

# President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

*Office of the President  
February 27, 2017*

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The Festival of the Arts finished in a flurry of activities over the past few days. Sunday's performance by the West Central Concert Band, Ferris Symphony Band and West Central Chamber Orchestra conducted by Scott Cohen with special guest conductor, Adrian Ronda-Sampayo, was the perfect finale. One of the largest Williams Auditorium crowds in recent memory enjoyed the concert, which featured Spanish selections and music from popular video games. During the concert a video montage of this year's Festival was presented. Following the concert, the new downtown mural created by Andy "Cosmo Joe" Watkins was unveiled. Special thanks to the Big Rapids Festival of the Arts Board – Miriam Andrus, Roxanne Cullen, Mark Gifford, Jerena Keys, Ed Mallett, Marlies Manning and Courtney Gilson-Piercey for their extraordinary efforts in planning, supporting and presenting this monthlong celebration of the arts.

## **State Budget**

Much of last week was spent in Lansing advocating for higher education and the financial support we receive from the state. The House was debating HB 4001, a proposal to immediately cut the state income tax from 4.25% to 3.9% and then reduce it by .1% annually until the tax was eliminated. Currently, the income tax generates \$9.2 billion, and with no plans to replace this revenue, the reduction for next year's budget would have been \$680 million. This shortfall would have increased to \$1.1 billion for 2018-19. While the bill did not include plans for budget reductions, initial comments from some in Lansing suggested these reductions should begin with public universities.

Early in the week prospects for defeating this legislation seemed very bleak. The bill was strongly supported by the Speaker of the House, was reported out of committee in just 90 minutes and was the first bill on the House's agenda for consideration. Many constituencies worked very, very hard to encourage the House to not approve this bill. Currently I chair the Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU), which encompasses the presidents of the state's 15 public universities. Tuesday our presidents went to the capitol as a group to speak out against the bill. I cannot recall a time in the past when we have worked together in this fashion.

Fortunately, on Tuesday and Wednesday you could feel support for this bill begin to change. Many organizations spoke out against the devastating effect this would have on the state, especially with future obligations from the General Fund for Brownfield Credits and the Roads Bill. Governor Snyder took a strong position against the bill, declaring "...I still have a billion dollars' worth of concerns..." After two revisions and a 12-hour marathon House session that went into the early hours of Thursday morning, the House narrowly rejected the proposal, just three votes short of passage. Candidly, this did not seem possible earlier in the week and was only made possible by 12 members of the majority caucus who voted against the measure.

During our meetings in Lansing, Gov. Snyder visited with the MASU presidents group. Our discussion centered around support for higher education and our students, reinforced the importance of international students and faculty for our universities and state, and approaches on how we can work together. We also discussed future initiatives to increase the educational preparation of Michigan citizens and to continue to grow the state's economy. Much of my time in Lansing was spent visiting individually with members of the Senate and House Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittees and the State Budget Director. In these meetings I expressed support for the Executive Budget proposals for public universities and student support, in addition to advocating for an alternative proposal we have developed for the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP).

Higher education is critical to sustained economic growth in Michigan, and we are a leader in providing degree programs that fuel and support this growth. I will continue to be present in Lansing to ensure our voice is heard on issues that directly affect our students and higher education in Michigan. Please know, as this process continues, I will share developments on our progress, possible challenges and other developments with the entire campus community.

### **Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann**

The Office of International Education and the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan are hosting Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann on the Big Rapids campus. Ambassador Neumann currently serves as the president of The American Academy of Diplomacy, a Washington, D.C. based organization working to strengthen American diplomacy. He is a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and has served as Ambassador to Algeria, Bahrain and Afghanistan. He is the author of *"The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan,"* as well as a number of monographs, articles and editorials. Prior to Afghanistan, Ambassador Neumann served in Baghdad with the Coalition Provisional Authority and then as Embassy Baghdad's political/military liaison with the Multinational Command, where he was deeply involved in coordinating the political part of military actions. He was an Army infantry officer in Vietnam and holds a Bronze Star, Army Commendation Medal and Combat Infantry Badge.

On Tuesday, March 14, at 1:30 p.m. in the University Center, Room 202, Ambassador Neumann will share a 20-minute version of the film *"America's Diplomats,"* which takes viewers inside the Foreign Service and uncovers the role diplomats play in shaping American history. After the viewing, Ambassador Neumann will host a Q&A session. He is especially interested in hearing your thoughts, ideas and concerns about foreign policy issues. Thank you to Piram Prakasam of the Office of International Education and Dixie Anderson with the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan for partnering and bringing this wonderful learning opportunity to our students and Big Rapids community. I strongly encourage you to attend.

### **Free Summer Housing**

Although it is still February, now is the time to encourage our students to study on campus this summer in Big Rapids. Housing and Residence Life will offer free housing this summer in residence halls for students who register for six or more credit hours. It is also possible for students working full-time on campus this summer to receive this special housing offer. It is my experience that summer study can be very rewarding and enjoyable.

It reduces a student's time to degree, thus impacting student debt, and in the summer, there is plenty of parking available on campus. Please share this housing news with students and encourage them to attend. For more information, click [here](#).

## **Athletics**

The men's basketball team completed their regular season with a dominating 77-59 win this past Thursday against Grand Valley. This is the first regular season championship for our men since 2012. The top-seeded team in the GLIAC, our men's team will host a Tournament Quarterfinal game on Tuesday at 7 p.m. in Wink Arena against Hillsdale as they compete for their third straight conference tournament title. With a victory Tuesday, we will also host the GLIAC Semifinals and Finals this Saturday and Sunday. This would be their first conference tournament in our facilities since 2011. Congratulations to Head Coach Andy Bronkema and his coaching staff, and to all the student-athletes who work so very hard on and off the court. Please come out and support our men's basketball team this week. This is a very talented team, and they are fun to watch.

On the road over the weekend, our men's hockey team won Friday evening for their third victory in a row and tied Lake Superior State through two overtimes on Saturday, before falling short in the shootout. They finish the WCHA regular season as the post-season number five seed. They will travel to Bowling Green for a first-round WCHA playoff best of three series that begins this Friday evening. We wish the team success as they begin defense of the Broadmoor Trophy they won last year as the WCHA post-season tournament champions.

As our winter sports teams head into tournament action, spring sports are also underway. Our men's tennis team, ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in the country, had a very successful opening GLIAC weekend with a 9-0 sweep over Findlay on Saturday and another 9-0 sweep against Hillsdale on Sunday.

## **Spring Recess**

This week is the midway point of the spring semester and the three quarter mark of the academic year. After Spring recess there remains just seven regular weeks of classes until final examinations. Commencement ceremonies are scheduled for May 5-6. It has become a tradition to feature one or two stories about graduating students who have overcome obstacles or who have had extraordinary success while a student at Ferris. If you know of a student taking part in commencement this year who we could highlight at Commencement, please contact Terri Cook at ext. 2504 or [terricook@ferris.edu](mailto:terricook@ferris.edu).

If you will not be working on campus next week, I am hopeful you can use this time to rest, relax and prepare for the increased pace of activities that comes with the final weeks of the school year. If you are traveling, please travel safely. Thank you for the good work you do each and every day for our students. Your dedication and commitment to our students is something I greatly value and appreciate.