

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
March 14, 2011

For those who have been away from campus this past week, welcome back from Spring Break. All of us have been stunned by the video from Japan as that country and its people struggle with the devastation from the earthquakes and tsunami. Perhaps, like me, you feel moved to assist with this catastrophe. I have asked Dr. Dan Burcham, Vice President for Student Affairs, to coordinate campus efforts and responses to needs for assistance.

Legislative Testimony

On March 2nd, I presented testimony to both the state House and Senate Appropriation Subcommittees on Higher Education. As you know, despite some encouraging signs in Michigan's economy, these continue to be very difficult times for higher education funding. This reality presented the background for these hearings. I presented testimony that responded to both the historical decline of state support for public universities, as well as Governor Snyder's proposed budget, which cuts higher education by a greater percentage than any other sector of the budget.

While the tendency is to talk about the University and our budget, universities are ultimately about people. In my testimony I chose to focus on our students and the impact legislative action would have upon them. I fear that far too often the public loses track of the impact decisions in Lansing have on the lives of students struggling to earn their degree.

First I gave an overview of the downward trend of state funding over the last several years. Over the last decade, the only two areas of state spending that actually declined were support for community colleges with a 9 percent decline, and state universities with a 28.7 percent decline. Coupled with inflation of more than 30 percent during this period, this means the purchasing power of our funding has declined by 59 percent. In comparison, funding for human services was the fastest growing segment of spending with an increase of 61.5 percent over this time.

The proposed budget would reduce state funding to 1993 levels. Ferris is the state's fastest growing university and today we teach an additional 3,400 students. For each full-time student the proposed 15 percent cut represents a reduction of \$602 in support for their education. In 2001 Michigan provided \$6,094 in state support for a full-time student at Ferris. Had the state continued to fund each full-time student and increase that amount by inflation, support for our students would be \$8,474. Instead, in this budget that support would be just \$3,349, a difference of \$5,125, a decrease of 60 percent per student. This represents an annual disinvestment in our students of \$63.2 million!

In my testimony I spoke about the many sacrifices you have made as we worked to align our budget with the continual reductions in state support. We have worked so very hard to reduce costs and find efficiencies. In this process we have eliminated more than one hundred positions at the University. The cost of a student's education is tuition plus state support. In 2001 the cost for a full-time Ferris student was \$11,674. Today that cost is \$14,700, an annual increase of less than 2.6 percent, less than inflation during this period, and more than a \$1,000 less than the Higher Education Price Index.

The governor's proposal for financial aid funding was also a major topic for this testimony. Although technically Gov. Snyder's proposal increases financial aid funding slightly, it does this by shifting the support almost completely out of the state general fund and relies instead on drawing upon federal money from Temporary Aid to Needy Families. This is an unprecedented move for our state, and is an area of great concern. If the use of TANF funds for financial aid were deemed an inappropriate use, then the budget for financial aid would be essentially zeroed out. I urged lawmakers to consider carefully the ramifications of this proposal.

This led me to point out how much uncertainty there is in this budget proposal. In addition to moving financial aid out of the general fund, the budget also moves higher education funding out of the general fund and into the school aid fund, and makes the size of budget cuts to universities contingent upon tuition restraint. Additionally, there are discussions on changing the funding formula for universities. Taken together, these proposals add up to a significant change in the relationship between the state and public universities. In addition to being a fundamental change, just as concerning is the fact that large portions of that change are very unclear on how they would, or even could, be implemented.

In conclusion I related stories about individual Ferris students and the challenges they overcome to earn their degrees. This is a critical year for higher education funding and I very much want to share more of these materials with you. On Tuesday, March 22 at 11:00 a.m. in Rankin Center Centennial Room, I will present the material from my testimony and answer your questions regarding this. If you cannot join me, the text and graphics from my presentation are accessible at <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/president/presentations.htm>. I look forward to visiting with you about these important issues.

Vice President Scoby Review

As a part of the continued support and development available for members of the leadership team at Ferris State University, there is an ongoing process for formal Professional Development Review of Vice Presidents and Deans. Vice President for Administration and Finance, Jerry Scoby, has requested a review at this time and one is scheduled for this week. As review facilitator I will be interviewing a number of diverse stakeholders both within and outside of Administration and Finance. The purpose of the review is to aid Vice President Scoby's ongoing professional development. It will provide feedback about the perceptions of stakeholders, and offer constructive suggestions for his future improvement and effectiveness.

Many people have been invited to participate in these sessions with me, and a significant number of these were randomly selected. Additionally, there is an opportunity for any member of the University community to provide input to me in writing. If you elect to do so, please address your sealed letter to me marked "personal and confidential." Under the review protocol, it is necessary that you sign your letter. No anonymous information will be considered. Please include your office or home telephone number, so I may contact you if I have a question or wish to follow up with you. All communications received will be considered part of the review, and all will be treated confidentially. No attribution or identification will be made regarding any interviewee or respondent.

Athletics

Two of our men's athletic teams were in competition this past weekend after compiling successful regular-season records. On Saturday our men's basketball team defeated Wayne State University 90-88. This was their first NCAA regional competition win in six years. On Sunday they defeated Drury University in the semifinal game by a score of 83-76. They have now reached the "sweet sixteen" of the tournament and play against top-seeded Bellarmine University in the regional finals in Louisville on Tuesday evening.

Playing a CCHA quarterfinal series at Kalamazoo, on Friday our men's hockey team won against Western Michigan University 3-1 and lost 3-1 on Saturday. They concluded the three-game series on Sunday evening by battling back from 4-1 2nd period deficit, only to lose 5-4 in overtime.

In Albuquerque this weekend freshman Samantha Johnson placed ninth in the nation in the mile run at the NCAA Division II Women's Indoor Track and Field Championships.

Events This Week

We begin the second half our spring semester with a full and varied slate of activities this week. These are just a few of the week's notable events.

- Tuesday is the Strategic Planning and Resource Council meeting at 3 p.m. in the West Campus Community Center with continued discussion of Online Teaching and Learning.
 - Wednesday is the Women in Leadership and Learning conference, starting at 11 a.m. with a keynote address at 7 p.m., at the Holiday Inn and Conference Center. Keynote speaker for the WILL conference is Stephanie Leonardos, chief executive officer of Amerikam and recipient of an honorary degree in business and industry from Ferris. Amerikam has a unique and effective partnership with Ferris State University. More information is available at <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/news/news/News.cfm?AnnouncementID=1372&CatID=1>.
 - The Spaghetti Bridge High School Competition is this Friday and Saturday. If you have not experienced this, take a moment to look at <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/othersrv/sbridges/>
 - The National High School Rube Goldberg Machine Competition takes place Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Wink Arena - <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/colleges/technolo/rube/homepage.htm>.
- This year's challenge is watering a plant. The event is free and open to the public.

As always, additional information about these and other events is available through the Campus Calendar on the Ferris home page. I hope you will take advantage of these and other opportunities for engagement.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler, President