

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
September 27, 2010

Planning Process

Over the next few weeks I will be encouraging you to think about the University's strategic plan and its future. In beginning this dialogue it is good to look back at our strategic efforts. During spring semester 2007 the University began to consider planning in the context of long-term strategic focus. Under the leadership of Professor Robert von der Osten a process was developed to identify and clarify institutional values, redefine the mission of the University and to build a strategic plan for the University's future. At that time the Governing Ideas Task Force, chaired by David Pilgrim, helped shape and refine the disparate ideas, suggestions and recommendations received into cogent, understandable statements based on more than 75 stakeholder meetings.

In this initial effort, the statement of shared values for the University community may have been the most difficult to formulate. With few exceptions, discussions of values elicit strong opinions. Ultimately consensus formed around six values – collaboration, diversity, ethical community, excellence, learning and opportunity.

Discussions next moved to mission, a concept viewed as potentially divisive, pitting some portions of the University against others. As with values, discussions of mission can be heated and passionate. The critical concept here turned out to be the career focus of the University. This became the nexus around which consensus was reached, with the word “careers” used twice in the 31 words of our mission statement: *Ferris State University prepares students for successful careers, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. Through its many partnerships and its career-oriented, broad-based education, Ferris serves our rapidly changing global economy and society.* The idea of service to the global economy and society foreshadowed global initiatives we have seen blossom at Ferris, and included a shared understanding that a review of general education was ahead.

After mission, attention shifted to vision, codified in a statement of what the University wishes to become. One of the critical concepts here was the idea of “integrative education, where theory meets practice throughout the curriculum...” The vision lays out four aspirations – to be the preferred choice for students; the premiere educational partner; a stimulating student-centered environment; and a University aligned with its values.

After many months of formulation, discussion and review, these documents were accepted by the Academic Senate and the Board of Trustees in early 2008. The full text is accessible at <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/ferrisfaq/mission.htm>.

Strategic Plan

Using these key documents as a guide, and again with broad consultation throughout the University, a strategic plan was developed and approved for implementation in the fall of 2008. It sets forth six broad goals

- Become a demonstrable center of excellence in educational quality and student learning
- Develop a University community where all are valued, welcomed, and informed

- Enhance the financial position of the institution
- Provide a state-of-the-art, sustainable and safe learning, living and working environment
- Foster collaborative internal and external working relationships
- Foster innovation and improve processes to move the University forward

The strategic plan is a continually evolving document which contains 35 distinct initiatives. A current copy of the strategic plan is accessible here - http://www.ferris.edu/strategic-planning/Strategic_Plan.doc .

Along with the strategic plan a new consultative body, the Strategic Planning and Resource Council, was tasked with monitoring, revising and providing advice to the president on the plan's implementation. The initial head of SPARC was Professor von der Osten, who was succeeded in January 2010 by Professor Leonard Johnson. Current membership and meeting minutes of SPARC are accessible here - <http://www.ferris.edu/strategic-planning/meeting-summary.htm> . SPARC meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 3 p.m. in the West Campus Commons and the meetings are open to all who wish to attend.

Much progress has been made on the strategic plan. For the SPARC Summer Retreat, University vice presidents prepared a strategic plan progress report, which is available at <http://www.ferris.edu/strategic-planning/SPARC-July10.pdf> .

I encourage you to take the time to review these materials and look forward to hearing your comments, reactions and suggestions to them.

Budget

The state budget is still not done. Lawmakers adjourned last Thursday and are scheduled to reconvene tomorrow, Tuesday the 28th. The major development from last week was approval of the retirement plan for state workers. This is similar to a previously approved plan for teachers and other MPSERS employees, with the exception that an additional contribution from state workers equal to three percent of their wages expires after three years. There is no expiration for the three percent contribution from the MPSERS employees, which includes some of our faculty and all of our staff hired before 1996.

The higher education budget is not yet out of conference committee. The major stumbling block appears to be a Republican-supported requirement for annual reporting on stem cell research. Democrats, including the governor, oppose this provision.

While tentative agreements could still fall apart, the budget appears headed toward completion by the October 1st deadline. However, such an agreement would come at the cost of future budgets. The 2011 budget is being balanced with the use of one-time fixes that include federal stimulus dollars, accounting moves and some very optimistic estimates. Experts across the state agree that this will leave a structural deficit of \$1.6 billion. The question is whether higher education will feel the impact of this as early as in a mid-year executive order, or not until the next budget.

Art Prize

The second year of ArtPrize in Grand Rapids is building upon its hugely successful inaugural event. Last year the Old Federal Building was a major venue and the site of the winning entry. On the heels of our announcement regarding the Old Federal Building's renovation into educational space for Kendall College of Art and Design, we see how important the building is not

just for Kendall but Grand Rapids as a whole. This year the building is not a venue, but is acting as “The Hub” for ArtPrize. “The Hub” is a public space where art viewers can relax, discuss and vote electronically for their favorites via free computer access.

Kendall College of Art and Design is a very active participant in this year’s ArtPrize, sponsoring the ArtPrize speaker series at the Federal Building. The first of these lectures is this evening at 7 p.m. Wednesday evening’s lecture includes presentations by David Greenwood, KCAD Professor of Sculpture and Functional Art, and Deborah Rockman, Chair of Drawing and Printmaking at Kendall.

Kendall is further involved in ArtPrize as a venue – most dramatically acting as host to a seven-story mural artist Jeff Zimmerman has painted on the exterior north wall of the KCAD building. This is one of eight works exhibited at Kendall. Last year, two of the final ten entries were by Kendall alumni, with Tracy Van Duinen’s mosaic “Imagine That!” taking second place.

ArtPrize includes 192 venues exhibiting works by 1,713 artists. More than 26,000 people have signed up to provide electronic votes on the art works. ArtPrize symbolizes the way art and culture can help revitalize urban environments. Ferris and Kendall are excited to be a part of this creative and unique competition. I hope you plan on making ArtPrize a destination before it ends on Oct. 10. More information is available at www.artprize.org.

United Way

Finally, it is time for the United Way to seek the support of the Ferris community. Even more than in past years, your generosity is needed by an increasing number of people in the Mecosta-Osceola area who have been hard hit by the downturn in the economy. Unemployment in Michigan has remained above 13 percent even as the national economy has seen some modest improvement. Among the many good causes that seek your support, we see the tangible results of the United Way in our community throughout the year.

This year Ferris’ goal is to raise \$61,000 toward the overall Mecosta-Osceola United Way Goal of \$500,000. I hope you can and will help us reach and exceed this goal to help those in our community in the greatest need. Thank you.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler, President