Assurance Argument Introduction

Ferris State University was founded in 1884 (under the name of Big Rapids Industrial School) based on the belief that educational opportunity should be available and accessible for all. In the institution's 136-year history, this principle has guided our mission, vision, and values and remained central to today's goals for continuing innovation and excellence.

Ferris State University is not a one purpose, one location educational entity. We provide local, regional, and global education to students seeking a broad-based, career-focused education. As a multi-campus institution, Ferris provides programming at several additional locations, as well as the Kendall College of Art and Design (KCAD) branch campus in nearby Grand Rapids, Michigan. The separate branch campus report (KCAD Branch Campus Report) accompanies this Assurance Argument and describes the semi-autonomous branch campus structure of KCAD within Ferris. KCAD maintains responsibility and oversight for their educational offerings through parallel processes and procedures as appropriate for the accreditation requirements associated with a college of art and design. The Assurance Argument provides brief overviews to KCAD's practices where useful to identify the differences; however, KCAD processes are covered in more detail in the accompanying KCAD report.

Addressing the Five Criteria for Accreditation

Ferris' mission, vision, and values drive the University's leadership, contributions, and service to the community and are the foundation of our planning processes, academic programs, and student support services. Ferris' Board of Trustees, administrative leadership, faculty, staff, and students receive guidance through policies and procedures that identify ethical standards, provide clear opportunities for addressing or responding to potential issues, and set a roadmap for daily decision making.

Ferris State University has long-standing practices supporting effective teaching and learning, an ongoing commitment to address achievement gaps and student learning needs, an institutional pledge to ensure awareness of and cultivation of diversity and inclusion across the curriculum, and a shared obligation to provide innovative teaching and learning opportunities. Our commitment to effective learning remains grounded in a culture of assessment and improvement efforts that involve all faculty and addresses all courses offered at the University. We continue to review, improve, and enhance our assessment processes and documentation of results, evidence, and improvements.

Ferris State University's operational effectiveness is ensured by mature, established operational philosophies and practices grounded in data-driven decision making and strategic planning, linking institutional resources with appropriate goals and initiatives. Our ongoing planning processes and initiatives focus on the improvement of student outcomes and operational efficiency and are realistic, anticipatory, responsive, and future focused.

Using the Reaffirmation Process to Reflect and Improve

The University has long used the reaffirmation process to encourage reflection, as well as rigorous assessment, evaluation, and continuous improvement. The current process, kicked off by our Quality Initiative, facilitated extensive cross-university involvement, strengthened Ferris' commitment to continuous improvement, and resulted in several key lessons learned. First, we work well together. Second, we can improve, and we did improve.

Through this process, the University has effectively communicated challenges and improvements through an approach driven by our willingness to identify problems and work collaboratively to develop and execute solutions. As a result, we have a broader awareness of the complex and diverse nature of the University, a more comprehensive understanding of how the University operates, and a more thorough appreciation of the interconnectedness of policies and procedures. The reaffirmation process provided the University with extended opportunities for open, honest conversations. The process helped us examine issues closely, with a focus on specific metrics and the strategies underlying the path toward achieving institutional goals and outcomes—and a planful, purposeful, and accountable approach for the future.

Using the Reaffirmation Process to Identify our Strengths

The Ferris State University community takes tremendous pride in the kick-start provided by the QI process, which provided the institution an opportunity to examine issues related to persistence, assessment, and ongoing improvement.

We are proud to affirm that the University's mission, vision, and values are interwoven within the fabric of our educational goals, curriculum, and assessment processes.

We are proud that our focus is on our students; we help our students succeed; we provide opportunities for students from under-resourced families and environments; we offer a unique blend of technical and professional programs recognized throughout the region, state, and nation for excellence.

We are proud of our commitment to Ferris' institutional core values of Collaboration, Diversity, Ethical Community, Excellence, Learning, and Opportunity that drive our work while creating a dynamic educational environment for our students and our community.

Criterion 1: Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

Criterion 1 Summary: Ferris State University's mission, the missions of the academic colleges, and the mission of Ferris' branch campus, Kendall College of Art and Design, have remained consistent, emphasizing the importance of a broad-based, career-oriented education. Ferris' mission, vision, and values (MVV) are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect global and societal needs.

Ferris' MVV are foundational to the University's identity:

- Ferris' MVV drive the University's leadership, contributions, and service to the community, and are tied to the University's planning processes: Strategic Plan, Campus Plan, and Diversity and Inclusion Plan.
- Ferris' academic program offerings are current, relevant, and regularly evaluated to ensure alignment with the MVV, reflect sound learning outcomes, and include effective assessment processes.
- Ferris supports and reinforces its MVV with rigorous academic programs and responsive student support services to meet the needs of its diverse student body.
- Ferris strives to enhance its culture of inclusion, engagement, respect, and life-long learning among all students, faculty, staff, and stakeholders.

Criterion 2: Integrity – Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

Criterion 2 Summary: Ferris State University demonstrates integrity, ethical and responsible conduct, and transparency in all aspects of administrative and operational actions. Ferris' Board of Trustees (BOT), administrative leadership, faculty, staff, and students are supported by policies and procedures that identify ethical standards and provide clear opportunities for addressing or responding to potential issues.

Ferris' ethical and responsible behavior includes:

- BOT policies that address all aspects of University operations and procedures.
- Academic policies that support the integrity of programs and faculty, including providing evidence for all claims.
- Human Resources policies that ensure integrity in hiring practices, data handling, and related auxiliary functions.
- Clear representation of University data and transparency of University procedures.
- An environment that ensures and supports academic freedom and pursuit of truth in teaching.

- Policies and procedures that support responsible research, ethical behavior, and guidance for students in research ethics, academic honesty, and integrity.
- Collective Bargaining Agreements that support the effective, safe, fair, and productive work of various employment groups.

Criterion 3: Teaching & Learning – Quality, Resources, and Support

The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

Criterion 3 Summary: Ferris State University has effective, long-standing practices supporting effective teaching and learning, from robust Faculty Center programming to advanced eLearning support. Ferris continues to address several areas, including achievement gaps across under-represented student groups, diversity awareness across the curriculum, and long-term instructional technology planning.

Since 2011, the University has implemented steps to improve and enhance these areas, including:

- Following Graduate Studies Committee recommendations, the prior provost/vpaa evaluated current graduate practices and policies. The current administration is in the process of responding to these recommendations to clarify support for graduate and professional education.

- The enhanced Office of Research and Sponsored Programs now oversees several research grant programs, promotes external grant applications, and supports intellectual property policy development and activity. Faculty tenure policies include increased expectations for research and scholarship and documentation of these activities through the Digital Measures™ tracking system.

- Significant additions were made to Ferris' equity and diversity practices, including the FNTFO, representing and supporting non-tenured faculty; strides in instructional design and instructional activities to reach more diverse populations served by the institution; and enhanced efforts to retain under-represented student populations.

- Enhanced instructional technology and learning resources include the eLearning staff, a faculty-driven advisory team, and incentive funding focused on continuous improvement.

Specific areas of focus:

- Identified as an undocumented, often inconsistent process by the 2018 Multi-Location Site visit, Ferris has developed and implemented a consistent performance review process for adjunct faculty.

- Ferris' capabilities for effective online delivery of instruction and educational resources have dramatically improved with coordinated eLearning staff and resources and improvements to library resources and services. These developments positioned the institution to manage the sudden shift to an entirely remote delivery model as a response to COVID-19 effectively and efficiently.

- Ferris responded to recommendations for consistent, equitable treatment of faculty groups, under-represented students, and greater integration of global issues and diversity into academic offerings with significant institutional changes. Responses included an adjunct faculty contract and increased campus involvement, enhanced engagement efforts with diverse community groups, improved

retention numbers in minority groups, and better-defined diversity goals as demonstrated by revised general education outcomes and increased campus initiatives.

- Ferris has continued to respond to market needs by developing graduate programming that builds on the University's areas of recognized strengths, from its first non-clinical doctoral program in community college leadership (EdD) and the doctorate in nursing practice (DNP), to the master's degrees in healthcare administration (MHA) and social work (MSW). Institutional support continues for graduate programs with additional focus on evaluation and implementation of previous recommendations.

Criterion 4: Teaching & Learning – Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Criterion 4 Summary: Ferris State University recognizes that teaching and learning can be improved only with intentional, well-defined evaluation and improvement efforts that involve all faculty and all courses. Since 2011, Ferris' assessment processes have been revitalized with improved processes and documentation of results and evidence:

- Adding learning outcomes in the University's curriculum development and approval processes.
- Adding learning outcomes, assessment measures, and results from the assessment system into the Academic Program Review process.
- Increasing documentation of assessment efforts and results at course and program levels, including retrospective reporting of improvement efforts.
- Developing assessment committees, led by the Academic Senate, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs, increasing the role of faculty-driven assessment practices.

Specific areas of focus:

- In 2011, weak evidence of Ferris faculty research and scholarship prompted the institution to adopt the systematic reporting system, Digital Measures™. The institution also refocused academic research and scholarship through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, coordinating research programs, developing research policies and procedures, and enhancing research grant and fellowship opportunities.

- The QI process revitalized and energized Ferris' culture of assessment, involving faculty and staff from across the University in developing effective methods for improving student learning and engagement. Institutional assessment structures, processes, and data reporting strategies were also targeted for improvement, resulting in significant improvements in all areas.

Criterion 5: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources, and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Criterion 5 Summary: Ferris State University operates effectively using efficient administrative structures, engaged shared governance councils, and participatory stakeholder groups.

The institution's effectiveness is ensured by mature, established operational philosophies and practices:

- Data and strategic planning provide the foundation for informed decision making.
- Ferris' governance and budgetary processes are aligned with the institution's MVV.
- Ferris' strategic planning provides links between institutional resources and appropriate goals and initiatives.
- Ferris' budgetary allocations ensure the University's mission and educational priorities are achieved, academic programming reflects excellence, and students receive valuable learning opportunities.
- Ferris' qualified staff ensure the effective daily operations of the institution.
- Ferris' ongoing planning processes and initiatives, which focus on the improvement of operational efficiency and student outcomes, are realistic, anticipatory, responsive, and future focused.

Specific areas of focus:

- In 2001, Kendall College of Art and Design (KCAD) merged with Ferris, starting a partnership that has evolved, first with sharing of basic institutional processes, then to administrative structures, and moving to increased collaboration among faculty and students and across academic programs. By 2020, KCAD's status as a branch campus demonstrates the maturity of the relationship and the operational and administrative structures.