

# President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President  
May 9, 2016

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## Commencement

This past Friday and Saturday we held commencement ceremonies in Big Rapids and Grand Rapids for the Class of 2016. Nearly 2,000 students walked across the stage to receive their diplomas out of the 2,500 who were eligible to do so.

This year we continued a tradition started last year of inviting retiring faculty to join the commencement party on stage. Our 2016 graduates were joined by Fulbright Scholar Dr. Phillip Middleton of the Department of Languages and Literature, and Dr. Dean Luplow of the Michigan College of Optometry. This was an opportunity for our graduates to thank these dedicated faculty members for the difference they made for many students over the years. We also recognized three outstanding Ferris alumni who were presented with honorary doctoral degrees – Jeffrey Harrold, Robert Hegbloom and Vivian Pickard. We will post their remarks, which were heartwarming and inspiring, on our website.

At the Big Rapids ceremonies I shared stories about a few graduates who took a remarkable path to their degree, often times by succeeding despite obstacles that would have deterred others. This year's stories included the journey a couple from Uzbekistan took to graduate from our Nursing program, two students who overcame life-threatening and limiting diseases, a student whose experience with a sister's autism inspired her to write a book, "My Sister the Superhero," a foster youth who overcame cultural differences to become a championship athlete and is now headed to a graduate program in higher education leadership, a father and son both in the automobile industry graduating together in a program we offer at Macomb Community College, an international student from Saudi Arabia who built a life and a family in the midst of personal grief and health issues, and a first-generation student who was earning the first of two degrees from Ferris on her way to becoming an architect. Commencement is the high point and most emotional event of the academic year, and these stories about succeeding against the odds are emblematic of many other students' journeys. I hope that you will take a few moments to read this year's stories, which are available online at this [link](#).

If you attended one or more of the ceremonies, you experienced the joy and hope of our graduates. Photos and video of the ceremonies are available on the university's [Facebook page](#). While not as immediate as being there in person, these photos still convey much of the excitement of our graduates who are eager to now begin the next stage of their lives.

It takes the concerted effort of many people to make our commencement ceremonies successful. I want to thank everyone who made it possible for our students, their family members and friends to have such a fitting conclusion to their time at Ferris.

Commencement 2016 was a truly moving end to the academic year, and a wonderful send-off for our graduates. Much of our work at the university is engaged in the busy day-to-day schedule each of us keeps. Commencement provides that opportunity to step back, to see and experience the life-changing difference our efforts make in people's lives. It is impossible to experience this and to not feel an immense sense of pride.

Thank you for making this possible for our students.

## Board of Trustee Actions

On Friday the University's Board of Trustees met and approved a number of items of importance to our future. This included approval for a new residence hall on the north portion of the Big Rapids campus adjacent to the University Center. The board provided final approval for three new degree programs – a Doctorate of Nursing Practice degree, an Associate of Applied Science in Brew Management and an Associate of Arts in Psychology.

The May trustee meeting is also when the Board sets tuition rates for the coming year. The Board approved our recommendation of a 2.71 percent average increase, which includes an increase of 2.62 percent for lower-division courses, and a 2.81 percent increase for upper-division credits. This is the fifth consecutive year of tuition increases of less than three percent. They also approved a revision of Pharmacy

tuition to address accreditation requirements, and the concept of blending in and out-of-state tuition for first professional programs, which will begin in Fall 2017.

An excellent example of shared governance at work on our campus is the Tuition and Fees Committee. Each of the tuition actions approved by the Board on Friday was reviewed and recommended by this group. The committee is chaired by Sally DePew, director of Budgetary Planning and Analysis, and includes Tammy Babcock, Gabor Barsai, Rhonda Bishop, Matt Chaney, Sara Dew, John Globoker, Deanna Goldthwait, Sandy Gholston, Kristy Heeter, Jim Hessler, Russ Lewis, Beth Logan, Ron Riksen, Kristen Salomonson, Kent Sun, and student representative Noah Angileri. I rely on this group for their understanding of the many intricacies of tuition, their analysis of financial issues, and their strong commitment to our students. Please join me in thanking them for this exceptional work.

The Board also took time during their busy schedule to celebrate two significant milestones. At a luncheon on Friday they congratulated leaders from organizations across campus on the naming of Ferris State University as one of the top fourteen high value improving public universities. Later that afternoon they noted the awarding of a diploma to the 40,000<sup>th</sup> graduate we have produced since 2003. This is a remarkable number, and has been made possible through the efforts of the entire university community, including faculty, staff, and student leadership. On behalf of those 40,000 graduates, thank you for your commitment to this university and its students past, present and future.

### **Closing Thoughts**

In looking back upon this past academic year, there is much to celebrate. Much of this is group achievement. Resonating throughout these accomplishments is the consistency of purpose with which we have moved forward with our commitment to goals of affordability, access and excellence. At its luncheon last Friday, our Board of Trustees noted how Ferris was cited by *Money* magazine as one of the country's most rapidly improving high-value public institutions of higher education. To meet the criteria for this listing, colleges and universities had to have above-average graduation rates, have raised their graduation rates for all students by at least 10 percent since 2003 and have reduced achievement gap disparities.

We have not met these standards by chance. As a community we have spent much time and energy on realizing a positive and egalitarian vision for the future through implementation of both our Strategic Plan, and our Diversity and Inclusion Plan. Moving forward, we will continue to focus on these strategic objectives with emphasis on academic excellence, enrollment and student success, external engagement and support, and fostering a culture of leadership within Ferris.

In a week the first summer term will begin, bringing a smaller group of students to campus as they look to move forward on their academic programs and reduce their time to earning a degree. Summer can also be a time for vacation and relaxation, along with planning and preparation for the next academic year, as we welcome the class of 2020 to our campuses.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to helping our students succeed throughout the year. I hope that your summer is safe, enjoyable and renewing.

Best wishes,

David L. Eisler, president