

## President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President  
October 20, 2004  
Ext. 2500

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It is a pleasure to share with you the planning remarks I presented to our campus at an open session this afternoon. As always I would very much appreciate hearing your thoughts, suggestions, comments, and observations on these ideas.

Thank you for your continued help and support.

Dave

### **A Plan for Ferris and its Future**

David L. Eisler  
October 20, 2004

Thank you very much for being here. I appreciate this opportunity to share our next steps as we plan and shape the future at Ferris State University. I want to express my thanks to you the people of Ferris who have spent significant time over the past year helping me to understand our University, its people, traditions, and history. It is very exciting for me to share with you the next steps in our planning process.

Let me begin by sharing two recent experiences with you. Earlier this month I traveled to Lansing for the state convention of Michigan optometrists. Ferris hosted an evening gathering to share our plans for a new optometry building. My first impression was of the extraordinary number of our faculty and alumni that attended. During that evening Dean Alexander announced that faculty and staff in the Michigan College of Optometry had pledged \$125,000 for this construction. Plainly and simply I was overwhelmed by this extraordinary statement of support.

Just yesterday I was visited by a sixth grade student who wants to become an optometrist. She had heard about our building project from her parents and wanted to help make a difference for the school she someday hopes to attend. She presented me with a check for \$100, money she had earned and saved from her chores and projects. I was nearly moved to tears.

These two acts, the first a demonstration of the extraordinary commitment of our people and the second representing the hopes and dreams for the future that Ferris represents, help underscore the importance of what I want to share with you

today. We can plan and guide Ferris State University so it can both foster the aspirations of our people and fulfill the dreams of our students present and future. Together we will shape our future.

## **Background**

Today marks the third phase of our work together in planning both the present and future. This began with small group discussions, to date these are 75 in number, and have included over 1400 faculty, staff, and students. In these sessions I asked each of you to provide responses to these questions -

- 1) What three things do you cherish most about Ferris State University and would least like to lose?
- 2) What are the three biggest challenges facing Ferris State University?
- 3) If you were president of FSU, what do you believe are the three most important things you should do?

In our discussions I next asked you to share your frustrations and disappointments with Ferris; the things that kept you from doing your best work. For me there could have been no better introduction to Ferris and its people. Candidly as the sessions with faculty, staff, and students came to a close I found myself going through a sort of withdrawal as I missed this contact and input.

From this information emerged three vision statements that I shared with the campus last April -

- We Need to Create a Learning Centered University
- We Must Work Together
- We Must Become an Engaged Campus

Next we used sessions at the Summer University and the Opening of School Convocation to further explain these ideas and to see what each of these meant to you. In this process we were assisted by over forty faculty and staff facilitators who worked with you in small group sessions, discussing and defining these concepts. Over a thousand people provided input into what these three vision statements did and could mean.

Your responses to these ideas can be synthesized as follows

### **Create a Learning University Means:**

### Learning

- Learning is a journey, not a destination
- Creates a “can do” attitude and sufficient skill sets (educating students, staff, faculty for life)
- Getting away from just teaching to focus on learning
- Teach lifelong learning to help guide students after graduation

### Faculty Staff Development

- Faculty/staff professional development opportunities, resource, money, and time
- Developing a strategy for faculty and staff development that is intentional
- Employee career development
- Ongoing professional development we grow, students grow
- Sharing of the best practices – through demos or personal engagement

### Learning Is Everywhere

- Encourage out-of-class learning
- Learning is not necessarily in the classrooms but in life’s experiences
- Structured involvement outside classroom

### State of the Art

- Keep current with technology/information technology to adequately prepare students, staff, and administrators for industry expectations
- Keep curriculum up to date
- New technologies, up to date techniques

### Assessment

- Assessment should be longitudinal and meaningful
- Benchmark, measures, evaluates
- Continuous assessment + improvement of teaching + learning

## **Working Together Means:**

### Collaboration

- Become the people of Ferris, not faculty, staff, administration
- A group of people working and connecting together toward a clear goal
- Collaboration among divisions, colleagues, and programs
- Cooperation vs. competition
- Enabling cross university programs
- Foster win/win attitude between unions and management
- Working to the good of the student/community

### Communication

- Communicate! Listen and communicate!

- Knowledge and understanding other areas outside of your own department
- Sharing information

#### Common Purpose, Values, and Understanding

- Big picture – we all affect a positive/negative outcome for Ferris community
- Bridge faculty, staff and administration/board gap
- Shared goals and working together
- Focus on shared values

#### Valuing Others

- Create positive trust and respect
- Empowering employees
- Along with sharing who is successful, sharing how they got there
- Learn how to provide a positive environment
- Make work fun, smile, laugh, friendliness – with co-workers and students

### **Engaged Campus Means:**

#### Build Relationships

- Bring campus and community together on projects
- Build/maintain relationships with stakeholders
- Ownership in programs and university of students and faculty

#### Awareness

- Enhance positive role models through social activities
- Sensitive to diversity

#### Attendance and Participation

- Attending commencement, sports, evenings, out of class events
- Coordination of events around campus and community
- High attendance of events

#### Engagement and Involvement

- Interested in environment around us, not just the university itself
- Provide social opportunities to enhance learning experience
- Recognize students have other responsibilities outside of FSU teach them the value of participating in the community
- Strong relationship between university and external constituents

I want to emphasize that these are your words and represent your thoughts on these concepts. Beyond explaining and defining these ideas I was also searching for another response, is this the right vision for Ferris State University? In reading and analyzing your ideas, and in subsequent meetings with facilitators I explored this carefully. Your responses affirmed that these are both reasonable and logical

goals for our University. In seeking your opinions, the most common response was, “These are the right ideas, what are you going to do about them? What results from this?”

This is not a surprising response. In my thirty years of work in higher education at four different campuses, I believe this concern for results and change have been expressed by faculty and staff at each location. All too often I have seen planning efforts that result in lofty goals and impressive documents, both of which are soon forgotten in the rapid pace of daily college life.

### **Next Steps**

In moving forward it is extraordinarily important that we focus on a limited number of efforts that have the most potential for success. I also believe this process must continue the broad involvement of people from all areas of our campus. Further for us to succeed, we must embed these efforts in our planning activities this year.

Today it is my pleasure to announce the formation of six task forces, co-chaired by members of our faculty, staff, and administration. Each group will be given a similar charge –

- **Benchmark best practice** - Any planning effort should begin with a clear aspirational understanding of what we want to achieve. What is best practice and how can adapt that for our university?
- **Identify internal resources and unique strengths** – There is a tendency to sometimes look to others for assistance when the best examples and strengths are already here. As Kim Cameron has taught us, great organizations focus on their strengths and expand them, looking for the positive rather than negative.
- **Consider diversity implications** – There is a tendency on campuses to focus one planning group on diversity. It is my experience that this can limit responsibility for diversity to that single entity when it is the responsibility of the entire organization.
- **Recommend strategic initiatives** – In a three-year context what can we achieve?
- **Identify multiple small wins** – In each area there are changes we can achieve now. In doing so we will build our institutional confidence

through our combined success. Further we will demonstrate conclusively that planning does result in action.

- **Recommendations should be challenging, but achievable** – Many of us have observed well-intentioned planning efforts that lost sight of reality.
- **Consider how we work together to achieve this** – If we are to build a great future for our institution, it will require efforts that are inclusive and create shared responsibility.
- **Report in 60 days** – Planning efforts should be time specific and not create a series of ongoing standing committees. Each group will develop a report which they will present to the Presidents Council in a session open to the entire campus before the holiday break. The materials developed will be posted and shared on the campus website. These results will then be developed into the structure and backdrop for this year's Unit Action Planning process.

The six task forces flow from our three vision statements -

### **We Need to Create a Learning Centered University**

**Physical Teaching Spaces** - We are truly fortunate to have a beautiful campus. However, many of our classrooms look much as they did when I began teaching in 1975. Every student and faculty member deserves to have a space that will facilitate extraordinary learning. More specifically we ask the following -

- What are the standards of expectation for classrooms and laboratory facilities?
- How do we create facilities that have the flexibility to support a variety of teaching\learning styles?
- How do we do this cost effectively, using resources efficiently and placing them where they will provide the most benefit?
- How do we provide the support to use these facilities effectively?
- Beyond technology how do we address issues of paint, carpet, furniture, and air conditioning?

This task force is co-chaired by Terry Doyle and Susan Jones. The membership includes the following people -

- Terry Doyle, co-chair – Center for Teaching, Learning
- Susan Jones, co-chair – Business
- Roxanne Cullen – Arts and Science
- Carrie Forbes – FLITE

- Jo Gerst - Enrollment
- Sharon Hamel - Media Services
- Jacque Hooper - Allied Health Sciences
- Mike Hughes - Physical Plant
- Diane Johnson - Residence Halls
- Bill Knapp - Center for Teaching, Learning
- Rick VanSant - Education

**Professional Development** – If we are committed to creating a Learning Centered University we must help our people continue to grow and excel. An institution dedicated to learning must be an active partner in creating learning opportunities for its people. More specifically we ask the following -

- How do we build upon current efforts and create additional opportunities for professional development and recognition for our faculty?
- How do we create additional opportunities for staff development and recognition?
- How do we encourage new initiatives and build support for workshops and travel?
- Should we create a series of summer workshops using our expertise? (technology, first year experience, writing across the curriculum, critical thinking)

This task force is co-chaired by Kim Hancock and Warren Hills. The membership includes the following people -

- Kim Hancock, co-chair - Pharmacy
- Warren Hills, co-chair - Human Resources
- Sue Cherry - Technical Assistance Center
- Anne Kelly - FLITE
- Cindy Konrad - Allied Health Sciences
- Fonda Kuzee - Physical Plant
- Ed Muccio - Technology
- Tom Oldfield - Academic Affairs
- Jon Taylor - Arts and Sciences
- John Vermeer - Business
- Chris Vodry - Business
- LeRoy Wright - Residential Life
- Louise Yowitz - Affirmative Action

**Technology** – There is no denying that technology is changing the way we work as a University. However the tendency can be to focus on implementing technology rather than facilitating learning. If we approach this from the context of a Learning

Centered University, what does this focus on learning mean for technology? More specifically we ask the following -

- How can technology efforts be driven by instructional and support needs?
- What is the campus standard for computer hardware\software?
- How do we create an approach for the replacement of equipment and software across campus?
- How do we provide effective support for faculty, staff, and students?
- What other technology efforts should we consider?
  - Development of a wireless network
  - Laptop initiatives
  - Support for pdas, cell phones, and other devices

This task force is co-chaired by Bill Boras and John Urbanick. The membership includes the following people -

- Bill Boras, co-chair - Business
- John Urbanick, co-chair - Information Services
- Mike Feutz - Technology
- Don Green - FSU-Grand Rapids
- Ellen Haneline - Allied Health Sciences
- Sue Hastings-Bishop - Education
- Robin Hoisington - Technology
- Bob Loesch - Arts and Sciences
- Nancy Reddy - UCEL
- Scott Thede - Information Services
- Randy Vance - Optometry
- Dave Wininger - Media Distribution

### **We Must Work Together**

**Communication** - A critical component to how we work together is how we communicate with each other. How do we effectively communicate both internally and externally? How can we create an effective positioning effort for our University? More specifically we ask the following -

- How do we create community and understanding with our communication strategies and tools?
- Assess Internally
  - What do we do?
  - What university publications do you read?
  - What do you want to know?
  - How effective is this?
- How do we promote the university externally?

- What do we do (including newsletters)?
- What is our message and our image?
- Is it effective?

This task force is co-chaired by Sandy Alspach and Shelly Armstrong. The membership includes the following people -

- Sandy Alspach, co-chair - Arts and Sciences
- Shelly Armstrong, co-chair - Advancement and Marketing
- Jennifer Amlotte - FSU-Grand Rapids
- Sandy Balkema - Arts and Sciences
- Michelle Balliet - Human Resources
- Marty Bledsoe - Public Safety
- Carma Burcham - Admissions and Records
- Rick Duffett - Advancement and Marketing, Administration and Finance
- Joe Gorby - Athletics
- Ron Greenfield - Business
- Paula Hadley-Kennedy - Academic Senate
- Jennifer Hegenauer - UCEL
- Gretchen Spedowske - Academic Affairs

### **We Must Become an Engaged Campus**

**Student engagement** - The majority of our students' time is spent outside of class. How is this used? A major step in becoming an engaged campus is to look at and build upon our efforts at student engagement. More specifically we ask the following -

- How do we connect and create new connections between
  - the classroom and extracurricular activities?
  - the campus and community?
- How do we build new connections for students with faculty, staff, administrators and other students?
- What are themes and effective strategies to foster interaction and engagement?
- How do we use organize, disseminate, and use the university calendar effectively?
- How do we promote and build upon existing projects?
- How do we build connections with students who are off-campus and at different instructional centers?

This task force is co-chaired by Raymond Gant and Bill Potter. The membership includes the following people -

- Raymond Gant, co-chair - Minority Affairs
- Bill Potter, co-chair - University College
- Mike Cairns - Student Affairs
- Ira Childress - Advancement and Marketing
- Cheryl Cluchey, UCEL
- Don Flickinger - Arts and Sciences
- Lori Helmer, Dining Services
- Scott Hill-Kennedy - Government Relations
- Cindy Horn - Student Leadership and Activities
- Brian Kegler - Athletics
- Tony Kettel - Rankin Center
- Wendy Samuels - Arts and Sciences
- Glen Zobel - Physical Plant

**Enrollment** - The final task force combines all three vision statements. As our institution becomes increasingly dependent upon tuition, enrollment becomes a critical factor. If we are to become the type of University we envision, we will need to focus on enrollment and how we attract students to our campuses. More specifically we ask the following -

- How do we build campus-wide involvement with enrollment?
- How do we create a support mechanism for enrollment, where resources and incentives follow growth and vice versa?
- How we connect campus-wide enrollment efforts with the department?
- How do we grow enrollment through program mix?
- How do we recruit students who are undecided on their major?
- How do we recruit students from out of state and Canada?
- Should we create a living\learning residential college?

This task force is co-chaired by Dan Burcham and Greg Key. The membership includes the following people -

- Dan Burcham co-chair, Student Affairs
- Greg Key co-chair, Technology
- Maude Bigford - Honors
- Sandy Britton - Kendall
- Matt Chaney - Admissions and Records
- Dave Engels - Business Operations
- Jana Hurley - Student Affairs, Housing
- Rick Kowalkoski - Arts and Sciences
- Nancy Peterson-Klein - Optometry
- Bill Smith - Business
- Deb Thalner - UCEL
- Craig Westman - Admissions and Records

## Action Steps

In this third phase of planning discussions we have established six task forces, each focused on a particular portion of our vision -

- Professional development - *learning centered*
- Physical teaching space - *learning centered*
- Technology - *learning centered*
- Communication - *working together*
- Student engagement - *engagement*
- Enrollment growth - *working together, engagement, learning centered*

This is not intended to cover comprehensively the three vision statements. It does however represent a good first effort at moving our University toward these goals. Building on the success of these initial efforts, we can and will create additionally targeted groups working on portions of our combined future.

My remarks and materials from today will be posted on our planning website at <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/president/planning2004.htm> and distributed in an all-campus message. Additionally I have scheduled two sessions for question and answer sessions, today following these remarks at 3:00 pm in the Presidents Room and on Tuesday at 11:00 am in Rankin 153. If you have questions, observations, and suggestions, I look forward to exploring these ideas in greater depth and soliciting your feedback in one of those additional meetings.

It is my experience that university planning efforts often do not fulfill their promise for three main reasons -

**The Reality Factor** - Planning efforts can lose touch with reality and create parallel structures outside of the normal operating processes of the university. To avoid this pitfall these goals are practically oriented and will be embedded in the Unit Action Planning Process.

**Funding** - Frequently planning results are hampered by no financial support for their recommendations. While these are challenging financial times for our University, we will pull together the one-time resources available to fund the recommendations accepted. When base funds are available, recommendations will be also be considered for this support.

**Follow Through** - It has been my experience that planning recommendations are frequently not accompanied by action. We will both measure and assess our

progress toward these three vision statements. During spring semester we will establish a university-wide group to assess our efforts.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Yesterday we celebrated the Alumni Building on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its dedication. In preparing remarks for the occasion I was moved by the commitment of the campus and community to create this project. It was designed to replace structures damaged by fire in 1928. However before the building was completed both our founder, Woodbridge Ferris and his hand picked successor Gerrit Masselink had died. As such the Alumni Building came to represent the resolve of the people of Ferris that the institution would not just continue, but flourish. Newspaper accounts of the time tell how faculty, staff, and students were so involved with this process that they sold bricks, six for five dollars.

This planning process represents a similar commitment on the part of our faculty, staff, and students. I believe it may represent one of the largest involvements of our university community in a single effort. Consider the following –

- Over 1400 people participated in initial conversations last year.
- This summer 1000 people reviewed the vision statements lead by 40 faculty and staff.
- Today we create 6 task forces that include 74 of our faculty, staff, and administration. Each group will add student members as needed, expanding this involvement even further.

I believe these combined efforts can help our University grow, prospect and succeed. Thank you so much for your contributions to this effort, past, present, and future. Together, we truly will make a difference.

David L. Eisler  
October 20, 2004