

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
February 26, 2007

For the past three years we have worked on a series of annual plans, preparing for a University-wide strategic planning process. Over the next few weeks Ferris State University will begin that institution-wide planning process. As we do so I want to share with you some thoughts on successful strategic planning and to encourage you in this effort. Your input and engagement will be critical to both the outcome and success of this process.

A recent four-year study of strategic plans at over eighty colleges and universities found that 68% of the institutions studied had not implemented the plans they developed. Perhaps the largest single success factor identified was the approach selected for strategic planning efforts. One third of the institutions studied had conducted the process “top-down.” Here frequently few goals were implemented because faculty and staff had not been engaged in the creation and development of the plan. A second third of the institutions studied conducted the process “bottom-up.” Here the plans often did not reflect the perspective of the institution’s leadership and the implementation record was no better.

The planning efforts deemed most successful, in that they set a strategic direction for the institution, established meaningful goals, and implemented the initiatives developed, used an approach described as “Let’s Do This Together.” All levels of the entire university were actively engaged in conceptualizing, developing, and implementing the plan. It is clear that this type of collaborative effort will also best succeed at Ferris State University.

To help facilitate strategic planning we will be working with Dr. David McFarland. David served fourteen years as President for Kutztown State University in Pennsylvania, where he was also elected Chair of the Commission of Presidents for the Pennsylvania State University System. His experience includes appointments as Provost at Central Missouri State University, Dean of Engineering Technology at Pittsburg State University, and Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of University College, Continuing Education and Student Development at Wichita State University. He co-chaired the National Commission on Teacher Education for the American Association of State College and Universities and hosted two White House Conferences in this process.

Dr. McFarland is actively involved with colleges and universities throughout the country, assisting them in developing effective, successful strategic plans. Perhaps most importantly, based on his experience in planning efforts at many colleges and universities, Dr. McFarland does not work with institutions on strategic planning unless they adopt an

approach that is designed to engage all campus stakeholders and is formulated around the concepts of “Let’s Do This Together.”

Strategic planning will focus on university core values, mission, vision, and strategic directions/goals. The work will reflect internal and external driving forces, identifying institutional distinctiveness and strategic advantages, establishing a strategic direction for the university, and developing strategic initiatives to achieve this future. Strategic planning will then become an ongoing process which can be adjusted and adapted to best meet the needs of our people, University, and state.

As the first steps in this process, Dr. McFarland will be on campus March 13 and 14th to conduct an environmental scan. Over two days he will meet with a broad cross section of people on our campus, many selected from our employee groups at random. These include faculty, staff, students, representatives from the Academic Senate, representatives from each of our unions, deans and department chairs, vice presidents, and vice chancellors. In addition, he will have two open forums which can be attended by all members of the campus community. These will be in the Rankin Center on Tuesday, March 13th at 11:00 am in the Dome Room and on Wednesday, March 14th at 1:30 pm in the Whitney Young Room (RAN 125-127).

After this initial scan, Dr. McFarland will return to campus in April to organize and engage the campus in a process which will include forums, focus groups, planning conferences, and working groups. The planning effort will continue into fall with completion during the academic year. Thank you in advance for participating in this process.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler
President