Former North Carolina State Senator Thomas F. Taft and Dr. Elizabeth Doster Taft hope their gift that established a distinguished professorship at ECU will help further solidify the university’s role in preparing leaders in education. The professorship will help ECU recruit a world-class scholar to campus.
Former N.C. State Senator Thomas F. Taft and Dr. Elizabeth Doster Taft believe that education—math and science education in particular—is key to America’s competitive edge in the global economy. And they believe that as the largest producer of teaching professionals for North Carolina schools, East Carolina University is well positioned to play an important role in maintaining that competitive edge.

To help enhance ECU’s ability to turn out qualified math and science teachers, Dr. Taft, an associate professor in the ECU College of Education’s Department of Mathematics and Science Education, and Senator Taft established the Tom and Liz Taft Distinguished Professorship for Science Education and the Tom and Liz Taft Scholarship for Science and Mathematics Education for students in the College of Education. With matching gifts from the C. D. Spangler Foundation and the UNC system through its Distinguished Professors Endowment Trust Fund, the Tafts’ donation will provide $1.25 million in support for the university.

“The diminishing number of young people interested in—and well prepared for—careers in science, engineering, and technology is one of several trends that is beginning to undermine America’s competitive edge in the knowledge-based global economy,” said Tom Taft. “We hope this contribution to ECU will help recruit a world-class scholar in science education that will enhance the reputation of the department and permit them to recruit highly qualified students interested in teaching math and science in public schools.”

In 1975, the United States was ranked third in the world in the percentage of students pursuing natural science and engineering degrees, according to a speech Tom Taft made to the UNC Tomorrow Commission in 2007. Now, the United States is ranked 17th. The Tafts hope their gift will help close that gap.

“Liz and I would humbly and respectfully challenge everyone to think long and hard about how much East Carolina University has meant over their lifetime and how much more it is going to do for you over the coming decades,” Tom said. “Evaluate what you think you can afford and then think about what Greenville and eastern North Carolina would be like without East Carolina University, and then instead of thinking about what you can afford to give, think about what you can afford not to give.”