

Remarks to the Ferris Board of Trustees
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Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion

I came to Ferris in 1990. I am still here in 2015, a quarter of a century later. As relates to diversity and inclusion, this Ferris is better. Diversity is one of the University's core values, and it is intimately interwoven into the University's strategic planning. Moreover, most members of our institution accept diversity as integral to our daily functioning. Come to Ferris any week of the year and you will have the opportunity to participate in diversity-related programs; indeed, a visitor would be hard pressed to find a comparable institution that does more diversity programming than does Ferris.

There has been a significant diversification of the Ferris student body in the past 8 years. The number of students who identify as one of the racial and ethnic groups that we count has increased by 1,310 since 2007. They are now more than 20 percent of the student body. The increased diversification of the student body is not simply noteworthy—it is praiseworthy. It is the fruit of our ambition and efforts.

Several years ago the University decided to increase the number of Latino students at Ferris. We built partnerships with the Latino community in West Michigan. We created the Center for Latin@ Studies. All universities produce innovative programs. We created the Woodbridge Promesa program to help students establish college-level proficiency beyond the developmental level before they begin college. The result of these and other efforts is that the enrollment of Latinos at Ferris has more than doubled in the last five years. A similar success story could be told about the University's work with International students.

Dr. Frank Hale, my former mentor who was hailed nationally during his lifetime as the "Dean of Diversity," used to say that a university's relationship with students should be to "recruit, retain, and release with a degree." There is still an achievement gap between white students and students of color but anyone who attends one of our seven annual graduation ceremonies will quickly recognize that the University is graduating a higher number of students of color.

We are making progress in other areas. One of our more entrenched diversity challenges has been recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. Even here, we are making progress, slow, yes, but progress. We must continue to be vigilant.

Thus far I centered my comments on statistics—in some ways this is the thrust of most diversity efforts: increasing the numbers of underrepresented groups. Diversifying our faculty, staff and student body is a first (or early) step, and, we have made some progress, but there is another challenge that lies ahead. I am speaking here of redoubling our efforts to cultivate a climate of inclusiveness.

I once heard a speaker say that diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance once you get to the party. He was almost right. Inclusion would also mean being invited to help plan the party, decide where to hold the party—and what music to play. Ferris's future is intricately related to diverse populations; we will be successful if these "new demographics" rightly believe that the University belongs to them as much as it belongs to others. Inclusion means more people at the table—even when that means building a bigger table.

I am working with a cross-divisional team to produce the University's next diversity plan, more accurately, a diversity and inclusion plan. That plan will have a great focus on ways that the University can build and sustain a climate of inclusiveness. A draft of that plan will be completed by the end of this semester—and, then vetted across the University. We are excited to do this work. I will end my comments today by reading the Preface to that plan. I beg your indulgence if you are already familiar with the Preface.

Woodbridge Nathan Ferris, the founder of our institution, is credited with saying, "My plea in Michigan—and it will be my plea to the last breath I draw, and the last word I speak—is education for all children, all men, and all women of Michigan, all the people in all our states all the time." This was his vision; it is our mandate.

We value diversity. We recognize that the myriad of ways in which we differ—our races, our ethnicities, our genders, our gender identities, our

sexual orientations, our ages, our social classes, our physical abilities, our faiths and ethical values systems, our national origins, and our political beliefs—offers a richness that enhances the University.

We value inclusion, meaning, proactive behaviors that make each person feel welcome and empowered—those who are rich, those who are middle-class, and those who are poor; Christians, Jews, Muslims, and those who believe there is no God; black people, white people, red people, brown people, and yellow people; conservatives, moderates, liberals; people who are straight, people who are gay, people who are bi-sexual, people who are transgender; people who learn in traditional ways and people who don't. An inclusive Ferris is a community where all those people and others believe that the University belongs to them as much as it belongs to others. This is the Ferris we are creating.