

A Seat at the Table

November 2020

“Don’t just get involved.
Fight for your seat at the table.
Better yet, fight for a seat at
the head of the table.”
Barack Obama

On June 3, 2020, a protest demonstration was held on the Ferris campus. It began in the Quad and ended in front of the FLITE Library. This event, organized and led by Byron Brooks, a Ferris student, included nearly 500 people—students, faculty, staff, police officers, and members of the greater Big Rapids community. There were speeches, a march, and a vigil. The participants challenged the University to look at the ways that its practices and policies impact African Americans and other people of color. In response to this challenge, the Institution issued *Our University’s Continuing Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, a document that outlined specific actions that the University would undertake. The following work has been—or is being—done.

- ✓ The Office of International Education is spearheading a university-wide initiative, “One Community; One Book.” Using the book, *Haste to Rise*, the initiative seeks to strengthen the community while addressing the University’s historical commitment to opportunity and racial justice. The book reveals that our founders built a strong partnership with Hampton Institute, an HBCU, which led to many African American students transferring to Ferris Institute. From its early years, the Ferris Institute was comprised of women, students of color, and students from other countries.
- ✓ Over the last several months, Ferris State University students, faculty, and staff have had meetings, including zoom town halls, with Big Rapids City officials to discuss interactions and relations between local police and Ferris students.
- ✓ Ferris State University staff are collecting and analyzing demographic data on students’ contacts with the Department of Public Safety and the Office of Student Conduct.
- ✓ From October 21-November 18, Ferris State University students participated in the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC) survey. The survey is designed to help assess, from our students’ perspective, the racial climate at the University. This information should prove useful to improve our diversity and inclusion efforts for students.
- ✓ The University hosted its second “Conversations That Matter” listening session on Zoom with students Thursday, Nov. 12, at 6 p.m. This was an opportunity for our students to share their voices with University leaders.
- ✓ Thirty people were trained to facilitate deliberative dialogues on campus by Assistant Professor in Developmental Curriculum, Kristin Conley. The participants learned skills

to enable them to facilitate deliberative dialogues on campus. The intent is to host dialogues every 4-6 weeks on various topics to enable our community to develop ways to engage and learn from each other regarding a variety of topics. Recently a deliberative dialogue occurred with the Student Government on the topic of a House Divided, which focused on democracy. Additionally, the Center for Latin@ Studies and the Office of International Education used this approach to dialogues with their students.

- ✓ Kendall College of Art and Design (KCAD) assembled an Equity Council of local advisors to assist with the College's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
- ✓ For KCAD's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Brown Bag Discussion Series, the College welcomed Grand Rapids City Manager Mark Washington to lead a conversation on how government, art, and equity can intersect to elevate the quality of life.

Other Valuable Work and More

- ✓ The Center for Latin@ Studies (CLS) hosted the first Latinx Welcome Back event as part of Bulldog Beginnings. The CLS also held a Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), a celebratory holiday to remember and celebrate the lives of departed loved ones.
- ✓ Eight Latinx students were selected for the inaugural cohort of the Building Bridges Through Education Fellowship through the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. A shout out to Kaylee Moreno Burke, Executive Director of the CLS, who completed the New Leadership Academy National Fellowship with the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education.
- ✓ Equal Opportunity has partnered with the Staff Center for Training and Development, Human Resources, and the Title IX Office to move the Title IX Responsible Employee Training Module and the Anti-Harassment & Non-Discrimination Training all online into Canvas.
- ✓ The Jim Crow Museum was featured on C-Span, see <https://www.c-span.org/video/?476906-1/jim-crow-museum-racist-memorabilia>. David Pilgrim's essay, "At the Jim Crow Museum, We Use Racist Objects to Engage Hearts and Heads in Social Justice," was published in *Folklife*, a Smithsonian Institute publication.

Final Thoughts:

We are a divided state in a divided nation. Ferris State University is not an island. We are impacted by the same challenges that confront all Americans—and we must find a path forward. We endeavor to be a truly inclusive university, one where people can strongly disagree but remain civil and professional.