

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
September 3, 2013

Thank You

Classes have begun with a smooth transition from the summer months to a record number of students enrolled in classes at Ferris State University for the fall semester. The start of the academic year is a time that best brings into focus the kind of teamwork that makes Ferris such a special place.

Many groups at Ferris are at their busiest, working hard to meet the needs of newly arrived students and hosting special events welcoming them to our campuses. Admissions, Residential Life, Dining Services, Physical Plant, Information Technology, our Campus Police, and our Ferris students themselves, among many others, have all been very busy. From physically moving students into the Big Rapids campus, to making certain students are registered and enrolled for their classes, to providing lunch for employees during the Founders Day picnic, people from many, many different departments at Ferris make a safe, smooth and memorable start of the academic year possible for the entire university community. Thanks are also due to our faculty, counselors, and department secretaries who contributed greatly to advisement and registration.

This is by no means a full listing of the people at Ferris who make it possible for our students to start or continue their studies knowing they have a strong support team helping them. Everyone at Ferris has contributed to this remarkable start to the semester. On behalf of our students, thank you for all your efforts.

Thursday's Founders' Day activities were some of the best in memory. Thank you for joining us for lunch under the big tent, or ice cream in the shade of the FLITE library. It was good to see our students out on the Quad learning more about opportunities both on campus and in our local area. Doing this next to the continued demolition of the Rankin Center reminds us of the future ahead. I want to extend special thanks to the Government Relations and General Counsel's Office for their work on the ice cream social and to everyone who cooked or served in the heat last Thursday. Once again there were many people who worked very hard to create an enjoyable day of community for students, faculty, staff, emeriti and people from the Big Rapids community.

Enrollment

The fourth-day count of enrollment is in, and it shows we welcomed a record number of students at Ferris State University for the start of fall classes. 14,707 students are enrolled at Ferris State University this fall, up 174 students over the start of the Fall 2012 semester.

There is much to celebrate in our fall enrollment statistics. This is the largest headcount in Ferris history. It is also the second year that Big Rapids enrollment is over 10,000 students. It is gratifying to see an increase in the number of students of color enrolling at Ferris. We are up 50 African American students, 55 Hispanic students and 72 students who identify as being of two or more races. International student enrollment continues to grow with a 25% (82 students) increase.

Another piece of exciting news is the retention of first-year bachelor degree students from last year. First-year student retention jumped from 70 percent a year ago to 77 percent this fall. This is the highest first-year retention in Ferris history and is truly an achievement to be celebrated. Thank you for helping our students succeed.

There are also areas of concern in these numbers, especially in terms of student credit hours on the Big Rapids campus, which are down 2,277. This is a decline of nearly 1.8 percent. Two colleges in particular, show significant declines for on-campus credit hours this fall: Arts and Sciences is down 1,392 or 2.4 percent, and Education and Human Services is down 941 or 11.6 percent. As more data become available in the weeks ahead, we will study that information carefully to see what can be learned from this fall's enrollment patterns. The 4th Day Fall Enrollment report is posted at

http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/president/newsletters/memos/docs/Fall_2013_Enrl_Summary.pdf.

Given the many factors depressing higher education enrollment in Michigan, including the declining number of students graduating from high school, these are very good numbers. As students begin their studies at Ferris we are reminded that we need to do everything we can to help them graduate on time and without a burdensome level of debt.

Thank you to everyone who is involved in attracting students to Ferris and thanks, also, to those of you who have offered suggestions on how to keep a Ferris education affordable. We will continue to seek ways to implement those ideas so that the class of 2017, and classes beyond, will leave our university with the brightest future possible in front of them.

If you were at my Founders Day presentation, you know that our university is seeking a way to shorten the time to graduation for our students as one of the most important steps we can take to reduce the cost of an education. Even as we congratulate ourselves on these strong enrollment numbers, we must not lose sight of the fact that the goal of a Ferris education is not simply to attend our university, but to graduate from it with a degree.

Founders Day Remarks

It was pleasure to offer remarks during Founders Day, from reflecting on our past as an educational institution, to present day challenges and opportunities, to some of the factors that will shape the kind of university we will be in the decades to come.

If you were unable to attend my remarks, I would urge you to review the slide presentation at http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/president/presentations/2013-2014/Founders_Day_2013.pdf. On the slides, for the online presentation I added some virtual "sticky notes" to make the major points accessible to readers. Very briefly, I want to touch upon a couple of the themes that reflect some of my thinking about the state of our university.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of paying homage to our founders, Woodbridge and Helen Gillespie Ferris. Woodbridge spoke regularly about the value of education and maintaining high standards both in education and in life. "I say put humanity first and money second, and even further down the line if needed," he said. Building on our founders' vision, we have established a robust strategic planning process to assure that we continue to innovate to make the school founded by the Ferris' relevant for 21st century students.

Part of that relevance is keeping pace with the changing marketplace to assure that our career-oriented degrees continue to help our students match their Ferris-earned education to the

needs of employers. One of the things I learned in preparing this material was that in the past decade we have added 38 new degrees. During this period we also closed 29 degree programs. As Provost Fritz Erickson has noted, we are one of the most nimble universities in being able to adjust our offerings in response to needs and changes in our society.

I also took this opportunity to look back at the university over the past 10 years. Some of the changes we have seen during that time, including the rise of Ferris as the preferred choice for students, happened thanks in no small part to our concern for students, public appreciation for the quality of our education, and that nimbleness I just mentioned.

Again, I hope you will take a moment to review the slideshow. We are unique among public universities in being named for our founders. Each year at this time we are fortunate to have the opportunity to pay tribute to Woodbridge and Helen Ferris by rededicating ourselves to their educational ideals.

Football Opener

After the long Labor Day weekend, Bulldog football opens its 2013 season with an away game against North Dakota State on Sept. 7. The game will be streamed live on national television by ESPN3. Also opening their seasons this next week are volleyball, soccer, women's tennis, and men's and women's cross country. For a full list of Ferris athletic teams in action, visit <http://www.ferrisstatebulldogs.com/composite> . Please support our student-athletes by attending one of the many contests that will be taking place in the coming weeks.

Thank you again for helping our students at Ferris State University begin Fall 2013 semester with such support and positive energy. I look forward to seeing you on campus.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler, president