

# President's Message to Campus

Office of the President  
June 22, 2018

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It is always exciting to welcome new students and their parents to the University for orientation. To see the anticipation on their faces and the confidence that they have made the right choice for their education, remind us of the important role we play in their future. Our Admissions staff have been busy planning 13 orientation sessions that will be offered throughout the summer. Over the last two weeks, 1,142 incoming freshmen have participated in orientation – a very positive sign as the numbers of students attending are up compared to last year. Many Ferris faculty and staff attend orientation and answer questions from students and their parents. Thank you to everyone involved in welcoming our students to campus and supporting this important step toward the start of their college career this fall.

We also have the pleasure of hosting middle and high school students on our campuses for academic and sports camps. These opportunities can open new worlds to these young minds and provide a chance to become comfortable with a university campus and especially with Ferris State University. Thank you to all of the faculty and staff who are leading these camps and sharing your expertise and Bulldog pride with students from across the state.

## **SPARC Update/Strategic Planning**

More than 60 faculty and staff participated in yesterday's Strategic Planning and Resource Council's summer retreat. The focus of the retreat centered around a variety of efforts for our future – progress on assessing the University's brand, a report from the HLC steering committee on their progress and the development of the next University-wide strategic plan. This planning work includes the University's mission and vision statements, and themes identified during listening sessions held last fall: (1) student success/enrollment/retention, (2) branding/reputation/image/community, (3) academic programs/offerings, (4) enhancing resources and (5) maximizing institutional effectiveness. Progress updates were provided by the co-chairs of the strategic theme workgroups, and everyone was actively engaged in assessing the many excellent ideas and thoughts shared. David Pilgrim and Spence Tower, co-chairs of the 14-person strategic planning steering committee, are continuing to gather both external and internal input over the summer months.

This month we are completing the fourth year of our strategic plan, *Living Our Values*. Questions to be answered in the coming months include - what do our communities and region need from us, what are challenges and opportunities in our future, and how must we change to continue to grow and succeed in the years ahead. I thank David, Spence and everyone who participated in this very meaningful day of planning for our future. As a University, we have worked extremely hard to incorporate our core values into the work we do every day serving and supporting our students. When you have a moment I encourage you to review the [2017-2018 Strategic Plan Progress Report](#) that highlights some of the accomplishments related to our strategic plan. Thank you for your efforts to move our University forward and to help our students succeed.

## TIP Funding

There is very good news for our Tuition Incentive Program (TIP) students. For the 2017-18 year, the state limited the total amount of TIP support students at Ferris could receive to \$8.5 million. In 2016-17 our students had received \$9.7 million in TIP support, so this meant that some students attending Ferris or who wanted to attend did not receive funding. For next year we faced an additional challenge as intent language in the state budget was designed to reduce funding for university TIP students to three times the average community college in-district tuition rate. This would have meant about \$330 per credit hour, much less than the full tuition support first- and second-year TIP students currently receive.

TIP funding was my top legislative priority in Lansing. We were fortunate to find and work with legislators who understood how vital this support is for our students and their futures. The great news is that the state budget approved by the legislature and about to be signed by the Governor includes full tuition payment for university students **and** removes the \$8.5 million cap.

In celebrating this victory, I want to thank two of our TIP students, Dymend Ross and Miranda Roberts, who allowed me to tell their stories as part of my [Senate Testimony](#). If you would like the full accounting of their stories follow the link above, but in essence, Dymend received TIP funding and Miranda did not. The tenacity of Miranda to earn her associate degree this past year was truly inspirational. She considered it critical to live on campus for her academic success. Many people worked very hard to find additional financial support for her, but ultimately to be able to afford living in a residence hall she gave up her meal plan. This support from the state for TIP students aligns with our opportunity mission and the difference we can make for these deserving, talented young people.

## Enrollment

While numbers will change somewhat as the different summer sessions progress, the 4<sup>th</sup> day enrollment count on May 17 reports University-wide headcount of 5,254 students, a decrease of 368 students, or 6.5%, from Summer 2017. University-wide student credit hours (SCH) are down in a similar fashion, 6.7%. Most disappointingly, SCH in Big Rapids are down 15.4%. Online SCH are up slightly and Kendall SCH are down 4.2%. On a positive note, regional campus SCH are up 6.8%.

In studying these data the demand for summer online courses is clear. This summer, classes on the Big Rapids campus represent 45% of our SCH, and online SCH are now 37%. You can read the full [summer enrollment report](#) online.

We have often talked about the continued decrease in the number of Michigan high school graduates. The disruptive impact of this on our University is profound. I would encourage you to consider carefully the SCH data on this [graph](#) located on page four of the 2017-2018 Strategic Plan Progress Report. This tracks University-wide SCH over the past decade. This past year University-wide SCH was 331,857. This is the lowest total SCH in the past decade and represents a decline of 25,614 SCH in the last two years. We have multiple tuition rates at the University, but using next year's undergraduate lower division tuition rate of \$421, this represents a loss in revenue of \$10,783,494 over a two-year span. This nearly \$10.8 million figure does not include potential declines for Fall 2019.

The very good news is that summer orientation numbers are strong and can help us reverse the decline of the past two years. Unfortunately, the same is not true for continuing student enrollments for next fall, which are currently 5.7% behind this same point in time last year. With some of the highest retention rates in our history this past year, why do we see this pattern? I believe several factors are at work here –

- First, this is the combined effect of reduced numbers of new freshmen over time, as these smaller classes move through their years at our University. We see this also in a pattern where we have record numbers of Ferris graduates with diminished incoming classes.
- Second, students are graduating more quickly. The simple reality is that incoming freshmen graduate in four or five years. No longer does it take six years for them to graduate. This past year for graduates who began as FTIACS (First Time in Any College), 46% graduated in four years, and 37% graduated in five years. Combined, 83% of our FTIAC graduates did so in five years. This is wonderful news and a significant improvement. The reality is that reduced time at Ferris has a negative impact on our finances. (Graphs on page two of the Strategic Plan Progress report referenced earlier provide additional detail on this.)

As a University community, many, many people are working very hard to recruit and retain students for our University. I am especially grateful for our staff in Enrollment Services who work every day to connect prospective students with the powerful, life-changing education we provide at Ferris. In public presentations, I have talked repeatedly about the declining birthrate in Michigan and the impact this has for the foreseeable future on the number of Michigan high school graduates. I am thankful for the efforts of faculty and staff on student recruitment and retention, and believe that we can and will succeed in this most challenging of demographic trends.

However, even if we maintain our market share of Michigan high school graduates, the continued decline in high school graduates will result in lower enrollments at Ferris. In our planning sessions this spring, I challenged our President's Council to identify 10 new targeted initiatives that could result in 25-50 new students at Ferris for Fall 2019. At our first planning session in mid-May, we invited an additional group of faculty and staff to join us in this effort. In these discussions, I encouraged our group to step beyond what may be comfortable and to consider ideas with risk, understanding that every idea may not succeed. From these discussions, we developed a list of [12 recruitment initiatives](#) we believe may make a difference.

Now is the time to begin targeted student recruitment initiatives to see meaningful success by Fall 2019. As we work to implement these initiatives, we believe you also have ideas that can make a difference. I encourage you to share these ideas with your department, office, college and division. Working together we can and will make a difference for Ferris and for our students.

## **Closing Thoughts**

While this continues to be a challenging time for higher education in Michigan, we have much to look forward to this coming academic year, and I am excited about working together with you on our future. I hope you are enjoying the start of summer and able to take part in activities that provide you both enjoyment and relaxation.

Best wishes,

David L. Eisler, president