

# President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President  
January 16, 2017

## Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

This week we are celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In what has become a tradition at Ferris State University, this morning faculty and staff gathered to consider the words of Dr. King and their application today. Fifteen individuals presented excerpts from his works or read personal, original writings. On this special day I want to share with you the remarks I delivered this morning.

Dr. King's public orations about racial discrimination began when he was a teenager in Alabama. He knew what was right, and what was wrong. He understood the difference between civility and incivility, and what it meant to be perceived as unequal to others because of the color of his skin.

He published his first book, "Stride Toward Freedom," at the age of 29. At age 33, he was pressing for civil rights with John F. Kennedy. At 35, he won the Nobel Peace Prize. He spent his entire adult life fighting valiantly for civility, social justice and a world that did not yet exist – a world in which black people were treated with the same respect, civility and rights afforded to white people. Great strides were made during the civil rights movement because of Dr. King's leadership and courage to do what was right. However, at the young age of 39, King was assassinated on April 4, 1968. While he was taken from this world much too soon, he made an indelible impression on our country.

Before Dr. King's time, there were individuals like Woodbridge and Helen Ferris, the founders of what is now Ferris State University. Much like Dr. King, they had a vision that was greater than their time. As a child, the public orations of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass greatly influenced Mr. Ferris. Later into his adult life, Booker T. Washington, W.E. DuBois and Franz Boas significantly shaped his philosophies and convictions on racism.

When the Ferris' created this institution in 1884, they did so to give people who did not have an education that opportunity. An opportunity for ALL people who yearned for the chance for an education and a better life. They created a place where underprivileged men and women had the opportunity to acquire an education – regardless of race or social standing.

In 1918 Mr. Ferris wrote a letter published in the "Ann Arbor Negro Year-Book" where he spoke of race relations. Here are few paragraphs of this letter.

*Professor Boas has convinced me that inborn racial differences are few and worthy of little consideration. Any attempt to show that there is a natural gulf between the colored race and the white race must result in failure. No one questions the existence of an artificial gulf between the two races – a man-made gulf. This man-made gulf has militated against the progress of both races in America. This gulf has established class distinctions. In a democracy class distinctions are odious, are perilous. Our ten million colored people are with us. They are here not because they sought this country as a haven of rest, but because they were brought here in bondage to the white race. The Civil War banished chattel slavery, but it is too early in American history to declare that a subtle slavery has not been substituted.*

He concluded with the following:

*...Any influence that savors of hate is ruinous. The one regenerating power in the world is love. Love is not a racial factor. It is a universal factor, that makes for patriotism, that makes for democracy. This is the only influence that can save the world from race hatred, that can save a nation from disintegration. All races in America have one patriotic obligation. The greater burden rests upon the white natives of America. This race has been blest above all other races,*

*consequently its obligation is imperative. The progress of the colored race means the progress of the white race. The enduring progress of the white race means the progress of the colored race. We shall continue to live together, therefore, we must work together under one flag to one end, the more abundant life.*

Mr. Ferris established a culture at this University that continues to this day. We are an institution with an unwavering commitment to diversity, inclusion and equality. This commitment is not something you simply start and finish. It is on-going, every day. It is important we celebrate days like today; days when we can advance our conversations about race, diversity and inclusion, not only here on campus, but in our communities, our churches and beyond.

In 1957, Dr. King lectured to students, faculty and visitors at Ohio's Oberlin College shortly after winning the Nobel Peace Prize. During his speech, "The Future of Integration," he made a very simple, yet very profound statement. "The time is always right to do what's right."

As we remember Dr. King today, let us not only challenge ourselves, but each other - to speak up when things are not right. Let us boldly continue Dr. King's mission for social justice, civility and doing what is right. And let us remember Mr. Ferris' vision of working together understanding that the one regenerating power in the world is not hate, but love, working together to one end.

## **Enrollment**

Last Thursday the 4<sup>th</sup> day enrollment count was completed. The enrollment outcome for the spring semester reflects the decline experienced this fall. Here is a brief summary of the enrollment figures compared to this time a year ago:

- University-wide spring headcount is 13,471, a decrease of 358 students (2.6%).
- University-wide student credit hours (SCH) are down 5,544.5 (3.6%).
- Big Rapids is down 133 students (1.4%) and 4,603.5 SCH (4%).
- Online is up 34 students (3.4%) and 504 SCH (3.2%)
- Kendall is down 105 students (8.6%) and 1,154 SCH (9.1%).
- Regional campus enrollment is down 154 students (7.6%) and 291 SCH (2.4%).

In addition to the online increase, there are other positives in the spring numbers. Spring retention is among the best in University history, with 93% retention of new fall semester bachelor students and 87% retention of new associate degree students, for an overall first semester retention rate of 89%. Thank you for helping our new students succeed. There is also an increase in Hispanic students and Asian students.

Spring enrollment is within the revised revenue projections made this fall. As a result, additional budget reductions for this year are not needed. Your efforts to recruit and retain students are deeply appreciated. The full enrollment figures can be viewed [here](#).

## **Festival of the Arts**

The Festival of the Arts, a once long-standing Ferris tradition, resumed in 2008 as a part of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our University. This year marks the 10th annual edition of the renewed Festival. It is a great example of collaboration, with major support from the City of Big Rapids, the Downtown Business Association, the Downtown Development Authority, Ferris State University and the Mecosta County Community Foundation. Many artists, art organizations, businesses, individuals and others also give of their time, talents and resources.

This year's series opens on Jan. 28 with a "Festival of Artists" featuring local artists invited to share their work, host mini-workshops and sell their creative wares. Local musicians

will entertain attendees through the day with Hope College's H2 Dance Company concluding the evening. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, Artworks will host two gallery exhibit openings and display the new light pole banners created by community residents. Later that afternoon a performance by Dean Malissa, the official and sole George Washington historical actor at Mt. Vernon, accompanied by the Plymouth Fife and Drum Corps, will take place.

Throughout the rest of February many events will be hosted throughout our community in a wide-ranging collection of genres - Architectural Arts, Cinematic Arts, Culinary Arts, Cultural Arts, Floral and Horticultural Arts, Industrial Arts, Literary Arts, Musical Arts, Photographic Arts, Textile and Fashion Arts, Theatrical Arts and Visual Arts. Many of our students, faculty and staff are involved in the workshops and presentations given during this month-long celebration.

There is truly something for everyone young and old alike with over 80 events planned. You can view the complete schedule of events online [here](#). Please join me in recognizing the Festival of the Arts Board of Directors for all of their hard work to help us beat the winter blues: Miriam Andrus, Roxanne Cullen, Mark Gifford, Jerena Keys, Ed Mallett, Marlies Manning and Courtney Gilson-Piercey. I encourage you to join me in supporting and attending the Festival of the Arts.

### **Athletics Update**

On Saturday the men's basketball team won its eighth consecutive game, defeating Northwood 91-59. The team scored 56 points in the first half and shot 51% for the game. With this victory the men's basketball team now leads the GLIAC North Division and moves to 13-3 for the season, 7-2 in the GLIAC. They will be home this Saturday playing Wayne State. The women's game begins at 1 p.m. and the men at 3 p.m. Congratulations to Head Coach Andy Bronkema, his staff and student-athletes for this success.

David L. Eisler, president