEIVES HONORARY DOCTORATE FROM EKU

Eastern Kentucky University bestowed an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters (L.H.D.) degree upon Dr. Aaron Thompson, president of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), during the fall commencement ceremony on Dec. 2, 2023. Recognizing Thompson's contributions to higher education and his commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for all Kentuckians, EKU President David McFaddin commended him for translating his personal journey into a lifelong dedication to education.

A first-generation college graduate from rural Clay County, Kentucky, Thompson earned a bachelor's degree in political science and sociology from EKU. Serving as a professor at EKU for 21 years, his role extended to associate vice president for academic affairs, then as interim president of Kentucky State University for a year.

Thompson assumed leadership as the president of CPE in 2018, having previously served as senior vice president for academic affairs and executive vice president. Thompson has authored and co-authored numerous books and peer-reviewed publications covering topics such as diversity, cultural competence, retention and student success.

Thompson's career has earned him various accolades, including induction into the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame in 2019. During commencement, Thompson expressed pride in receiving the honorary doctorate, emphasizing the lifelong learning and critical thinking skills instilled by EKU.

The university recognized more than 1,300 graduates at fall commencement. The graduating class hail from 15 countries, 42 states and 102 Kentucky counties. Notably, 43% are the first in their families to attain a higher education degree.

EKU CELEBRATES NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS DAY

On Nov. 8, Eastern Kentucky University hosted its third Gen 1 conference, marking National First-Generation College Students Day with an event dedicated to supporting and empowering first-generation college students.

"I am a first-generation college graduate, and more than 50% of this year's freshman class are also the first in their families to attend college," said EKU President David McFaddin. "We're proud of our mission to aid first-generation students in navigating college and getting them to the finish line to achieve that college-graduate status."

The Gen 1 conference emerged from a goal to make EKU the preferred destination in Kentucky for first-generation college students—those whose parents have not earned a four-year bachelor's degree.

Debra Aziza, a public health major at EKU, shared her motivations for attending the conference, saying, "I thought it would be interesting to get to learn and hear about other students and to not feel alone by being a first-generation student."

Dr. Gill Hunter, assistant vice president of retention and graduation, highlighted the importance of public awareness and the university's broader mission as the School of Opportunity. "We want first-gen students to recognize EKU as a place where they will be supported. We believe in the mission of providing students with an opportunity to try and the support to succeed," he said.

EKU was recently recognized for its first-generation success, ranking first among Kentucky's public institutions for Top Performers on Social Mobility by U.S. News and World Report.

