

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
February 14, 2011

It is difficult to believe we are already one third of the way into spring semester. As we move forward on our strategic plan several campus-wide groups have been formed to discuss topics of importance. All three groups will be asking for your thoughts, ideas and suggestions as we continue to move forward as a University.

Wellness Task Force

We have organized a task force to help develop a wellness plan for faculty and staff on the Big Rapids campus. In addition to the importance this charge has to the well-being of the University community, and the role wellness can potentially play in constraining health care costs, the task force will also help align our wellness goals with the University's Strategic Plan and our employee contracts.

The task force will work on developing a proposal for both short and long-term plans for programs and activities that support a healthy University community. A comprehensive employee wellness program could include such elements as health screenings and wellness coaching; incentives to encourage faculty and staff to participate in wellness programs; easier access to University fitness facilities; and improvements to the interfaces with health benefit providers' information and promotions. These are just some of the areas that the task force will study and consider while developing their recommendations.

Health care and wellness are both important and complicated issues for our University. Please join me in thanking the task force chaired by Warren Hills. Other members currently include Tom Adams, Derek Ameel, Cindy Horn, Miles Postema, Holly Schalk, Melissa Sprague, Allen Sutherby, Mark Van Lent, Cynthia Vandersloot and Tom Weaver. I appreciate very much their willingness to assist our University on this important effort.

University Center Visioning Committee

The opening of the FLITE library and the Quad in 2001 was a huge step forward in the revitalization of our Big Rapids campus. To continue improving the central core of the campus and make it as functional as possible for the Ferris community – especially our students – we need to begin exploring ways to best and most economically renovate the Rankin Student Center. While many think of Big Rapids as a residential campus, the reality is that only one third of the students who attend live on campus. How do we best meet the needs of these commuter students, and everyone in our University community and beyond? To this end a University Center Vision Committee has been formed to consider the many issues involved in making this goal a reality.

Transforming the Rankin Student into a state-of-the-art, sustainable and safe learning, living and working environment is part of the University's Strategic Plan. The broad framework of this challenge has been outlined in the University Master Plan. Currently the Rankin Center is a maze of rooms, offices and service areas that have been added or remodeled piecemeal since the building was constructed in 1958. The overarching goal of any redesign would be to make more sensible use of the space. Future elements of the building could include better spaces for lectures and artistic events, improved meeting and gathering spaces, a variety of food options, and more.

Finding solutions for upgrading this building will be challenging because we cannot request state funding for this project. As a result we will need to develop significant donor support to fund a portion of the cost.

Currently the committee, co-chaired by Dan Burcham and Wendy Samuels, includes Dan Cronk, Robert Eastley, Lori Helmer, Andy Rayburn, Mark Schuelke, Jerry Scoby, Matt Stanke, Morgan Toms and Michael Wade. Please join me in thanking this committee for tackling a truly difficult issue that is important to preparing for the future needs of our students and University.

Big Rapids – Grand Rapids Bus Service

For some time it has been my hope that we could develop a bus service between Grand Rapids and Big Rapids for students and employees who frequently make this commute. With the rising cost of gasoline and increased focus on energy conservation and sustainability, this is an appropriate time to investigate this possibility. A small group is researching this topic and will be distributing surveys to students and to employees. The group is chaired by Mike Hughes and includes Jennifer Amlotte, Shelly Armstrong, Warren Hills, Jon Shaffer and Troy Tissue. I appreciate their willingness to pursue this idea. Some years back I saw a similar effort that worked well between Tulsa and the Oklahoma State University campus in Stillwater, which leads me to believe the idea could be replicated here.

Bulldog Athletics

Two of our men's athletic teams are receiving attention for accomplishments they have worked for season-long. Senior members of the ice hockey team Pat Nagle and Zach Redmond are candidates for the Hobey Baker Memorial Award – college hockey's equivalent of the Heisman Trophy. Part of the awarding process is driven by a vote of the fans. More information is available at Hobey Baker website, www.hobeybakeraward.com. Congratulations to the team which has now won five straight games, including sweeping Alaska Fairbanks in an away series, and then the University of Alabama-Huntsville this past weekend. Friday and Saturday they will host Notre Dame at Ewigleben Ice Arena. Notre Dame is the top team in the conference and ranked 10th in the nation.

The men's basketball team achieved a milestone by recording its 1,000th all-time win in a game against Saginaw Valley State a week ago Saturday at Jim Wink Arena. This past week the team beat Ashland and Lake Erie to push their winning streak to ten and currently lead the northern division of the GLIAC conference. This week they host two important contests at home, Wayne State at 6 p.m. on Thursday and the University of Findlay at 1 p.m. on Saturday. Findlay is ranked third in the nation.

Congratulations to Pat Nagle, Zach Redmond, the men's ice hockey team coached by Bob Daniels, and the basketball team coached by Bill Sall. I encourage you to support both of these teams as they reach critical junctures in what are already very successful seasons.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler, President