

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
February 16, 2015

Governor Snyder's Executive Budget

Last Wednesday Governor Snyder released his 2015-16 executive budget, which contains an overall two percent increase in funding for higher education and support for containing Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System costs for the seven public universities, including Ferris, which pay into the system. This year, more than \$26 million of the governor's \$28 million proposed higher education budget increase would be allotted proportionally on how well universities score on the state performance metrics. Based on this, Ferris would receive an increase in funding of about \$1.5 million or three percent, which would be the third highest percentage increase among Michigan's 15 public universities. Again this year, the governor's budget includes a cap on tuition – 2.8 percent, less than last year's 3.2 percent and the lowest level for tuition restraint since performance-based funding were introduced.

While the increase in higher education funding is getting the most attention, over the long term the governor's proposal to limit MPSERS contributions is of greater impact for us. Last year, Ferris State University returned more than twenty percent of our state appropriations for this retiree pension and healthcare plan. This year, our MPSERS costs are equivalent to more than \$700 for every full-time student at Ferris. The governor is proposing that MPSERS funding be capped at 25.73 percent of MPSERS payroll, down from the 30.45 percent Ferris now pays into the system. For more than a decade we have worked for a permanent solution to restrain our MPSERS costs, something that was increasingly unaffordable for our university. This proposed support for MPSERS does not include a corresponding reduction in benefits retirees will or would receive.

The governor's budget provides optimism for increased funding and MPSERS relief, but will also require careful budgeting at the university level to stay within tuition restraint restrictions. There is still a long legislative process ahead and much of this could change. I will keep you updated on the higher education budget as it moves through the legislative process and continue to work in Lansing for increased support. For the last four years the state budget has been approved in May or early June, and a similar timeline is anticipated this year.

University Center Dedication

This Thursday we will have the formal dedication of our new University Center in the atrium area in front of the fireplace. This is a project that has taken years to develop, plan and complete, and has required the hard work of many people to make it a reality. It was 2011 when we began the process of visioning what this facility would be. This is an excerpt from my University Wide Message on February 14th four years ago –

The opening of the FLITE library and the Quad in 2001 was a huge step forward in the revitalization of our Big Rapids campus. To continue improving the central core of the campus and make it as functional as possible for the Ferris community – especially our students – we need to begin exploring ways to best and most economically renovate the

Rankin Student Center. While many think of Big Rapids as a residential campus, the reality is that only one third of the students who attend live on campus. How do we best meet the needs of these commuter students, and everyone in our University community and beyond? To this end a University Center Vision Committee has been formed to consider the many issues involved in making this goal a reality.

Transforming the Rankin Student Center into a state-of-the-art, sustainable and safe learning, living and working environment is part of the University's Strategic Plan. The broad framework of this challenge has been outlined in the University Master Plan. Currently the Rankin Center is a maze of rooms, offices and service areas that have been added or remodeled piecemeal since the building was constructed in 1958. The overarching goal of any redesign would be to make more sensible use of the space. Future elements of the building could include better spaces for lectures and artistic events, improved meeting and gathering spaces, a variety of food options, and more. Finding solutions for upgrading this building will be challenging because we cannot request state funding for this project.

You may also recall that Masselink Hall was the entry point for much of the technology infrastructure of the university – Internet, cable television, fire and other systems emanated from that building. Over 7,000 campus telephone lines began in Masselink. These all had to be updated and moved, before Masselink Hall could come down, a massive undertaking for our IT staff. While it is easy to see the physical changes in our new building, it is worth remembering the infrastructure changes and upgrades that were part of the project.

Thursday is an opportunity to recognize the dedication of the many people who worked together and whose efforts contributed to making this new resource possible. The ceremony will begin at 11 a.m. and include some brief remarks, live music, a ribbon-cutting and tours of the new building for those who are interested. Dining and catering services will be featuring a variety of appetizers in the ballroom area.

This is a historic event for Ferris State University. The dedication is a wonderful opportunity to take a moment and celebrate the efforts of those who have worked for this building's completion. They imagined the ways the University Center could transform the Big Rapids campus, and have created new opportunities for our students, faculty, staff and visitors to interact and to experience Ferris. I hope you will attend the dedication and I look forward to seeing you there.

2015 Health Savings Account Open Enrollment –PPO Option

The Ferris State University Health Care Committee has recommended an additional option for medical insurance in the form of a Health Savings Account PPO plan, sometimes referred to as a 'high deductible' plan. AFSCME, Police, Police Sergeants, Kendall staff, Administrative, and Administrative Support employees are eligible for this option during open enrollment in May 2015. The HSA option is being offered as an additional medical insurance choice and will not reduce the current medical PPO plan options available July 1, 2015.

An HSA PPO account, which can be used to pay out-of-pocket health care expenses, is an option that may fit the needs of many University employees. If an employee does not use the full

amount of money in the account in any given year, the funds remain in the account for future medical costs.

For fiscal year 2015-16, the university will contribute \$500 for single HSA subscribers, \$1,000 for dual coverage and \$1,250 for family plans. Employees have the option to contribute additional funds to their HSA, but contributions are not mandatory.

As a University we are committed to offering quality health care benefits in a variety of affordable options that our employees can choose from to best meet their needs. Human Resources and our healthcare consultants, the Advantage Benefits Group, will announce multiple educational sessions on these options in the coming weeks.

Events

There was a wonderful crowd on campus for Saturday evening's Grand Rapids Symphony concert. The Festival of the Arts continues this week with a full schedule. Events on the Big Rapids campus include the Arts & Lectures presentation of "War Bonds: Songs and Letters of WWII," on Friday, 7 p.m. at Williams Auditorium. Tickets are \$5 for students with valid ID, and \$7 general admission. Sunday at 4 p.m. in Williams Auditorium, the Ferris West Central Concert Band, Symphony Band and West Central Chamber Orchestra will each present a short set of pieces for the annual Winter Band and Orchestra Concert. Special guests are narrator Jason Daday, Ed Mallett on euphonium and Noah Mallett on marimba. This concert is free and open to the public.

Two other Festival events on campus involve our students and faculty. The first is LEGO Architecture in the Granger Center Tuesday evening at 6 p.m. The second is the "Why This Poem?" Poetry Jam on Wednesday at 1 p.m. in the IRC Connector.

In addition to Festival of Arts events, this Wednesday, 6:30-8:30 p.m. in UC 202C, the BEYOND: Diversity initiative is showing the film "Waste Land," which documents artist Vik Muniz, who collaborated with the pickers of Jardim Gramacho, the world's largest garbage dump. The film explores issues of dignity, creativity and social change.

Looking further ahead, on Friday, Feb. 27, the Hospitality Management program is presenting its gala, "Voyages Through Future's Past." This year's event has a "steampunk" theme, in partnership with the University Gallery, which will be open for guests during the gala. Organizers are collaborating with welding students under the direction of David Murray to handcraft the evening's centerpieces and archway. Quinn's Music has arranged the donation of a Washburn guitar signed by the country music duo Big & Rich as part of a live auction, and celebrity Steampunk Chef Asron Egan from Detroit is joining the culinary team. Menu and registration details are available at www.ferris.edu/business/gala. This event, which raises funds for the Gala Scholarship Endowment, is always an enjoyable evening. This year's gala promises to be a truly unique affair.

David L. Eisler, president