



*—a Ferris State international education newsletter*

## **The Most Persistent and Urgent Question**

Greetings from the Office of International Education (OIE):

This week, I am attending the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) conference in San Francisco. This is a conference attended by Senior International Officers (SIOs) around the world.

Many of the SIOs I have spoken to are being charged by their universities to significantly increase international enrollment to compensate for decreasing domestic enrollment. For example, Oakland University, Western Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University all have robust plans to expand their International enrollment. Outside the United States, the Czech Republic has also adopted the same approach of inviting more international students to compensate for a decrease in domestic enrollment. There is palpable excitement and energy among the SIOs to collaborate and innovate to address these challenges.

In our previous newsletter, we shared data on the challenging road ahead for domestic student enrollment in the Midwest. We also shared how international enrollment can make a difference. The Spring 2019 Ferris enrollment figures demonstrate the need for exploring ways to reverse the decreasing enrollment trend.

In the Spring 2019 semester, Ferris State saw a decrease of 620 students and a drop of 6277 Student Credit Hours. The Student head count decrease amounts to a drop of 4.7% in student enrollment. With decreasing enrollment, resource challenges will become more acute.

The current trend indicates that there is potential for our main campus enrollment to be below 8000 students. Without significant efforts to reverse this trend, the numbers could even reach fewer than 7500 in a short period.

International engagement can bring more International students to our University, but will it answer the most persistent and urgent question?

The answer to this question was expressed when the annual award for innovation was given yesterday in the AIEA conference to Pima Community college:

AIEA Recognizes Pima Community College with 2019 Innovation  
Award in Internationalization

Pima Community College answered “the most persistent and urgent question” for academic leaders: How can academia address the larger societal challenges by connecting Institutional needs and priorities to the mission of the Institution?

The award recognized their effort to connect their institutional mission to the national conversation on immigration and international education to address their own needs. I believe the purpose of education is to uplift human dignity through the development of knowledge, skills and abilities to survive and thrive. Pima richly deserves the award for recognizing this and applying it in their work.

The joy of sharing is at the heart of the transformative power of education and the foundation of our educational enterprise. It was recognized by the ancient Tamils and shared in the couplet below from Thirukural 399:

**தாமின் புறுவது உலகின் புறக்கண்டு  
காழுறுவர் கற்றறிந் தார்.**

Thaamin puruvadhu ulahin purakkandu Kaamuruvar katrarin dhaar

When the learned see that their learning contributes to make all the world happy, they are pleased and pursue their learning more.

*At the heart, is it not why many of us become educators?*

Dr. Piram Prakasam  
Executive Director, Office of International Education




## Just Like Me

Ferris is located in a relatively homogeneous environment where gaining viable experience with diversity can take intentional initiative. Much of the United States, and in fact much of the world, is in a similar type of homogeneity. I grew up in such an environment, attending a small school in northern Michigan where I had five classmates in my eighth grade class.

Our family’s journey is a quintessential American/Michigan one. My grandfather arrived in the United States at the age of 16 as an illegal immigrant from the border region of Germany and Poland. He had a limited education and was unable to read or write in English. He is the epitome of someone the current political environment in the United States wants to keep out. My father grew up in east Detroit during the Great Depression, at which time his parents lost their home. I have no doubt that this instilled the will in my father to make sure that he was never in a position for that to ever happen again, in part leading to his putting in the hard work necessary to become a dentist. It took all of one generation to go from someone with virtually no education to someone graduating from the University of Michigan in one of the most respected professions.

I remember my parents taking me to visit Detroit in 1967. We were staying on the 12th floor of the Pontchartrain Hotel when one of the infamous race riots broke out involving thousands of people right before our eyes. If you think about it, someone who lost their family home and saw their city explode into riots and disarray would be a strong candidate to become an angry racist. Yet the opposite



happened for my father. His patient list included a large number of people from a variety of social and economic backgrounds where everyone was treated with respect and dignity. His office was the main place I saw people of color as there were none that lived in our town. My father was very soft spoken, where his actions were his words. It took a while, but over time I learned from him that there was far more to this world than living in a space where everyone was just like me.

My first job after graduating from college involved living in a suburb of Chicago where everyone spoke Spanish. Years later I began teaching at Ferris where one of my first classes had students from 17 different countries. This sparked an interest to not only try to learn something about each country, but also to try and understand as much as possible about each country. I became fascinated with the stories of each student that for various reasons decided to spin the wheel and get on that plane to the United States. I was humbled by the courage that it took to leave the familiar confines of their home for a place like Ferris, which usually they knew little about. I enjoyed sharing what I have learned as I enjoyed learning from them.

I also had the opportunity to be in the shoes of my students when I received a teaching/research Fulbright Scholarship to the Universidad de Chile. I went weeks before I saw another person with blue eyes, and being a half-foot or more taller than just about everyone else, I truly understood what it felt like to be conspicuous in appearance. I had similar experiences working in a variety of other countries including Perú and India, where I spent time in ghettos that words cannot describe. (By the way, everyone from Chile is an American. Everyone from Mexico is an American. Panama – yes, Americans. All are from North and South America).

The program that I taught in during the 1999, 2000, 2001 timeframe had about 150 International students, which was the largest population in any program on campus. Then we experienced 9/11 and the ability of International students to come to the United States became restricted, and the University for various reasons essentially disbanded the International Office. In a few short years my program had no International students.

It took about 10 years for the International student presence to recover at Ferris, and in 2015 the program that I teach in again had the largest number of International students. This culminated in graduating the 5th largest class of the 180 plus programs at Ferris during the 2015/2016 academic year.

The year 2016 marked a distinct change in the social and political climate in the United States, which has also been felt at Ferris in terms of emphasis on International enrollment. This has been acutely felt in the graduate program in which I teach, where International enrollment has dropped from 125 to less than 10 in two years.

There are many reasons for the precipitous decline in overall enrollment in International students, but a significant contributing factor is the lack of a welcoming environment within the United States and a lack of a collective vision to strengthen our international efforts. We need a comprehensive international plan.

When I travel to other countries the discussions with students invariably turn into a series of difficult questions about what is going on in the United States. We are a land of immigrants that has created an environment that, while far from perfect, is highly desirable for just about anyone from anywhere else in the world. It is difficult for a lot of citizens of the United States to understand that most people want to come to the United States just to have a better life. They want to contribute and be a part of it.

One of the Dutch International students that graduated from my program was cited in the November 2018 issue of Forbes magazine as someone who has founded one of America's great start-ups, creating a billion dollar company in a few short years. The article was about how International students contribute to the American success. Our alumnus, Arian van Veelan, was listed along with Elon Musk and

International alumni from prestigious world class Universities in the United States.

This commendable success is matched by every one of the International students that applies their education obtained at Ferris to achieve the greater good for all of us. This includes three FSU International student alumni that are responsible for securing the computer systems at Ferris to those that work at just about any major company that you can name.

As educators, we enjoy sharing the joy of learning and it makes our world a better place both here in Big Rapids and around the world. There is no other place in the world where this can happen in such meaningful ways and it is imperative that we don't lose sight of the magic that can happen in the United States and at Ferris.

Dr. Greg Gogolin  
Professor, Information Security & Intelligence



## In Context

1. **Read:** [International Students Are Founding America's Great Startups - Forbes – Stuart Anderson](#)
2. **Watch or Listen:** [2018 Weinberg College Convocation Address by Cody Keenan at Northwestern Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences, June 23, 2018 – YouTube](#)



## A Moment In Time:



Professor Matthijs van Veen and Professor Boris Slaghuis from Saxion University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands are meeting with Professor Mike Berghoef from the Social Work Program. Professor Berghoef visited Saxion University back in 2001. We have had a relationship with Saxion for more than two decades and collaborated on many projects.



## Upcoming Events:

1. February 5 at 5:00 pm in the IRC Connector – Lunar New Year Celebration and Taste of Asia (open to campus and community)
2. February 14 (Thursday) - International Potluck 11:00 am-1:00 pm in IRC 104 open to faculty and staff
3. Fridays at 1:00 pm in IRC 104 – Weekly Study Abroad Workshops (open to all students)

Imagine more...



# *Past OIE Newsletters*

**Spring 2019**



Spring 2019 Issue 1

**Fall 2018**



Fall 2018 Issue 6



Fall 2018 Issue 5



Fall 2018 Issue 4



Fall 2018 Issue 3



Fall 2018 Issue 2



Fall 2018 Issue 1