

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
March 20, 2017

Legislative Testimony

Last week we presented testimony in Lansing to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education. I focused on the impact of proposed 2019 budget intent language on our students in the Tuition Incentive Program. Here are some excerpts from my remarks:

- Most testimony you hear will be about Michigan's public universities, and rightfully so. Michigan is fortunate to have exceptional public universities. This testimony will focus on **our students** and the potential debilitating impact of proposed 2019 budget intent language for the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP).
- TIP is a state financial aid program funded through the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, and has grown to where it now represents \$53 million in the current year's budget.
- Ferris State University's unique history of providing opportunity attracts exactly the kind of students the TIP program is meant to help. At Ferris, we believe helping these students is at the core of our mission.
- Ferris is uniquely positioned to help these lower-income students be successful in earning a career-oriented degree, and finding employment. Indeed, we have a track record of effectively doing so.
- The proposed language in the Executive Budget is a blunt instrument attacking the futures of TIP students who earn their associate degrees at public universities. As a result, for the second year in a row we face diminished support from the state in helping these students make a difference for their future.
- As proposed for 2019, TIP support for public university students, which currently covers their tuition costs while earning an associate degree, would be limited to twice the in-district community college rate. This proposal would reduce support for our TIP students by one third, and would make it extremely difficult for our students to attend, and for those who do, it would significantly raise their student debt.
- Through TIP young lives are changed, moving from a cycle of loss and economic hardship to a future that is both bright and promising. These are stories of student success that triumph over the most difficult of hardships and are the pinnacle of life-changing opportunity that we want for all students.

To illustrate the successful opportunities TIP creates for students at public universities, two students shared their stories of how the TIP program created an opportunity for them to obtain an education and further themselves and their families. I am very grateful that Tekarra Coleman, a sophomore majoring in Health Information Management, and Kaylia Ervin, a graduate of our Criminal Justice program and a second year law student at Michigan State, would join me before the committee. These two young ladies did an exemplary job and truly highlight the successful opportunities TIP creates for students. The full text of their remarks and my written testimony, which also includes the topics of performance-based funding and partnerships with community colleges, is accessible online [here](#). Should you wish to view this, you can watch the recorded testimony [here](#), which begins at the 25-minute mark. I will continue

to work very hard in Lansing on TIP funding, state support and MPSERS funding over these next few months.

Keynote on Radical Curiosity

Educator, speaker and author Debbie Irving will deliver her keynote presentation, “Radical Curiosity: The Unexplained Pathway to Human Potential,” on Tuesday at 11 a.m. in the University Center, room 202.

Ms. Irving is known for engaging her audiences in thoughtful discussion through the use of personal storytelling. Through this, she illustrates how each of us develops our own belief systems and misinterprets our experiences. She will share how she has silently reaffirmed harmful, archaic racial patterns instead of questioning obvious racial disparities and tensions. I encourage you to attend, engage in these discussions and enjoy a lunch with your colleagues. Thank you to the Academic Senate, the Office of Multicultural Student Services, the Diversity and Inclusion Office, and the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning for sponsoring this event.

SPARC

One of our highest priorities continues to be addressing student debt. At last week’s Strategic Planning and Resource Council meeting I presented an update on our efforts to reduce student debt, along with new institutional and national data on student debt trends.

Over the last several years, we have worked extremely hard at reversing the pattern of rapidly increasing student debt for our graduates. There is good news to share here:

- From a high of \$37,325 in 2012-13, average student debt of undergraduates with debt has declined to \$35,710 in 2015-16.
- This is \$234 more than the average student debt in 2009-10.
- Had debt continued to increase at the rate experienced in 2007-2009, projected average student debt in 2025 would have been nearly \$85,000.
- On our current trajectory this number is more likely between \$35,000 and \$43,000.

Even with this success there remains significant concern. Student debt at Ferris is the second highest among Michigan’s public universities. Over 81% of our graduates have student debt, the highest percentage of these universities. As we continue to work to improve the financial literacy of our students, our approach to this challenge is five-fold:

- Contain Costs
- Raise Institutional Financial Aid Support
- Double the Scholarship Base
- Make a Ferris Education More Affordable
- Reduce Time to Degree

Please take a few moments to look at the slides from this presentation. I have annotated them using Adobe’s “sticky notes” feature, and they are accessible [here](#). (To view the sticky notes, save the slide show, and open it with Adobe Acrobat.) Some of the highlights include:

- Slide 8 – Student loan defaults for Ferris attendees are 6.3%, a 34% improvement since 2013.
- Slide 10 – Ferris is 4th highest in the state for student mobility (moving from the bottom 20% to the top 20% economically).
- Slide 15 – Institutional financial support has increased by 88% since 2008.
- Slide 18 – Donor funded scholarships have increased by 44% since 2013, and endowed scholarships have increased by 65% since 2013.

- Slide 19 – In addition to this support, the Ferris Futures Scholarship Challenge has created 53 new endowments since July. During this period \$2,423,946 in scholarship gifts and pledges for this program have been received.
- Slide 22 – Since 2008-9 the net price of a Ferris education has increased by 16%. This is the smallest percentage increase among the Michigan 15, and far below the average of 24.4% for these institutions.
- Slide 25, 26 – During this period the net price of a Ferris education has moved from 6th highest among Michigan publics, to 9th.
- Slide 28 – 51% of our FTIACs who graduate, do so in four years. Of our FTIACs who graduate, **86% graduate in 4 or 5 years**. This is remarkable!
- Slide 33 – This clearly shows the impact of time to degree on a student's debt load.
- Slide 36 – This shows the difference our combined efforts have made on changing the pattern for student debt at Ferris.

We must continue to make addressing the debt of our students one of our highest priorities. Each of us can place the face of a Ferris student we know on this portrait of student debt. **Our goal is to not just reduce the growth in student debt, but to reduce the student debt for each and every Ferris State University graduate.** Thank you for your efforts to make this important difference for our students both now and in the future.

Athletics

Two of our student athletes received special recognition this past week. Tennis freshman Pablo Munoz Baroja, from San Sebastian, Spain, was chosen as the GLIAC men's tennis Athlete of the Week. Sophomore Zach Hankins of the men's basketball team has been chosen as the 2017 Division II Conference Commissioner's Association Midwest Region Player of the Year. Congratulations to both of these men on these honors.

David L. Eisler, president