

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
January 20, 2014

Enrollment

The official enrollment figures for spring semester are in, showing that our university increased both in terms of headcount and Student Credit Hours over spring 2013. Again this year we have the largest spring semester in Ferris State University history. Our total student headcount tops 14,000 to stand at 14,003, up 190 over spring 2013, while our total SCH productions stands at 157,302, up 219 over last spring. Online enrollment continues to grow with 78 more students, up almost 9%.

Enrollment is up across nearly all segments of the University, with increases in headcount and student credit hours at our regional campuses, at Kendall College of Art and Design, and on-line. It is remarkable that 957 students are taking all of their coursework on-line. In Big Rapids there is an increase in headcount, but student credit hours are down from a year ago, a decrease of 579 credits. This is, however, a major improvement over fall enrollment when the SCH decrease was 2,277. The largest area of decline is in the College of Arts and Sciences, which is down 1,792 credits.

The spring enrollment figures also reflect our commitment to being a diverse, welcoming campus. We saw increases in students who identify as African-American (up 5.6%), Hispanic (up 17.4%) and of two or more races (up 29.5%). Our international student population also rose significantly, up 92 to 362 students (up 21%). The only reporting group that saw a decline was in the number of Asian students. Our overall retention figures are strong, with total continuing students up 54 over last spring. We were also up in FTIAC (First-Time in Any College) students, and transfer students.

In reporting these figures last year, I noted that Michigan colleges and universities are facing a dwindling number of high-school graduates. This is a demographic reality that will continue to be a challenge for Ferris.

Thank you for everything you do to continue to make Ferris State University the first choice for students seeking a degree that can help lead to success in a career and in life. More information on our spring enrollment figures is available at <http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/president/newsletters/memos/docs/Spring-2014-Enrl-Summary.pdf>

Student Achievement Measure

For years, Ferris State University's effectiveness as a university has been under-appreciated due to a flawed system of calculating graduation rates. Traditionally, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, the government's standard account measure for the success of institutions of higher education, has counted only those students who start and finish their degree at the same college or university. This reflects a model of education which has long since disappeared for most institutions.

A new reporting project made possible with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the Association of American Universities, is making possible a more complete picture of student outcomes. This shows how our university is much more effective in its role of producing graduates.

The Student Achievement Measure looks at student progress across different post-secondary institutions to track students' progress toward a degree. As an inaugural member of SAM, Ferris State University is helping to make this reporting possible. In turn, we can now quantify what we have known for a long time -ignoring student mobility produces data that are severely flawed in judging the effectiveness of universities in producing graduates.

According to SAM, 52.5 percent of full-time students who started at Ferris in 2007 earned a degree at Ferris within six years. This is the traditional measure - looking only at students who start and finish their degree at the same university. However, an additional 11.3 percent of students who started at Ferris earned a degree within that time at another institution. Combined, that's a 63.8 percent graduation rate. The SAM also tracks students who are continuing to work on their degree. For this cohort 6.1% are still pursuing their degree with Ferris and 8.8% with an institution to which they transferred. Altogether this shows that 79.7% of the students who began their education at Ferris in 2007 have either received their degree or are still studying. This nearly 80% success rate reflects far more accurately our work with helping students here at Ferris.

The figures for students transferring to Ferris are even more impressive. For those students who began as full-time transfer students in 2007, 64.3 percent earned a degree at Ferris, with an additional 8.9 percent receiving that degree elsewhere - a combined 73.2 percent graduation rate. 2.8% of these students are still studying at Ferris and 4.1% studying at their transfer institution. Altogether, 80.1% of transfer students at Ferris are succeeding.

The SAM also provides data on associate degree students. For our FTIAC students who entered in 2007, 57.8% have graduated, 28.4% have transferred to another institution, and 3.1% are still enrolled at Ferris. This means 89.3% of our associate degree students succeed. The SAM does not track transfer students into associate degree programs, but does provide data on part-time new associate degree students. Here 62.3% of part-time students entering in 2007 graduated from Ferris and 24.7% transferred to another institution, a success rate of 87%. This is remarkable and in sharp contrast with national data that suggest less than 25% of part-time associate degree students graduate. These are very impressive numbers.

The SAM website notes that "more than one in five students who complete a degree do so at an institution other than the one where they started." This means traditional measurements have discounted the degrees earned by 20 percent or more of this country's degree-seeking students. This under-counting of student achievement is something we have known, but been unable to document. This is a very important first step toward rectifying what has been a decades-long distortion of student graduation rates.

For more information and to see the details of how effective a resource our university has been for students seeking a life-changing degree, visit www.studentachievementmeasure.org . The Ferris data is accessible at <http://www.studentachievementmeasure.org/participants/169910>

University Efficiency

This past December, the Michigan House Fiscal Agency issued a report examining state funding reductions, tuition levels and higher education operating costs. That report shows that since 2001, Ferris State University has been Michigan's most efficient state university in terms of restraining overall costs per student. We issued a news story about this at the time highlighting this remarkable achievement. As members of the university community we do not always see the tangible outcomes of our efforts. With

that in mind, I want to review what we have accomplished by working together, since it is something that no other university in the state has managed to do.

Ferris was the only one of the state's 15 public universities whose combined rate of state support and tuition was less than its rate of student growth. This is extraordinary. In the past 13 years, we had the greatest decline in per-student state appropriations at 38.6 percent. This was because the state did not fund our significant growth in enrollment. We also had the lowest cumulative increase in total per-student resources (appropriations plus tuition) at 36 percent. Since 2001, Ferris grew at a rate of 2.6 percent per year in terms of full-time headcount, while our annualized per-student total resources grew only 2.4 percent.

The report documents how our university overcame two different hurdles in order to constrain costs while growing our mission.

First, since 2001 combined state support and tuition at Michigan's public universities has increased by about a percentage point above the Consumer Price Index and a half-percentage point above the Higher Education Price Index. However, Ferris' rate of 2.4 percent was *below* the HEPI index of 3 percent, and only a tenth of a point above the CPI rate of 2.3 percent.

Second, Ferris is one of seven public universities with unfunded liabilities under the Michigan Public School Employees' Retirement Systems. The report notes that these seven universities will pay 13.41 percent for their MPSERS employees in addition to payroll of non-MPSERS staff and part-time employees. During the last fiscal year, Ferris returned 21.6 percent of its state appropriations to cover MPSERS costs.

As a learning-centered university, we have worked very hard to keep a Ferris education affordable and to give our students great value for their tuition dollars. This report is an objective measure of how we, as a growing institution, have achieved this. While there is still more to do, we should take a moment to appreciate that our efforts really have made a difference. The full report has some very interesting information and some very revealing charts. You can access this information online at [http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa/PDF/HigherEducation/State Appropriations Tuition,and Public University OperatingCosts.pdf](http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa/PDF/HigherEducation/State_Appropriations_Tuition,and_Public_University_OperatingCosts.pdf).

Thank you for your efforts encouraging students to enroll and succeed at our University. With your assistance we are making an important difference in helping students benefit from the opportunities available to them at Ferris State University. As a university community, we have worked very hard to foster excellence and success in an environment of reduced funding. Thank you for helping our University to become more efficient and to restrain costs for our students. Most of all thank you for retaining our students and fostering their success on the pathway to graduation.

Thank you,

David L. Eisler, president