

Remarks by Kerry Morgan (Journalism, 1992)
2017 ECU Department of Communication Distinguished Alumna
April 11, 2017

Thank you.

First I want to introduce a few people who are with me tonight.

My friends – KELLY WITT BROWN and her husband CHRIS BROWN. Kelly and Chris went to ECU with me. Kelly and I were Chi Omega sorority sisters, fellow journalism majors, and we worked at the Progress together. She knows where all my skeletons are buried and has the pictures to prove it. I'm thankful she didn't bring them. And Chris – well, we are thankful he still loves us despite those skeletons.

My dear professor Dr. Bonnie Gray. Dr. Gray was the director of the newly instituted ECU Honors Program when I rolled into town. She took me under her wing, became my mentor, but more important, my friend. I am forever indebted to her for all the love and guidance she's given me through the years.

And my family – my husband Shannon – we've been married almost 20 years. HE puts up with a lot!! My daughter Emily, who is 15, my son Will, who is 11, and daughter Ellie, who is 6 – they are my biggest accomplishments since graduating. Thanks to the four of you for being my world.

So...

I arrived at Eastern when I was only 17 years old. I looked like I was 12. My grandmother made some of my clothes. I had a meal card for the grill and dining room. And my mom sent me \$20 a week spending money.

There were no cellphones. No internet.

Our social media was hanging out on the CORNER between classes.

The boundaries of my world were limited to a small town in western Kentucky that I called home.

But I had big dreams and a big imagination and Eastern embraced me.

I went through several majors – business, accounting, education, English – before I found my passion. One summer I stayed on campus, and for fun and curiosity, I enrolled in a photojournalism class.

I spent most of the summer in the dark room. I was hooked. And pale.

But - I had found my calling.

Before I knew it, I was taking 18, 21 hours of journalism classes a semester.

The program was incredible – Libby Fraas, Liz Hansen, Jack Hillwig, Glen Klein – they worked so hard to provide us with intense, hands on, real world training.

I traveled to Clay City in Eastern Kentucky to work on newspaper operated out of a double wide trailer for the community Journalism class.

I reported on the Kentucky General Assembly for the Shelbyville newspaper – for a government reporting class.

I caught a train to Washington, D.C., in the middle of the night with my classmates and Dr. Klein for a spring break trip to tour media outlets in the capital. Somehow we all survived and made it home.

And I worked at the Progress.

OH, the Progress.

Some of my happiest, zaniest, most creative moments in college were with my Progress colleagues. I am so thankful DOC gave us the freedom and instilled in us the courage to produce our own newspaper – to be reporters for our university community. We took our job and our responsibility very seriously. We were trained to be professionals. We were professionals.

It was our finest achievement in college.

Since graduation I maintain – a degree in journalism is one of the best degrees a student can earn. Journalism prepares us for life. Journalism is about communication, professionalism, relationships, working on deadlines, practical skills – journalism is the very essence of REALITY. I do not know of another degree that could have **better prepared** me for my professional career as a lawyer and a judge. **PRICELESS.**

I know that the Mass Communications Department and the Progress have had a tough year.

I'm sad that the journalism program that I went through will no longer exist.

I feel fortunate that I came through in a time when Administrators and Politicians valued the journalism program and left us alone.

I cannot imagine the indignation of having a politician tell me that my degree, and, accordingly, my dreams, are unworthy, because she doesn't think I will be able to get a job.

Just imagine my life if I had listened to someone who once told me the same thing about a degree in journalism.

IF I had listened to that nonsense - I wouldn't be standing before you today.

But, that is the world we now live in.

You are the next generation to hold our leaders accountable.

You must write and report the truth.

You have already been tested at Eastern.

You know what is coming – you've seen the ugly - but you will be prepared.

Just report the truth. And don't be swayed by storms that follow.

And even if your career takes a different path – like mine did – take those same principles – of truth, honor, and professionalism – that you learned right here at Eastern, and apply them to whatever you do.

NEVER allow anyone, a Governor, Lt. Governor, or even the President, intimidate you or prevent you from speaking the truth.

- Never let yourself down.

-And always remember what you learned RIGHT HERE at Eastern and the SKY WILL BE THE LIMIT FOR YOUR FUTURE.

Thank you so much for this incredible award. I will cherish it forever.

GO COLONELS!!!