

**REPORT OF A
FOCUSED VISIT**

Assurance Section

TO

**Ferris State University
Big Rapids, Michigan**

May 22-23, 2006

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

**Dr. Sue Day-Perroots, Dean of Extended Learning, West Virginia University,
Morgantown, WV 26506**

**Dr. Robert L. Reid, Provost and Professor of History Emeritus, University of Southern
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I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT

- A. Purpose of Visit – Focused Visit for Institutional Change Request to change the SIS request to allow Ferris State University to “deliver fully online certificates and degree programs”.
- B. Accreditation Status - Ferris State University was first accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association in 1959. Accreditation remained consistent until 1977, when FSU received accreditation for a first professional degree in Optometry. Accreditation was changed in 1983 to include the masters of Accounting degree and in 1984 to include the master of Science in Occupational Education degree.
In 1998, FSU hosted a focus visit to review financial stability, the general education program, assessment program, and its merger with Kendall College of Art and Design. In the following year, FSU again participated in a focus visit to request approval for the Master of Science degree in Information Systems Management with blended Internet delivery.
The last comprehensive visit occurred in 2001 with a recommendation for the next comprehensive visit in 2010-2011. An institutional request to extend accreditation to include a Bachelors program in Technical Education at Red River College in Winnipeg, Manitoba was approved by the Higher Learning Commission on June 23, 2003. A progress report on the merger between Kendall College of Art & Design and FSU was accepted by the Higher Learning Commission staff on September 7, 2004.
- C. Organizational Context – Ferris State University presents a number of factors which contributed to the shaping of this request. Among these are:
- 1) extend historic strengths in career-oriented, technological and professional education;
 - 2) address increasing demand for online courses;
 - 3) strengthen partnerships with community colleges and other strategic agencies/organizations;
 - 4) extend academic programming to reach full-time working adults in areas of business and health care; and
 - 5) address institutional enrollment goals; and
 - 6) respond to the call of Governor Granholm for higher education in Michigan to develop a high performance economy through its higher education system. Goals include doubling the percentage of residents who attain post-secondary degrees or other credentials linking them to success in the state’s new economy and improving accessibility to 4 year campuses.
- D. Unique Aspects of Visit – There were no unique aspects to the visit.
- E. Interactions with Organizational Constituencies –
- 1) FSU President and Vice President for Academic Affairs
 - 2) Deans' Council - 11 attendees

- 3) Online Faculty and Advancing Online Task Force – 26 attendees
 - 4) Individual Faculty for online course demonstration
 - 5) Faculty and Curricular Governance, Academic Senate, University Curriculum Committee, Ferris Faculty Association, and Academic Program Review – 6 representatives
 - 6) Student Service Leaders – 13 attendees
 - 7) Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, WebCT and Information Services and Technology Support Staff – 9 attendees
 - 8) University Center for Extended Learning Staff – 3 attendees
 - 9) Online students – 5 students
 - 10) Open Meeting – 1 person from Academic Affairs, 4 Library representatives, 2 Technical and Professional Program leaders, and 1 Web Services representative
- F. Approvals Obtained – According to Ferris State University's Change Request document, the internal approval process was followed. This approval process for online program delivery includes the faculty member developing course (or program), the department head/chair, College dean, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the Extended Learning unit responsible for its delivery. The only external approval is the Higher Learning Commission.
- G. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed
- 1) Change Request Document and Appendices
 - 2) Previous Commission Reports and Actions
 - 3) Michigan Report of the Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth (2004)
 - 4) FSU Strategic Plans and Planning Documents
 - 5) Distance Learning Task Force Report (2004)
 - 6) Online Course Enrollment Reports
 - 7) Recommended Best Practices in Online Delivery of Instruction (2005)
 - 8) Policies – Intellectual Property and Course Development
 - 9) Academic Program/Curriculum Development and Approval Process
 - 10) Surveys- Online Students and Online Instructors
 - 11) Off-Campus Schedules
 - 12) Student Assessment of Instruction Instrument
 - 13) FSU Fact Book
 - 14) Degree Notebooks for each program request
 - 15) Marketing Program Review Information
 - 16) Ferris and UCEL Promotional Materials
 - 17) Ferris Faculty Association Agreement
 - 18) 2005-06 and 2006-07 Academic Affairs Division Plans
 - 19) Career Guide
 - 20) Disabilities Services - *Guidelines for creating web content accessible to all*
 - 21) Web pages including: UCEL pages, e-Learn Advisor, FLITE, UCEL programs, President's speeches, and numerous array of institutional materials both referenced in the Change Document as well as many pages "surfed".

II. AREA(S) OF FOCUS

- A. Statement of Focus – Institutional Change Request for “No prior Commission approval for offering degrees completely online”.
- B. Statements of Evidence
- Evidence that demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
 - a) The proposed change is consistent with the mission, history and strategic plan of Ferris State University.
 - b) Discussions with faculty, senior administrators, support staff, and students indicate that the university community recognizes, endorses, and understands the change request.
 - c) The goal of the state of Michigan as developed by the 2004 Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth appointed by Governor Jennifer Granholm is to achieve “a high performance economy”. Specific goals include: 1) double the percentage of residents who attain post-secondary degrees or other credentials, 2) improve the alignment of Michigan’s higher learning institutions with emerging employment opportunities, and 3) build a dynamic 21st Century workforce. There is evidence that the request for change is responsive to this call for action.
 - d) Ferris State University has a significant number of articulation agreements and extensive experience with off-campus site management.
 - e) Ferris State University has an array of career-oriented, technological, and professional programs, most of which have earned specialized accreditation.
 - f) The University engages in regular strategic planning of which the proposed change is a key component. This planning process has resulted in a number of policies, research reports, and initiatives including, but not limited to: Report of the Distance Education Task Force-A Proposal for the Ferris Model of E-Learning, Recommended Best Practices in Online Delivery of Instruction at Ferris State University, Intellectual Property and Course Development Policies.
 - g) There are formal review mechanisms in place including Program Review (6 year cycle), assessment of student outcomes, and yearly administrative reviews of programs.
 - h) Ferris is in the process of implementing software and hardware to consolidate and improve student access to services, e.g. one-stop-shop. Banner is the software system currently being installed for the University, and e-learning will be provided through Web CT Vista.
 - i) Student support services for online learning include registration, advisement, library access, use of online services, and a help desk. The University Center for Extended Learning coordinates these in cooperation with the College of Professional and Technical Studies.
 - j) There is an informal yet highly effective network of faculty peer mentoring for online course development.

- k) The enthusiasm shown by faculty for online learning is evident in the growing numbers of courses, sections, and enrollments, and in increasing numbers of faculty trained, expanding opportunities for professional development, and last but not least, the large turnout of faculty advocates for online learning who met with us during the focused visit.

C. Recommendation of Team

- Evidence sufficiently demonstrated. No Commission follow-up recommended.

D. Rationale for the Team Recommendation

The Team recommends that Ferris State University be granted Commission approval to offer existing degree programs completely online. This recommendation is based upon the evidentiary statements above. While FSU has over 100 courses totally online, it has no current degree programs offered completely online. It is also noted that there are no external program approval requirements for online delivery. It is expected that programs will be added as the initial set of baccalaureate and masters offerings in this request prove to be successful. Under current University policy, programs offered online do not require approval through the faculty governance system. Given this, the Team recommends that programs offered online be limited to those currently in the Ferris State University catalog.

E. Other Accreditation Issues [If applicable]

None noted

III. STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

Affiliation Status – No change

Nature of Organization – No change

Legal status – No change

Degrees awarded – No Change

Conditions of Affiliation -

Stipulation on affiliation status – No change

Approval of degree sites – No change

Approval of distance education degree - No prior Commission approval for offering existing degree programs as found in the 2005-2006 Career Guide of Ferris State University completely online."

Reports required – No Reports Required

Summary of Commission Review

Year for next comprehensive evaluation 2010-2011

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Advancement Section

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ADVANCEMENT SECTION

A. Observations of Team Regarding Change Request

The Change Request was carefully documented by Ferris State University with an array of supporting documents (16 appendices and 26 individual binders in the Resource Room). The Team found the materials very well organized and clearly stated. The narrative responses to the Change Request questions were well written with supporting documentation included in a separate notebook. This format presents a model for other institutions.

An impression of the Team that resulted from the number of participants and the level of participation is that online development and learning have been ongoing topics on this campus for more than several years. Within those discussions, it was evident that assessment criteria are interwoven into the conversations on learning among faculty and administrators at Ferris. That faculty were well represented was particularly of note, especially since the visit occurred during the second week of Summer Sessions. Strong support for the proposal was evident throughout the visit. Moreover, this support from faculty, support staff, and students, was grounded in solid understandings of the role of online learning and the opportunities that this form of delivery brings to the University.

B. Consultations of Team

The Team encourages Ferris State University to build upon the solid foundation in place. Two documents developed at the institution merit continuing use:

- a. Report of the Distance Education Task Force - A proposal for the Ferris model of E-Learning (April 2004), and
- b. Recommended Best Practices in Online Delivery of Instruction at Ferris State (April 2005)

These documents exemplify the on-going dialog and good work taking place. Closely related to these reports is the careful strategic planning which led to the Change Request.

The levels of planning in technical infrastructure, academic policies, and sound instructional pedagogy for online learning are evident and foster a strong foundation for the work ahead. The migration to WebCT Vista will require that this planning and implementation move forward in concert. To this end, the Team recommends that all units involved in online design and delivery work in a coordinated manner to achieve success. While IST will play a major role in the technical infrastructure, representatives from the Center for Teaching and Learning, Colleges, Student and Technical Assistance unit, BANNER management and UCEL must be actively engaged in the next stages of online deployment. It is clear that Ferris values learning and, in this transition, learning must remain at the forefront of online delivery.

Ferris State University has an extraordinary model of peer mentoring that advances pedagogy of online learning. It is important to continue to recognize the contribution and commitment of these faculty mentors. One manner that has

been proposed and bears follow through is the training and preparation of faculty at levels of mastery for online instruction.

The budgetary approaches for online program delivery warrant examination. The methodologies must be clearly defined for effective planning and fiscal accountability. If tuition and fees are expected to support technical infrastructure or course delivery or support services, those elements should be defined and shared with planning units and the campus community.

At the time of the visit, a new Director of the Center of Teaching and Learning had been hired, but was not in place. This leadership will be critical to Ferris as it increases online development and moves into a new course development system. While the Center addresses teaching and learning both on-campus as well as online, there may be a need to reorganize other units across the campus in order to aggregate expertise to more effectively support the teaching and learning environment. Units that may be related include Media Services and Graphic Design, Classroom Technologies, and other pedagogical support services. It is anticipated that as the Center increases in use and demand, the staff will need to develop Memorandums of Understanding with faculty to establish clear expectations and timelines for instructional support.

Currently the Center of Teaching and Learning calls upon "early -adopter " faculty to serve as mentors, provide feedback and advice, and offer training. It is recommended that a formal Advisory Group be organized to assist the Center and FSU to provide guidance in the work of the Center and to recommend applicable institutional policies and/or serve as a liaison to Faculty Senate.

Team Recommendations for the
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

INSTITUTION and STATE: Ferris State University, MI

TYPE OF REVIEW (from ESS): Focused Visit

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW: A visit focused on the institution's request to offer online degree programs.

DATES OF REVIEW: 5/22/06 - 5/23/06

Nature of Organization

LEGAL STATUS: Public

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

DEGREES AWARDED: A, B, M, 1st Prof

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

Conditions of Affiliation

STIPULATIONS ON AFFILIATION STATUS: International offerings are limited to the Bachelor's program in Technical Education at Red River College in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

APPROVAL OF NEW DEGREE SITES: No prior Commission approval required for offering existing degree programs at new sites within the state.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

APPROVAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION DEGREES: Prior Commission Approval Required

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: Prior Commission approval required to offer any online programs beyond those listed in the current (2006) University Catalog.

REPORTS REQUIRED: None

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

OTHER VISITS REQUIRED: Focused Visit: 2005 - 2006; A visit focused on the institution's request to offer online degree programs.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: None

Team Recommendations for the
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

Summary of Commission Review

YEAR OF LAST COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2000 - 2001

YEAR OF NEXT COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2010 - 2011

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

INSTITUTION and STATE: Ferris State University, MI

TYPE OF REVIEW: Focused Visit to evaluate the request to offer online degree programs.

Educational Programs

	Program Distribution	Recommended Change (+ or -)
Programs leading to Undergraduate		
Associate	45	
Bachelors	101	
Programs leading to Graduate		
Masters	11	
Specialist	0	
First Professional	2	
Doctoral	0	

Off-Campus Activities

In-State:	Present Activity:	Recommended Change: (+ or -)
Campuses:	Grand Rapids (FSU-GR/Kendall)	
Sites:	Scottville (Northern) ; Alma (Main) ; Clinton Township (Southeast) ; Dowagiac/Niles (Southwest) ; Flint (Southeast) ; Muskegon (Southwest) ; Traverse City (Northern) ; Port Huron (Southeast) ; Warren (Southeast) ; Brimley (Northern) ; Dearborn (Southeast) ; Gaylord (Northern) ; Lansing (Southeast) ; Midland (Southeast) ; Mt. Pleasant (Southeast) ; Petoskey (Northern) ; University Center (Southeast)	
Course Locations:	None	
Out-of-State:	Present Wording:	Recommended Change: (+ or -)
Campuses:	None	
Sites:	None	
Course Locations:	None	
Out-of-USA:	Present Wording:	Recommended Change: (+ or -)
Campuses:	None	

Sites: Winnipeg, Canada (Red River
College)
Course Locations: Winnipeg, Canada (Red River
College)

Distance Education Certificate and Degree Offerings:

Present Offerings:

None

Recommended Change:

(+ or -)

Offering of online degree programs is limited to those listed in the current (2006) College Catalog.