

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
August 23, 2010

Welcome Back

Whether you have been at Ferris for the beginning of many fall semesters or if this is your first one here, it is my pleasure to welcome you to campus as students return. Although not official yet, enrollment figures, especially in our campuses around the state and on-line, are strong, and it appears that Ferris will enroll more than 14,000 students this fall, a record high for our University.

Fall is always an exciting time on campus, and this year there is much to celebrate. The improvements in Big Rapids that are either completed or in the works reflect some wonderful accomplishments for Ferris. The just-opened East Campus Suites will provide a new level of residence experience for Ferris students. If you are in Big Rapids, you have undoubtedly seen how much work has been done on our new Michigan College of Optometry building. And while it might be less noticeable to visitors to our campus, the mechanical air conditioning and heating upgrades to the Arts and Sciences complex, when completed, will make that facility more conducive to teaching and learning.

As usual, members of our physical plant have done a remarkable job of keeping the campus looking its best for both new and returning students. This year part of our preparations includes improvement to the markings on crosswalks throughout campus to improve pedestrian safety. I want to thank everyone who has worked so hard these past few months not simply to maintain campus, but to make it more attractive and supportive of our mission than it has ever been.

For several years now we have been the fastest growing university in Michigan – and that didn't take place by accident. In addition to our educational offerings and the many locations in which we provide access to education, the quality of life we work to offer students has played a major role in our growth. There needs to be strong reasons for students to come to Ferris, and we continue to provide those reasons, both in the education we provide and in our facilities. From Dining Services, which has done such a remarkable job with the renovated Rock Café and the rest of our dining facilities, to our recruiters, residential life employees and so many, many more, we excel by understanding and anticipating our students' needs.

Success Stories

Engaging students, encouraging them to excel, and helping them discover their potential are some of the things I believe we do best at Ferris. Over the summer I have looked back on the many pages of notes from the "Share Your Success" sessions we held last spring. It is easy to feel your pride in your many successes and in the difference you make for students. This year I will continue to collect success stories from across the University and share them as much as possible in these messages and elsewhere. Too often we forget to celebrate our achievements.

Despite the many physical improvements to campus, Ferris is a remarkable University not because of its buildings, but because of its people. It is our work together that helps students succeed. In my seven years at Ferris I have seen the perspective of our state change through increased understanding about how critically important a college education is to a person's success.

Certainly more students than ever are seeking a college education. Their objective is not just to go to college, but rather graduate from it. Throughout the year I want us to engage in discussion, planning, and action which will further help students achieve this goal. My hope is that Ferris State University will be recognized as a place where students succeed because we work together to assure that success.

State Budget

This past academic year I spent much time trying to raise awareness about the relationship between the slumping economy, declining state support of education, rising tuition and how this insidious cycle is making the pursuit of a college degree ever more difficult. Without a well-prepared new workforce, Michigan will be stuck in this cycle of diminishing expectations.

In subsequent messages I will keep you abreast of state budget developments and their impact on our University. For now, I don't want to begin the semester on too somber a note. Let me simply remind you that the state continues to face budget deficits, still has not approved this year's budget and continues to rely on federal economic stimulus dollars which will be gone next year.

Since 2001, Ferris has been the fastest growing university in Michigan, yet only one other school has restrained tuition more than we have during that time. Our cost to educate a student (tuition plus state support) has gone up an average 2.6 percent a year. In the face of our economic challenges we clearly are doing something right. Actually, as one can see from our "Share Your Success" meetings and Good News reports, we are doing many things right.

Faculty Contract Negotiations

You are probably aware that we are now a week away from the start of fall classes without having completed agreement on a new contract with Ferris faculty in Big Rapids. I believe that the elements for an agreement are in place and am hopeful that a new contract will be signed soon.

Both teams have worked hard and put in innumerable hours to resolve issues in a process which has now gone on for more than a year. I am optimistic that we will see the fruits of this long process before the start of classes. I believe our proposal to faculty is fair, equitable and sustainable. Other universities in the state have either put forward or completed contracts that contain no salary increase for faculty. The contract we have offered faculty does not treat salaries in this way.

The uncertainty caused by these negotiations comes after a summer which for many of you has been a very busy time readying the University for the start of the semester. Additionally, this comes on the heels of the painful steps we took to reduce University staff by encouraging early retirements, even as we are attracting more students than ever. When classes begin for our 126th year, we will be challenged to move forward, working together more efficiently than we ever have before. And we will.

An archive of updates on the progress of contract negotiations, the current proposal to faculty, relationship guidelines between faculty and administration, and more is available at www.ferris.edu/fsuintranet/negotiations . To access this site you need to be on a computer logged into the University's network.

Closing Thoughts

Later this week our students will return to campus. Sometimes it can be small gestures that get a student's academic career off on the right foot and create a positive impression of the University they have chosen to attend. Please take the time to answer questions from students, hold a door open, be patient as traffic increases and students struggle to move their possessions into their new homes. We don't get a second chance to create a first impression that will last not just the length of a student's career at Ferris, but will remain with them as alumni. I look forward to working with you as we continue to make Ferris State University a place committed to the success of our students, our communities and our state.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler, President