

# President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President  
November 17, 2014

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## Student Debt Forums

Over the past weeks I have conducted ten sessions on student debt and want to thank everyone who has participated in one or more of these forums. This is a topic of great importance to our students, who have decided to attend our university in order to satisfy their intellectual curiosity, gain essential career skills and create new opportunities for themselves. We exist as a university in order to meet those expectations. At the same time, for Ferris students who entered as freshman and graduated with debt, their indebtedness is the highest of graduates from any public university in Michigan, \$37,325. We also have the highest percentage of undergraduate students graduating with debt, 81 percent.

Working together, it is important we find ways to maximize our educational goals, while at same time making the resources our students seek accessible, affordable and attainable. If you were unable to attend one of the student debt forums, my slides with some explanatory “sticky notes” have been posted on-line at

<http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/president/presentations/2014-2015/index.htm> .

I hope you will take a few moments to review this information.

We are making progress in student debt, and the rate of increase of student debt for our graduates has slowed. However, we must find ways to *reduce* debt for our students. A four-part plan is serving as a blueprint for these efforts –

- Contain Costs
- Raise Institutional Financial Support
- Double the Scholarship Base
- Reduce Time to Degree by One Year

The first three steps are underway, as indicated in the slides from my presentation -

- In containing costs, over a three-year period we have reduced the net price for students from families earning less than \$30,000 by 25 percent, the largest reduction of any public university in Michigan (slide 13). For students from families earning \$30,000 - \$48,000, net price declined 14 percent (slide 14). For students from families earning \$48,000 - \$75,000, net price declined 2 percent (slide 15).
- Since 2007 we have increased general fund student financial aid assistance from \$8 million to \$18 million. (slide 17) This, however, is still the third-lowest percentage of the budget used for financial assistance for any of the public universities in Michigan (slide 18).
- The Ferris Foundation Board is completing a feasibility study on raising \$15 million in new donor scholarship support, which would double our existing scholarships (slide 20).

We will continue and build upon these efforts. Where your help is most needed is in reducing the time it takes our students to earn their degree. For our students, tuition is about one-half of the financial cost for a student attending Ferris. Much of the remainder goes to their living

costs. Graduating in less time eliminates the need to borrow for another year of living costs and allows the student to enter the workforce or move more quickly to graduate school.

In each session in Big Rapids, Provost Paul Blake facilitated a discussion soliciting ideas of how this can be done. Those materials are posted on-line and accessible here - <http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/president/planning/StudentDebt.htm> . Ideas from the session in Grand Rapids at the Kendall College of Art and Design are posted on the same site. I encourage you to review these materials. We are still soliciting your ideas, please send them to me [eislerd@ferris.edu](mailto:eislerd@ferris.edu) . I look forward to hearing from you.

We are making progress with the very challenging problem of student debt, but we are committed to doing more. This effort will be aided by our university community being knowledgeable about the issue. The feedback you provided at these forums is helping to advance these objectives.

Next steps in the process involve faculty, staff, program directors, and deans developing and implementing approaches to encourage students to complete 30 credits annually. They will focus on eliminating impediments that can keep students from completing their degrees in a timely fashion. Additionally we are reviewing data sets from the last three graduating cohorts to see what can be learned about the behaviors of our students as they move toward graduation. We will look to develop insights at the program level to craft approaches that are responsive to the actual experiences of our students.

Whether you attended and contributed at one of the forums, or review this information online, thank you for taking the time to be up-to-date on the information we have and on our efforts to help our students get the most out of their Ferris degrees.

### **Upcoming Events**

This Thursday, Nov. 20, IRC 115, at 11 a.m., I will be hosting a forum on the university budget. I have presented these regularly for the past several years with the goal of sharing budget information and providing insight into university finances. With a portion of state funding now based on a formula that takes into account our university's performance on a number of metrics, the link between Ferris' goals and the resources we need to reach those goals is closer than ever.

We have made very positive strides in using our financial resources as prudently as possible. This has taken place in large part because our university community works to use budgets wisely, is well-versed in the where our resources come from, how it's allocated, and what our long-term strategic goals are. If at all possible, please find time to attend this session. For those who cannot attend, I will be posting the materials from the forum on the web for your review.

This week there are some very interesting events in our ongoing exploration of diversity. On Tuesday, Nov. 18, from 3-5 p.m. in FLITE 240, the Center for Latin@ Studies is celebrating its two-year anniversary with *Testimonios: Impacting Change*. The Center will announce a leadership transition, hear from student panelists and enjoy appetizers from the El Granjero Mexican restaurant.

On Wednesday, Nov. 19, as part of Native American Heritage Month, the presentation "Fifty Years On - Wounded Body and Soul," will take place in Williams Auditorium starting at 7 p.m. Will and Company, based out of Los Angeles, will perform their play, *Native Visions*, highlighting the lives of important Native Americans who have shaped our country. This

production explores social justice issues faced by the Native American community, including destruction of native lands, poverty and self-determination.

On Thursday, Nov. 20, from 6:30-8 p.m. in SCI 126, Professor Dan Noren will be part of a panel that will delve into the topic of diversity of languages as a part of Ferris' BEYOND: Diversity series. More information about these and other events is available on the university calendar accessible from the Ferris home page.

### **Athletics**

These past few days have been an exciting time for our Bulldog athletic teams. On Saturday, our football team completed a historic regular season, coming from behind for an exciting 46-42 victory over Walsh University. Quarterback Jason Vander Laan, a Harlon Hill Award candidate, clinched the win by running for a touchdown with just 36 seconds remaining in the game. With this our team completes the regular season with a perfect 11-0 record, the first 11-win regular season in school history, and captures the GLIAC Championship outright. The victory extends the team's unbeaten streak to 15 games stretching back to last season. We will host a second-round NCAA playoff game on Saturday, Nov. 29, against the winner of the first round contest between Ohio Dominican and the Colorado School of Mines. Congratulations to Coach Tony Annese, his coaching staff and our student-athletes on this historic season. Please join me in offering them our best wishes as they head into the playoffs.

Our hockey team had a remarkable weekend series against the University of Alaska-Anchorage. On Thursday the team put on an offensive show, winning 10-2. On Friday, they won again, this time 4-0 over the Seawolves. This game marked the 13<sup>th</sup> career shutout for senior goalie, C.J. Mott. This is the most of any active NCAA goaltenders. The team next plays the University of Alabama-Huntsville at home this coming Friday and Saturday, Nov. 21 and 22. Face-off for both games is 7:07 p.m. in the Ewigleben ice Arena.

Our volleyball team won convincingly over Hillsdale last Wednesday in three sets in the GLIAC conference tournament quarterfinals. On Saturday, against Findlay University, our women Bulldogs had another strong 3-0 win. On Sunday they soundly defeated Grand Valley on their home court, in 4 games, winning the conference tournament. Senior outside hitter Courtney Rehm was named the tournament MVP. Outside hitter Meghan Vander Meer and middle hitter Caroline Heitzman were also named to the all-tournament team. Our team is seeded second in the NCAA Midwest Regional Tournament which begins this Thursday, November 20 at Grand Valley. They play Lewis University on Thursday with the time not yet set for that match. The second round of the tournament is Friday and the regional championship game Saturday. Congratulations and best wishes to Coach Tia Brandel-Wilhelm, Assistant Christa Jung and our volleyball team on their continued success in the conference and now in the NCAA tournament.

David L. Eisler, president