



ECSU freshman hold the "flames of wisdom" during Fall Convocation Candlelighting Ceremony. Held every fall, this tradition is a memorable experience for incoming students.

Photo by Jamie Jordan

Chancellor Burnim urges freshmen to 'remember why you are here'

by NaKeisha Sylver

"Why are you here?"

With this simple question ECSU's Interim Chancellor, Dr. Mickey Burnim, began his address at the Freshman Candlelighting/Fall Convocation ceremony on Sept. 24, 1995.

To dramatize his question Burnim told a story of two men who went with a third man to catch a train following a night of drinking. The men arrived at the train station only to discover that the train was leaving the station. One of the men jumped aboard the train, and another grabbed onto it and was pulled aboard. The third man didn't make it onto the train at all.

When an observer, who saw the man laughing, asked him why he was laughing, the third man responded with, "The joke is on the other fellows. They just came to the train station to see me off!"

"They had forgotten why they were there," Burnim said, to the chuckling crowd. "What is the significance of your being here at ECSU? Why are you here?"

While the members of ECSU's class of 1999 pondered this question, Burnim

continued: "I can almost hear some of your responses. It's a requirement for my class. Or I need a marketable skill."

Burnim suggested, however, that the students' purpose for being at ECSU went deeper than that.

"Our individual purpose may be intrinsically linked to the purpose of this 104-year-old institution," he said, adding that the school's mission statement challenges the University "to provide a challenging and supporting environment to prepare students for responsible leadership in a constantly changing world."

Burnim discussed social ills facing the planet, such as poverty, racism, sexism and "wars that pit brother against brother." These are the challenges which threaten our civilization, he added.

"That is why we are here," Burnim concluded. "Our ultimate goal is the preservation and survival of our civilization."

Burnim charged ECSU's freshman class to accept the responsibilities and challenges which face them at ECSU and in the world beyond. "What you

get out of your experience here is in direct proportion to what you put into it."

He urged students to look beyond material gain and narrowly defined goals, and to consider their obligation to the larger society.

"In life every man has twin obligations to his parents, wife, children, his people, his community and his country," said Burnim, quoting South African President Nelson Mandela. "Real leadership always exacts a price."

The Interim Chancellor also issued a challenge to ECSU's faculty: "Faculty, we are here to prepare our students for responsible participation in leadership."

Following the address, members of the freshmen class had an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity for leadership.

Monique Boyce, Mark Mwaura, Ronel Brewer, Chashia Washington, Santiel Creekmore, and Shina Hemingway conducted the ritual of lighting their candles. The candles represented hope, awareness, youth, beauty, truth, faith, love, and the eter-

nal flame of wisdom. The students exchanged poetic dialogue with SGA President James Cherry.

"It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness," said Cherry.

"Yes, light a candle," said Boyce. "That sounds good, but even a small flame cannot be made of nothing. What have I to give?"

Freshmen participants said they were touched by the ceremony.

"It was better than I expected because I left with knowledge," said Tonia Spruill, a freshman from Edenton, NC. "I came expecting nothing, but I left with something."

What some freshmen remembered most about the ceremony was Vice Chancellor Helen Caldwell's admonition about returning to their dorm rooms with their candles still lit.

"Traditionally, only those students who arrive at their dorms or homes with their candles still lit are supposed to graduate with the rest of the class," said Caldwell, with a smile.

"I just hope I can make it to the dorm with my candle lit," said Chastity Kinsay, of Enfield, N.C.