

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
May 3, 2006

This past weekend was a particularly busy one, with many activities on campus. Both the Talent Show and Step Show attracted large crowds to Williams Auditorium. Brothers from the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity flew in from Los Angeles, New York, and Jamaica to be on campus for their 40th reunion. This was a very special gathering with much history and many good stories in the room.

Saturday's "Evening of Appreciation" was a wonderful evening of thanks for the many people who support our University with their financial support. At that event we welcomed 84 new people who over the past year had joined our donor societies. Special thanks go to the men and women of our physical plant and custodial crew who helped prepare our facilities and grounds for this event. This was an excellent time to have visitors on campus, as I cannot recall a spring when our campus has ever looked more beautiful. Lori Helmer and our dining service people prepared a truly marvelous meal for our guests.

Monday evening's pancake breakfast attracted nearly 800 students. I want to thank our faculty, staff, and student leaders who worked very hard to help provide this study break to our students. I believe all of us were surprised by the number of students who turned out for what is becoming a tradition at Ferris State University. Special thanks go to student Abby Lund for organizing this event and again to our dining service people who provided the support to make certain this succeeded.

On Friday and Saturday we will honor over 1500 graduates at five commencement ceremonies. Commencement provides the opportunity to celebrate our students, their individual and collective successes, the obstacles they have overcome, and the difference they have made for others. Many of you have sent me names of graduating students who impressed you with their special stories of success. Over the past week I have been visiting with students you recommended to me.

I want to share some of those stories with you. The success and achievements of our students represent also your success. As faculty and staff you have helped guide, encourage, challenge, inspire, and support them. My hope is that you will find these stories as inspiring and compelling as I did. For me listening to these students was both a meaningful and emotional experience.

Learning Centered

Over the past few years we have talked about becoming a learning-centered university. Sometimes it is possible to forget how hard our students are willing to work, and the challenges they overcome to seek new paths, pursue new careers, and follow their dreams. Here are two examples.

Having already earned a bachelor degree in Chemistry and Environmental Science this student found that his position in the automotive industry lacked meaning. Seeing the medical industry booming and with a strong desire to help people he entered the Nuclear Medicine program here at Ferris State University. Married and with two daughters, ages two and four, this was a challenge that required considerable time management skills. As he describes it “you have to be able to juggle a lot of balls in the air.” And no wonder, in addition to his studies at Ferris, he worked a full-time job for a cell phone company. From 10 pm to 6 am he repairs cell phone towers throughout the state of Michigan, traveling as many as 65,000 miles a year. Since August he has worked both this all night shift and his 40 hour per week radiography internship. He credits the support of faculty here for his efforts, especially Shelia Squicciarini. In speaking with him I expected to hear about how hard he had worked during this period and how difficult this experience had been. Instead he talked about how much he had enjoyed his degree and how much people had helped him. He begins his new position at Beaumont Hospital in Troy on May 15th. For me Joel Fallon exemplifies the determination of our students to earn their degree and their willingness to work incredibly hard to reach this achievement.

With an English degree from the University of Michigan this student progressed rapidly in a large Midwestern department store chain, working in corporate security. However, in his job he found himself always looking at the dishonest and negative parts of society. In his future he wanted to be focusing on the good and positive. When his brother experienced serious health problems he and his wife moved back to Grand Rapids so their family could be together. Looking to continue his education, he found that the networking and security portions of our Master of Science in Information Systems Management degree fit well with his experiences and he enrolled in that degree Winter 2005. Without an undergraduate degree in computer science, he had to hit the ground running and there were lots of areas where he had to work very hard. Three semesters later he graduates with that degree on Saturday. In addition to his studies in Big Rapids, through counselor Bill Foster at Ferris State University – Grand Rapids he learned of the bachelor degree program in Digital Animation and Game Design. He also enrolled in this program, working simultaneously toward both an undergraduate and master degree. In describing his educational experience at Ferris he talks about

how willing people have been to help him succeed. This has also been a busy time for his family, as his wife is working on an MBA and 12 weeks ago they welcomed their first baby. Elias Olivarez is a wonderful example of the determination of a student to follow his dream and to create a bright future for himself.

Working Together

One of the characteristics we have sought to create is a campus where people work together. At Ferris State University we work together to help students. These same characteristics can be found in our students who work together and through their combined efforts seek to help and involve fellow students.

This young man came to the University to become an optometrist. This is a person who exemplifies involvement, and he soon became a member of the Student Alumni Gold Club. He also joined the pep band, playing 171 performances and becoming its assistant director. When he became a docent for the Card Wildlife Museum, it was clear to him that his true passion was in outdoor, wildlife, and environmental education. Building on this experience he worked with students to help create the Outdoor Club, which brought national wildlife celebrity Jack Hanna to our campus, not once, but twice. The second time this event was staged in Wink Arena because the crowd was too large for Williams Auditorium. He earned national recognition when he was selected as a Morris K. Udall scholar, one of 80 in the nation and the first for our University. He is currently involved with planning for the Udall Scholar National Conference. He conceived and headed a gala in April for the Card Wildlife Museum. Working with other students he staged an evening that earned over \$16,000. These funds will be used for transportation costs so school children can visit the Card Wildlife Museum. Graduating with his bachelor degree in Environmental Biology Bret Muter is a student who does more than excel academically, he also works very effectively with his peers.

As a first year student this young lady was both homesick and shy. Through the help of mentors like Karen GreenBay and Karyn Benner she began to recognize the opportunities available for her here at Ferris State University. Working with her fellow students at Ferris, she helped create the First Expressions registered student organization, a social, artistic group that encourages students to share their artistic talents to inspire others. She overcame her initial shyness to be elected by the student body last fall as Homecoming Queen. As a high school student she had begun to write poetry and had been encouraged to share her poems with others. Last year she became determined to realize her dream and to publish her poetry. This fall she published "Wiser Than Young," a collection of poems reflecting her experiences. This spring she published her second book, "Waiting

for Rain.” Even more impressively, with receipts from her book, she has created a scholarship at Ferris State University. She wants to help that next young man or woman have the educational opportunity she has experienced. Graduating with a bachelor degree in Television and Digital Media Production, Kaiya Hamilton truly is a student who works to help other students.

Engaged Campus

Beginning with the Torchbearer Awards last Wednesday, over the past two weeks I have seen firsthand some of the extraordinary engagement of our students. These efforts go far beyond superficial, occasional activities done for recognition or credit. They are wonderful examples for all of us of the difference a committed, concerned individual can make. Here are two wonderful students that truly understand the meaning of service and engagement.

As a mother with two children, this woman was determined to get an education at Ferris State University. She applied on-line, sold her home before she was accepted to the University, and with the assistance of her family moved to Big Rapids two days before Christmas. She arrived with no money, except for a \$50 check that she could not cash until the following Monday. Reflecting on her experiences at Ferris, she talks about how the community here has embraced her and what a wonderful experience this education has been for her children. She has become an active member of efforts from the Office of Minority Affairs, especially TOWERS, an acronym for Teaching Others What Establishes Real Success. With TOWERS she speaks to school age youth, conveying through her testimony how to overcome adversity, to choose friends wisely and to discover personal gifts to take action "right now." She continues to stay in touch with the students she speaks with, encouraging and mentoring their success. An active member of the Social Work Association, she began her undergraduate degree Winter Semester 2003 and graduates on Saturday with her Bachelor of Social Work degree. This fall she will begin her masters work at the University of Michigan. Her hope is to create a nonprofit organization for intervention with teen pregnancy and child care. Vanita Sanders understands and exemplifies the difference a person can make for others.

The semester before graduating from Ferris State University with a bachelor degree in the human resource field, this student felt she had chosen the wrong field. Upon graduation she was employed with a regional bank. Through their mentoring partnership with a local elementary school she confirmed her true passion, to be a teacher. She moved with her husband to Chattanooga and was a substitute teacher in a poor inner city school. This was an eye opening experience for her, as she taught in rooms that did not have enough desks, let alone books for the students in her classes. Very few children had thoughts of attending college

and their futures had few hopes and aspirations. Many days she would return home after a day of teaching crying in frustration. Moving back to this area she enrolled again at Ferris, this time to earn her teaching credential and the Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction. At the start of her student teaching experience, her supervising teacher at Chippewa Hills shared an email regarding Heifer International and their program, "Read to Feed." As a student teacher, she implemented this program with her classes, where students seek pledges from family and friends for each book they read. The money raised was then used to purchase farm animals for indigent people in Latin America or South America. As an example, when students had earned \$150 they could purchase a llama. This gift was then matched by the charity so the family received both a male and a female animal, and the first offspring is given to another indigent family. For motivation, in her classroom she built a seven-foot hunger tree, and the students placed a leaf on the tree for each book they read. Beyond encouraging reading, this project motivated school children to become actively involved in helping others far less fortunate. Graduating on Saturday, she and her husband are moving again, this time to Chicago, where she hopes to work in an inner city school that in her words, "needs me." Her desire is to become the type of teacher who makes a difference for students, the one who students remember years later. Jill Swett's determination and commitment to help others exemplifies Ferris' students desire to make a difference.

Closing Thoughts

Joel Fallon, Elias Olivarez, Bret Muter, Kaiya Hamilton, Vanita Sanders, and Jill Swett are wonderful examples of what is possible with a Ferris State University education. I want to thank each of you for your efforts throughout the school year to help our students. Your combined efforts help graduate truly extraordinary people - human beings well prepared both for the future and to make a difference for others. These are impressive achievements for you and reflect the continual growing quality and stature of our University. I am truly honored to serve as your president. Thanks so very much.

Best wishes,

Dave