

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
October 31, 2006

This past weekend's football contest included some of the worst October weather in recent memory. On Saturday morning alumni from Grand Valley and Ferris met in what has become an annual flag football contest. This was played under especially difficult conditions with driving rain, snow, and sleet. I was reminded that if one does not like the weather in Michigan, you need only wait, because it will change and it did.

This weekend also included the induction ceremonies for the Bulldog Athletic Hall of Fame. It is always rewarding to hear reminisces of these outstanding athletes as they reflect on their college careers. It is also an opportunity to learn about University history. This year two swimmers were inducted into the Hall of Fame. Until last Friday I was unaware that Ferris at one time had a swimming team or that Rick Kowalkoski was its coach.

Task Forces

Over the past three years task forces have proven an effective mechanism to focus attention and energy to areas of importance or opportunity. Two years ago we implemented a planning process which focused the combined efforts of faculty, staff and students from across our campuses. These groups work to connect action recommendations with our vision -

- **We need to create a Learning Centered University**
- **We must Work Together**
- **We must become an Engaged Campus**

Past task forces have brought forward recommendations that have created the classroom renovation project, the faculty and staff computer replacement program, the campus wireless network, transfer scholarships, administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement, the enrollment funding formula, student technology associates, and a renewed emphasis on grants and special projects.

In continuing to move forward, we will focus on a limited number of efforts that have special need and potential for success. This process will include broad involvement of people from all areas of our campus. Recommendations from these task forces will be embedded in our planning activities this year, both as broad university-wide projects and a part of the Unit Action Planning process.

Earlier this year we created a presidential task force on enrollment that is already hard at work. Today it is my pleasure to announce the formation of three university-wide task forces, co-chaired by members of our faculty, staff, and administration. These groups will focus on the following areas -

Advising - One of the critical factors in student success is academic advising. With new administrative software, tools and electronic support for advising have changed. This group will build on the work of the 2005-06 Academic Advising Task Force convened by Vice President Michael Harris. The task force, co-chaired by Paul Blake from the College of Arts and Sciences and Deb Cox from University College, will focus on the Big Rapids campus, helping us improve the support we provide academic advisors, and ultimately providing better support to our students. Specifically, they will consider -

- How do we advise - new students, undecided students, students who are changing majors, general education and program requirements, part-time students, and transfer students?
- What is needed in terms of academic advising training materials and processes to support advising?
- How do we develop stronger Internet-based technology for academic advising?
- How do we prepare graduation audits?
- What is the general satisfaction of faculty, staff, and students with advising?
- How do we reward and provide recognition for advising?

Membership for this group includes the following people -

Paul Blake, co-chair, Professor, Languages & Literature
Deb Cox, co-chair, Department Head, University College
Elise Blacklaw, Admissions Counselor, Education & Human Services
Shari Chamberlain, Transfer Admissions Counselor, Admissions & Records
Mary Cline, Educational Counselor, Education & Human Services
Jason Daday, Recruiting Officer-Technology, Admissions & Records
Jay Hettiarchchy, Professor, Computer Information Systems
Lauren Ogard, student representative
Robert Rankey, student representative
Mary Steeno, Educational Counselor, Allied Health Sciences
Kent Sun, Associate Professor, Mathematics
Ben Upham, Assistant Professor, Automotive Service Technology

Health Information and Wellness - A very important benefit for our employees is health insurance. How can we build upon existing efforts, help employees be aware of and make best use of these benefits? Can we build upon existing university resources to create a campus wellness program for faculty, staff and students? This task force, co-chaired by Wendy Dodd from the University Recreation Center and Warren Hills from Human Resources, will seek to answer the following -

- How do we help employees be aware of the benefits available to them?
- How may we best use services available to the University community both on-campus and in the community?
- What would be considered University standards for health and wellness?
- How do we create a campus culture of wellness?
- How do we raise campus awareness of health issues?

Membership for this task force includes the following people -

Wendy Dodd, co-chair, Assistant Director, UREC
 Warren Hills, co-chair, Associate Vice President, Human Resources
 Susan Davis, Physician, Birkam Health Center
 Tom Liszewski, Personal Counselor, Birkam Health Center
 Denise Mitten, Associate Professor, Recreation Leisure Services & Wellness
 Bill Papo, Professor, Printing & Imaging Technology Management
 Marcy Parry, Associate Professor, Health Care Systems Administration
 Mike Slocum, Hall Director, Residential Life
 Steve Stratton, Labor Relations, General Counsel Office
 Paul Sullivan, Director, Birkam Health Center
 Allen Sutherby, Cable Television Technician, IS&T
 Shelly VandePanne, FSUS Coordinator, University College
 Joe Viviano, student representative
 Brenda Walton, Dietician, Dining Services
 Tom Weaver, Carpenter, Physical Plant

Scholarships - Endowments and scholarships make a critical difference in keeping a Ferris education affordable for many of our students. The continued growth of these sources of support will soon exceed our abilities to award them effectively and to adequately thank donors for their support. This group, co-chaired by Kathy Lake from Enrollment Services and Mary Kay MacIver from Alumni Relations will consider the following -

- What are current processes for donor recognition, announcement of scholarship opportunities, the awarding of scholarships, and monitoring scholarship awardees?
- How can scholarship information be more effectively shared with prospective awardees?
- How do we better communicate with faculty and staff to make certain that all scholarship funding is awarded?
- How can we effectively connect scholarship recipients with the donors who have provided this support?

The members of this task force include the following people -

Kathy Lake, co-chair, Director, Enrollment Services
Mary Kay MacIver, co-chair, Associate Director-Alumni Relations, UA&M
Maude Bigford, Coordinator-Honors Program, University College
Kevin Dendel, student representative
Matt Eickhoff, Assistant Director, Student Leadership & Activities
Brian Kegler, Assistant Athletic Director, Athletics
Becky Kowalkoski, Educational Counselor, Business
Rod Larsen, Assistant Dean, Pharmacy
Ron McKean, Associate Dean, Technology
Angie Mishler, Admissions Counselor, Admissions & Records
Tracy Powers, Assistant Dean, FSU-GR
Christa Walker, Advancement Services Assistant, UA&M
Heather Youngs, Scholarship Programs Coordinator, Financial Aid

Each task force group will be given a similar charge -

- **Benchmark best practice** - Any planning effort should begin with a clear understanding of what we want to achieve. What is best practice and how can we 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. 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 less than 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 campus in open sessions scheduled for December 15th. The materials developed will be posted and shared on the campus website.

These four efforts represent the combined talents of 54 members of our University community. It is especially impressive that every person asked to participate has accepted the invitation. I appreciate very much that so many of you have been willing to share your time and talents to help us move forward on these areas.

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 into university-wide goals 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** – The success of the past two years’ task force efforts resulted from the hard work of the people involved and our willingness to accompany planning with action. We will both measure and assess our progress on each of these efforts.

The past two years’ results demonstrate that this broad-based approach to planning is powerful, positive, and effective. I look forward to hearing the results of these planning forces and invite you to join me for these discussions on December 15th in the Founder’s Room from 10:00am-2:00pm.

Ongoing Efforts

Beyond these four task forces, people across our University are actively involved with our continued conversion to the Banner administrative software system. There are few efforts that will challenge a university so thoroughly as a change in administrative systems. Our teams, currently led by Karen Thompson, have done remarkable work and the new systems are installed and working. However there still remains much to do as we adapt to this new working environment, work to get data from the system, and learn to use these new capabilities effectively. If you are interested in following these continuing efforts, you may find the information contained in the online Steering Committee Notes useful.

We have also begun a learning management software conversion. This major change activity is led by Gloria Lukusa-Barnett. The goal is to migrate from our current system, Web CT Campus Edition, to Web CT Vista by Fall 2008. Eight teams of faculty and staff are working on this effort. Further information on this project is accessible on their website.

Good News

The Higher Learning Commission has approved our request to offer existing programs through the Internet without additional Commission review. This decision reflects well on the quality of education we provide through the Internet and the confidence of the Higher Learning Commission in these offerings.

Students in the Electronic Animation and Game Design program at FSU-Grand Rapids developed a game to help promote the Michigan Supreme Court. This has been selected as part of a Quest for Excellence Award by the Michigan Museums Association. This past year students from the Department of Recreation Leisure Services & Wellness received support from Michigan Campus Compact. Their efforts on the Fishing and River Fishery Stewardship Venture Grant are featured on the Campus Compact website.

Michael Klobucher has been selected by the Awards Committee of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame as a member of the 2006 National Scholar-Athlete Class. Additionally, he is a finalist for the Draddy Award, given to the nation's top scholar-athlete. This award is considered the academic equivalent of the Heisman Trophy. Students from Ferris State University won the Michigan Intramural Recreation Sports Association State Flag Football Tournament. This fall we had 97 flag football teams on campus, an astonishing number.

Additional good news about our University is contained in the Ferris Foundation fall newsletter, the latest Alumni Bulldog Bytes, and the fall issue of the *Crimson and Gold*.

Closing Thoughts

This evening our women's volleyball team takes on Michigan Tech in the quarterfinals of the GLIAC conference tournament. The match starts at 7:00pm. Take a break from Halloween and help cheer these athletes on to victory. Friday is the annual Ferris Foundation Gala in Grand Rapids at the Amway Grand Hotel. Special guest will be the noted actor, James Earl Jones. Funds from this gala are used for student scholarships and faculty and staff grants.

Much is underway on campus with these and other important efforts. Thank you for helping our University move forward on a number of fronts. In a little over three weeks Thanksgiving will be here. The fall semester seems to be rushing by. At this busy time of the academic year, thank you for the extra efforts you make to help our students. I appreciate very much your willingness to make a difference for Ferris State University.

Best wishes,

Dave

Web Links

Academic Affairs Advising Task Force -

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/vpoffice/pdfs/taskforce.pdf>

Banner Conversion Steering Committee Notes -

<http://www.ferris.edu/banner/teams/steering/notes/index.cfm>

Web CT Vista Conversion -

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/academics/center/WebCTVista/index.cfm>

Fishing and River Fishery Stewardship Venture Grant -

<http://micampuscompact.org/pdf/FSUfishing.pdf>

Ferris Foundation fall newsletter -

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/foundation/FFnews/fall06/>

Alumni Association Bulldog Bytes -

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/alumni/BulldogBytes/>

Crimson and Gold -

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/alumni/c&g/>