

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
May 11, 2015

Commencement

This past Friday and Saturday we held five commencement ceremonies in Big Rapids and a sixth in Grand Rapids to celebrate the achievements of our graduates of the Class of 2015. This year nearly 2,000 students attended commencement out of the 2,500 who were eligible to walk at the end of spring semester. The lack of sunshine and occasional showers could not dampen the enthusiasm of these graduates who are preparing to start the next stage of their lives. Looking into their eyes as they walked across the stage and shaking hands with them is always a high point of the academic year for me. It is easy to feel very good about the difference our education makes for students and their futures when it is so clearly expressed on our graduates' faces.

There are many, many people who work very hard to prepare for and serve at commencement. Together they make certain the considerable logistics are handled smoothly, so our students and their families will have a memorable experience. I want to again thank everyone involved in making commencement a special moment for our graduates.

At the Big Rapids ceremonies I shared brief stories about some of our graduates who achieved great success and/or overcame significant obstacles in the course of earning their degrees. This featured a diverse group of students who took very different paths to graduation. These stories vividly represent our values of diversity, excellence and opportunity. Reading them, one is both proud of our students and their accomplishments, and humbled by the challenges they have overcome to succeed. My comments about these graduates are available online at <http://www.ferris.edu/president/presentations/2014-2015/index.htm> . I encourage you to read about the unique journeys our students take to first arrive here at Ferris, then earn their Ferris degrees.

This year we began a new tradition of inviting retiring faculty to join the commencement party on stage. It was good to recognize Gloria Barnett, Robert Friar, Terry Nerbonne and Randy Vance, and for the commencement audience to thank them for the difference they have made not only for the graduates present, but also for generations of Ferris students. During commencement ceremonies we recognized three outstanding individuals who have made lasting contributions to Ferris State University - Dale Hagerman, Karl Linebaugh and Fred Shell received honorary degrees. Commencement 2015 was a wonderful celebration. Photos of this experience are accessible at <http://ferrisphotos.smugmug.com/Other> .

If you were at one or more of the ceremonies, you know first-hand what a powerful and meaningful event commencement is for our graduating seniors. However, if you were unable to attend, the words and images from the day help to convey some idea of what a special and singular experience this is.

Board of Trustee Actions

Last Friday before our first spring commencement ceremony, the University's Board of Trustees met to take action on a number of items. Most prominently, they acted on tuition rates

for the 2015-16 academic year. The board approved our recommendation of a 2.65 average increase, which includes an increase of 2.41 percent for lower-division courses, and a 2.89 percent increase for upper-division credits. With our focus on reducing student debt, this marks the fourth consecutive year of modest increases of less than three percent. This is made possible through the efforts of everyone at the university to control costs. Thank you for helping keep Ferris affordable for our students.

Our Board formally renamed the College of Pharmacy Building the “Hagerman Pharmacy Building,” in appreciation of Phil Hagerman and his wife, Jocelyn, who, along with the Hagerman Foundation, made a \$5 million gift to Ferris earlier this year. A portion of the Hagermans’ gift supports renovations to the building, provides significant scholarship support and endows a chair in the College of Pharmacy for medical informatics. It is my hope that this act of philanthropy will inspire other significant donor investments in our academic programs and facilities

Board members also approved a new facility master plan for the Big Rapids campus. This is a significant update from the 2009 master plan, and it will serve as a blueprint for continued campus development. Among the many projects in this plan are the replacement of Bishop Hall and a new, revitalized approach to student housing. I want to thank Vice President Jerry Scoby for his leadership on this effort, along with each person who provided input or took time to review the multiple drafts leading to this finalized version. The new Big Rapids master plan is accessible at <http://www.ferris.edu/master-planning/>.

This past year we have made significant progress on our strategic plan, master plan and strategies to increase student enrollment and reduce student debt, among other issues. Our Board has been very active and engaged in these and many other areas critical to our continued success. Please join me in thanking our board members for their service, which is essential to the progress we have made, and will continue to make for our students.

Summer Enrollment

There is some very good news on our summer enrollment figures. Measured against a comparable time a year ago, initial data show summer headcount up 5.4 percent, or 300 students, with a total of 5,893 students enrolled. Student credit hours are up 5.4 percent, or 1,857 SCH. We are seeing especially strong figures in our College of Arts and Sciences (head count up 116 or 26 percent; SCH up 830 or 29 percent); Business (headcount up 86 and SCH up 424, or 11 and 9 percent, respectively); Education and Human Services (headcount up 34 and SCH up 223, both 10 percent); and Pharmacy and Kendall College of Art and Design, with SCH up 16 and 15 percent respectively.

There are multiple terms for summer classes and our numbers will likely change, but this first report is very encouraging. High school student demographics in Michigan will continue to decline for years to come, so seeing this positive trend for summer is, I believe, a sign that we are succeeding in making Ferris a welcoming place for students in this competitive environment. Thank you for your helping create a university community where students feel that they are welcome, comfortable and receive the education they need to succeed

Closing Thoughts

This has been an exceptional year for our university. Work on our Strategic Plan has reinforced the relevance of our core values of Collaboration, Diversity, Ethical Community,

Excellence, Learning and Opportunity to the work we do. The ways in which these shape our future will continue to expand in the 2015-16 academic year, and beyond. Thank you for your contribution toward the progress we have made on envisioning our future, and for the work ahead of us on implementing and tracking our achievements.

Even as our work as a university continues, during the summer many of us make plans to relax, spend time with friends and family, and in other ways pursue those interests that revitalize us. If those plans involve travel, please do so safely. We look forward to welcoming our next class of students in the fall. Thank you again for making this past academic year one that provided our students with significant opportunities for success and growth.

Have a wonderful summer.

David L. Eisler, president