# Ferris State University Executive Summary of Diversity and Inclusion Assessment

## June, 2015

## Creative Diversity Solutions and IBIS Consulting Group, Inc.

## Background

Creative Diversity Solutions and IBIS Consulting Group were contracted by Ferris State University in 2014-2015 to conduct an overall assessment of diversity and inclusion at Ferris and to develop a series of recommendations based on this assessment, working closely with staff from the Diversity and Inclusion Office and an internal committee of Ferris stakeholders. The contractors collected and analyzed data to help Ferris State University understand its current position regarding diversity and inclusion, as well as how to focus on future diversity development. The diversity audit, in written form, will provide the basis of specific practical action plans and strategies for Ferris to develop the next diversity plan.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion was established in 2007 and began to implement the first Diversity Plan at that time. The Diversity and Inclusion Office at Ferris State University is now in its 8th year and the University felt that it could now benefit from a review by external experts, who could objectively analyze the work over the last 7 years and help to set the stage for the development of future work.

## Methodology

Methodologies used for the assessment provided an opportunity to conduct both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process. All comments from focus groups, surveys and interviews were integrated to identify common themes and patterns.  There were 10 interviews with major stakeholders from the administration and 17 focus groups, with approximately 160 participants. The participation rates for the online survey was as follows:

- Students: With a sample of **1,646** out of a population of 14,450 students (11% sample), the confidence interval is plus or minus 3% at a 99% level of confidence.
- Faculty: With a sample of **324** out of a population of 1,005 faculty (32% sample), the confidence interval is plus or minus 5% at a 95% level of confidence.
- Staff: With a sample of **543** out of a population of 1,174 staff (46% sample), the confidence interval is plus or minus 5% at a 99% level of confidence.

The survey data was analyzed to find discrepancies in the perceptions or experiences of different demographic groups.

## Context for the Audit

As was stated during the audit process, *"This is a different Ferris."* This sentiment shared by many who participated in the audit, provides an important context for the results of the findings. Many feel that significant progress regarding diversity and inclusion (D&I) at Ferris has been made in recent years, especially since the establishment of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in 2007.

With ongoing and sustained methods that include strategic planning, annual reporting, and oversight of D&I initiatives and programming at the Vice President's level, Ferris State distinguishes its approach to diversity and inclusion work. This approach has yielded benefits for Ferris. There is an awareness of the University's D&I efforts across the campus community. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion itself is appreciated for its expertise, as well as its efforts to engage a broad spectrum of the University and Big Rapids community regarding D&I issues.

The opening in 2012 of the Jim Crow Museum and the University's Center for Latin@ Studies has brought important visibility to the work of diversity and inclusion at Ferris. Thousands both in-person and online, have seen the Jim Crow Museum's largest in the nation collection of racist artifacts. The Museum was featured in the PBS film series, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*. The University's Center for Latin@ Studies, through its *"Promesa Pipeline"* program has built meaningful partnerships between Ferris State and Hispanic communities across Michigan, making connections and building relationships with potential students and their families within those communities as early as Middle School.

Ferris State's D&I work was recognized in 2012 when the University was selected as a winner of the *2012 Insight into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity* (HEED) Award.

## Summary of Findings

The results of this audit reveal both strengths and challenges regarding efforts to advance diversity and inclusion at Ferris. The following is a sampling of themes and quotes from the full report shared by the consultants with the Diversity and Inclusion Planning Committee on June 4, 2015. They are representative of the strengths and challenges regarding the continuing effort to advance issues of diversity and inclusion at Ferris.

**The themes and quotes are categorized under six key areas**

1. Leadership, Vision, and Accountability
2. Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Faculty and Staff
3. Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Students
4. Climate of Inclusion
5. Teaching Methods and Curriculum
6. Policies and Procedures

## 1. Leadership, Vision and Accountability:

Key representative themes include:
- The University's mission of providing opportunities, regardless of background, is an inspiring vision for many at Ferris.
- Diversity and inclusion is important to the University's future success.
- Many see the Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion as central to Ferris having made positive steps forward in this area.
- Many expressed a need for more gender and racial diversity in leadership and administration.

## 2. Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Faculty and Staff

Key representative themes include:
- There is a belief that recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and staff is important in order for the University to mirror society at large and to effectively prepare students for the global diverse workforce.
- The University's location and it being a predominately white community are seen as deterrents to the recruitment of underrepresented faculty and staff.
- International faculty and staff are constantly challenged due to perceived language barriers. This is seen as compromising the value of a diverse faculty at Ferris.

*"I like the fact that Ferris opens the doors for students who may not have been able to attend other colleges."*

*"It's hard to get diversity when many times people use the rationale (for not hiring) 'they won't fit in our culture', even though they may have the credentials and the experience to get the job."*

*"If we want to bring in diverse thoughts or perspectives or people here, we have to look beyond just Big Rapids/Grand Rapids. We've been having those conversations and it's been a real struggle for people."*

*"The problem that I see- a lot of times we'll get faculty from diverse groups here, but then the support for them is not what it should be. That is something we need to work on- whether it's visa issues or accommodations for people with disabilities- that's the big issue that I see Ferris having to work on."*

**Approximately 70% of white faculty (N=213) and 75% of faculty of color (N=56) agreed that the hiring of more faculty from underrepresented groups should be a priority at Ferris.**

**40% faculty of color (N=56) and 50% staff of color (N=62) disagree that Ferris does a good job of recruiting and hiring faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds.**

### 3. Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Students

Key representative themes include:
- Many feel that Ferris has done a good job of diversifying its student population though a number of initiatives- diversifying degree program offerings, the partnership with the Community Colleges, successful athletic programs and by raising the bar for admission.
- Recruitment of underrepresented students is seen as important and is seen by some as going hand in hand with recruiting a diverse faculty.
- There are some departments, colleges and divisions within the University where efforts are being made to expand strategies/programming for the recruitment of underrepresented students.
- There are challenges that the University community need to address regarding the college readiness of students, the specific needs of non-traditional and low income students and the variance of mindsets and skill sets of faculty and staff to address these students' diverse needs.
- There is a perception that efforts need to expand to reach diverse student populations and that the location of Ferris is a deterrent to this.

*"It (recruitment of underrepresented students) is important for both ways – for international and domestic students - because when they meet and talk they appreciate each other's culture. They know what is happening around the world."*

*"One of the challenges is that students come to us at different levels of pre-college preparation. True opportunity provides the support for success once you are here."*

*"We have so many students that come from the Detroit area that spend one semester and then leave. It's just too much of a cultural and offerings change for them to process at the age of 18."*

*"You have to invest in the work that it takes to be in those communities long-term. It's not just 'go to one event,' or 'go to a conference,' or 'go to a gala.' You build relationships with community partners; you connect with community leaders; you work with the students; you work with the public school system in different areas."*

**25% Asian students (N=41) and 30% Black/African-American (N=130) students disagree that Ferris does a good job of recruiting students from diverse backgrounds.**

## 4. Climate of inclusion

Key representative themes include:

- Over 80% of faculty, staff and students agree that they feel they are valued as members of the Ferris community and that the general atmosphere is comfortable for individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- There are some who feel that Ferris is too segregated as a campus and has too many cliques, which is not conducive to the development of an inclusive campus community. Others feel generational differences at work at Ferris.
- Stereotyping, misperceptions and mistreatment, both on and off campus, create a feeling of isolation for people of color, especially African- Americans.
- Many people from the Ferris community report hearing negative comments related to several different diversity dimensions. People of color report a higher incidence of hearing negative comments than their white counterpart.
- Many staff, faculty and students of color do not find the surrounding community comfortable for students across lines of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.
- There is some concern expressed related to the LGBT community at Ferris (students, staff and faculty) in terms of lack of inclusion and acceptance from the larger Ferris community.
- There is a perception that there is a lack of awareness regarding disability related issues, as well as a concern about the level of access and services for individuals with disabilities, and concerns that the invisible and intellectual disabilities are not being adequately addressed.
- Some students and staff express a concern related to a seeming lack of support for religious diversity at Ferris.
- International students need to be better integrated in the campus and in all areas of the University community.

**38% staff of color (N=62) do not feel comfortable recommending Ferris as a good place to work for individuals who are Black/African-American.**

**Over 50% of students of color (N=353) and white students (N=975) sometimes or often hear comments made by others related to someone's race.**

**Approximately 37% Black/African-American students (N=130) disagree that Ferris State University's general environment is comfortable for students who are Black/African-Americans.**

**38% faculty (N=136); 43% students (N=492); 30% staff (N=116) from religions other than Catholic/Christian/ Protestant report hearing negative comments related to religious beliefs.**

**Approximately 25-37% LGBT students (N=338), disagree that Ferris State University's general environment is comfortable for students who are LGBT. Over 36% disagree that Ferris State University's surrounding environment is comfortable for students who are LGBT.**

**Approximately 27% students with disabilities (N=93) disagree that Ferris State University's environment is comfortable for students who are students with learning disabilities.**

## 5. Teaching Methods and Curriculum

Key representative themes include:
- There is a mixture of sentiment amongst the faculty regarding the need to adjust their materials or teaching approaches to address different learning styles/needs of students as well as the need to include cultural issues in the classroom.
- In some cases students report that the classroom environment at Ferris is not respectful of individual differences, learning styles and needs, etc.
- Some students report that classes generally do not incorporate global and cross- cultural issues in the curriculum.

## 6. Policies and Procedures

Key representative themes include:
- Many noted inconsistent and arbitrary respect for and application of use of policies.  Many faculty disagree that they have the opportunity to influence important decisions in their departments.
- A number of people identified not having a University ombudsman for resolving complaints as a problem.
- There is a definite need felt by many for more professional training and faculty development opportunities and that Ferris employees need more training to provide better customer service.

*"How could our curriculum better represent the students and the experiences that they bring with them into the classroom?"*

*"You have a lot of our staff that comes from the local community, where they haven't been exposed to international students, or the needs of a number of different populations of (diverse) students."*

*"I've been in plenty of classes where the professors are very biased…"*

**42% white faculty (N=213) & 24% faculty of color (N=56) disagree with the statement – "I often adjust my course syllabus to include diversity/multicultural issues."**

*"The Center for Teaching and Learning for faculty is a very good place to begin providing training and other resources for faculty education and is already in place here."*

*"If you look at the rest of the private sector, they've made this transition to customer orientation.  That's almost a taboo word in the college".*

**The top three identified challenges for promoting diversity and inclusion among faculty, staff and students at Ferris included:**

| *Faculty* | *Staff* | *Students* |
|---|---|---|
| Creating more opportunities for interaction among people from different identity groups (43.3%) | Creating more opportunities for interaction among people from different identity groups (40.9 %) | Creating more opportunities for interaction among people from different identity groups (54.7%) |
| Recruiting a diverse faculty (35.2%), | Promoting understanding and skills to relate to people who are different (35.9%) | Promoting understanding and skills to relate to people who are different (44.8%) |
| Promoting understanding and skills to relate to people who are different (31.2%) | Developing commitment from staff and upper administration (29%) | Addressing the unfriendly environment (25.9%) |

**Recommendations**

**Note:**
The first three recommendations in each area were those prioritized by the Diversity and Inclusion Planning Committee.  The other recommendations, added from the full report, are those the consultants also felt were worthy of the University's consideration.

**The recommendations are also categorized under six key areas:**
1. Diversity Leadership, Vision and Accountability
2. Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Faculty and Staff
3. Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Students
4. Climate of Inclusion
5. Teaching Methods and Curriculum
**6.** Policies and Procedures

**Diversity Leadership, Vision and Accountability**
1. Integrate specific goals focused on creating more gender and racial diversity in leadership and administration into the new strategic planning process.
2. Have a discussion on how to structure a Division for Diversity & Inclusion, where all D&I related programming reports directly to the University's Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion. This will counter the perception that there are silos of D&I programming and duplication of efforts, as well as establish more cohesion and influence than currently exists.
3. Tell our "diversity story" often and better. The University "brand" would benefit from further publicizing the progress the University has made with its D&I initiatives, across both the campus community and Big Rapids community. *(i.e., Modeled by Syracuse University, Southern Methodist University)*
4. The University's leadership would benefit from collectively defining and executing more visible ways to "champion" D&I initiatives at Ferris, and would also benefit from soliciting more input from staff regarding the challenges associated with implementation.
5. The University should leverage connections with a number of individuals within the Ferris campus community, who are valuable resources for building engagement and a shared sense of responsibility for the University's D&I initiatives, by both identifying them and tapping their interest and vision.

**Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Faculty and Staff**

1. Standardize recruiting policies and procedures university-wide, across all departments and colleges and all 19 campus locations (see related initiatives detailed in full report). *(i.e., Modeled by Syracuse University)*
2. The University should evaluate current support efforts specifically focused on underrepresented faculty and staff, and add mechanisms as needed (e.g., targeted orientation and onboarding programming, mentoring and Affinity Groups, etc.) to counter feelings of isolation and being spread too thin.
3. The University needs to recognize and address the direct correlation between infrastructure issues (e.g., access to appropriate housing), and cultural resource availability (e.g., dietary needs, familiar social networks) in Big Rapids, and the effects that these have on both the comfort level and sense of belonging of underrepresented faculty and staff.
4. Continue the coordinated efforts of HR, EEO and the Office of the VP for Diversity and Inclusion to work proactively with search committees on implementing inclusive recruiting practices (see related initiatives detailed in full report). *(i.e., Modeled by Syracuse University, Southern Methodist University)*


**Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Students**

1. Expand mechanisms focused on the retention of underrepresented students (e.g., student success programming, learning center, mentoring programming, etc.).
2. Conduct an assessment regarding the effectiveness of the services Ferris has in place for non-traditional students, in order to provide a better support system for these students across all 19 campuses.
3. Train faculty, advisors, coaches and staff to more effectively support and recognize the challenges and stresses of underrepresented, low-income, non-traditional and international students.
4. Strengthen efforts to reach underrepresented students by expanding programming that builds genuine relationships and partnerships with diverse communities, and connects with diverse student populations as early as middle school. *(i.e., Modeled by the Caruth Institute, Southern Methodist University)*
5. Develop effective strategies for recruiting and enrolling underrepresented students and make this effort data-driven (see related initiatives detailed in full report).

**Climate of Inclusion**

1. Increase funding and staffing for effective diversity and inclusion related workshops and educational programs for students, such as those offered by the Multicultural Student Services Office, the Center for Latin@ Studies, and the EEO office (see related initiatives detailed in full report).
2. Develop specific strategies to address the issues identified below and educate all members of the University community on these and other D&I issues:
   - Stereotyping, misperceptions and mistreatment both on and off campus, is creating a feeling of isolation for many students of color, especially African American students and staff.
   - There is a perceived lack of inclusion and acceptance of the LGBT community that is negatively affecting students, staff and faculty from these groups.
   - Affirm that religious diversity is an important element of an inclusive campus environment and should be treated as such.
3. Provide training on diversity and inclusion issues for all faculty and offer training on cultural competency for all staff:
   - The University needs to provide specific training for faculty and staff regarding disability-related issues, and address concerns regarding the level of access and services for individuals with disabilities.
   - Faculty should be made more aware of accommodations for students who are religious.
4. Provide Human Resources and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion with the resources necessary to achieve their goal of offering a "diversity certificate" to faculty and staff.
5. Strengthen existing collaborations with the Big Rapids community, as well as create news ones, in order to counter the sentiment that Big Rapids is not a very welcoming community for diverse populations.
6. Expand the role of the Town and Gown Community Council to include D&I as a priority. This group can work to address some of the real and perceived "culture clashes" between the University and Big Rapids communities.

**Teaching Methods and Curriculum**

1. Build a partnership between Academic and Student Affairs to design and deliver co-curricular programming for all students that focuses on building D&I awareness, strengthens students' ability to share their diverse personal backgrounds and experiences, and have "difficult" D&I related conversations in an honest and respectful way.
2. Conduct a curriculum review examining the integration of issues of diversity and inclusion and intercultural and global perspectives, and provide opportunities for faculty to share best practices in these areas. Provide incentives for research and scholarship regarding diversity and inclusion.
3. Consider expanding the Study Abroad program, providing an opportunity for greater exposure to global diversity for domestic students.
4. Provide faculty and staff with training to build their ability to address individual differences and the different learning needs of students, and training to develop the faculty's ability to deal effectively with diversity and inclusion dilemmas that may arise in the classroom and other spaces on campus.

**Policies and Procedures**

1. The University would benefit from further integrating its diversity and inclusion goals and objectives into the new strategic planning process. Measurable D&I goals should be defined for each academic and support department, with the existing diversity and inclusion reports to the VP for Diversity and Inclusion used to track progress. *(i.e., Modeled by the University of Denver)*
2. Develop a mechanism across the University's colleges and departments for the sharing and coordination of effective D&I strategies. Focus resources on developing and measuring culturally competent services across all campus offices, departments and divisions.
3. Establish a University Ombudsman position for resolving employee complaints that is distinct from the Director of Equal Opportunity/Staff Attorney.
4. Tie supervisor training and performance appraisal to the measurement of D&I goals across each academic and support department. Align D&I training for managers with performance appraisal and recognition/rewards systems. *(i.e., Modeled by Syracuse University, American University)*