

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
November 21, 2005

Last week's snowfall confirmed the obvious, winter is here. I have always been amazed by a week like this past one, where one can mow the grass and shovel snow within a few days time. As we move toward Thanksgiving I would like to share our progress and provide information on current and ongoing efforts.

Classroom Renovation

Last fall a university-wide task force on physical facilities recommended we begin a comprehensive upgrade to classroom spaces across campus. The intent is to help facilitate learning across campus by creating spaces that are more supportive and conducive to faculty and student interaction. Improvements include a fresh coat of paint, carpeting to reduce noise in the room, technology for presentations and access to the Internet, improved lighting, and new furniture. This summer a pilot project with nine classrooms was begun with renovations to Automotive 105, Automotive 108, Business 224, Science 132, Starr 122, Starr 129, Starr 130, Starr 207, and Starr 223. In addition the Southwest Commons and a garage attached to the Power Plant were converted to academic use. This pilot project created several models designed to facilitate a variety of teaching and learning approaches including lecture, small group instruction, project-based learning, and combinations of these.

Student and faculty surveys have been collected and are being tabulated. The initial responses we are receiving are quite positive. Students really notice the difference and are very appreciative of the improved classrooms. We very much want your feedback on the classroom renovation project. Pictures of the renovated classrooms are accessible here: <http://www.ferris.edu/president/classrooms2005.htm>. Beyond that I would encourage you to take a moment to stop by and look at these renovated classrooms. I would appreciate hearing from you via email at eislerd@ferris.edu regarding your observations and remarks on these changes. As this project moves forward, it is my hope that we can continue creating classrooms that are supportive of a variety of teaching and learning styles.

Veterans Scholarships

Two years ago when our students began being called to active duty status, I started a practice of writing each one of these men and women a note. I thanked them for their service to our country and encouraged each one to return to school when their tour of duty concluded. We also sent them a University sweatshirt to remind them of our interest and support. Given the challenging and dangerous assignments many would face, somehow this never felt like we were doing enough.

When one looks back on our history as an institution, veterans have been a big part of Ferris State University. During periods following World War II, the Korean War, and during the Vietnam War, there were large numbers of veterans on campus, sometimes as many as 500 people. I believe the type of education we provide, which helps prepare students for successful careers upon graduation, is very well suited to help veterans make the transition back to civilian life. It has also been my experience that the added maturity from military service can help some students be better prepared for serious study.

At their meeting on Veterans Day, our Board of Trustees approved a new and innovative scholarship program. Veterans with six months or more of active duty service, who enroll for full-time study within four years of discharge, will receive a \$1,000 annual scholarship. For non-resident veterans, we will also apply in-state tuition, waiving the out-of-state cost. These scholarships apply to all programs, levels, and locations where Ferris State University teaches and are renewable for four years. Complete information on this program is available at <http://www.ferris.edu/admissions/financialaid/Veteran.htm> and <http://www.ferris.edu/president/VeteranScholarship.htm>.

I believe this program, combined with other benefits will make a difference. For men and women who have served and risked their lives for our country, I am hopeful this will help them earn a college degree and begin a successful career. We are seeing significant response to this program. On Friday, one week after the initial announcement, we received ten applications from veterans. If you know of someone who could qualify for this scholarship, please have them contact Troy Tissue at (231) 591-3957 or tissuet@ferris.edu. Thanks for your assistance.

Strong Efforts and Good News

The Thanksgiving break always serves as a reminder of how little time remains in the semester. After the brief respite of this weekend, the pace increases even more in the final two weeks of classes. I want to recognize some of the extra effort that I see our people make for the University.

Programs in Facility Management, Legal Studies, Music Management, Medical Records Technology/Medical Records Administration, Optometry, and Surveying Engineering Technology, have completed successful accreditation visits this fall and Dental Hygiene accreditors will be on campus next week. The National Association of Schools of Art and Design has approved new Bachelor of Fine Art degrees from the Kendall College of Art and Design in Painting, Photography, Sculpture and Functional Art, and Art Education. National accreditation requires significant extra effort, but also allows objective assessment against national standards of best practice. The Program Review Committee (PRC) recently committed its work this fall, evaluating 17 programs. I want to thank the members of the PRC together with the faculty and staff members of the departments reviewed for their commitment to this process.

Last week the Michigan College of Optometry celebrated its 30th Birthday. It was good to learn about the early days of this program and the challenges it faced. Ours is the only Optometry program in the state and this Birthday Celebration was a wonderful occasion to connect with some of the founders of this program. The History Task Force did a superb job of rededicating the G. Mennen Williams Auditorium. I enjoyed this opportunity to learn more about Governor G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams.

Across campus five task forces are focusing their efforts on questions regarding transfer students, grants and contracts, technology support, student engagement, and approaches to accreditation. These task forces will report on their efforts, Thursday and Friday, December 15th and 16th. As I read the University-Wide Notices, I see increased numbers of colloquia and sessions where faculty are sharing their expertise and experiences with our campus and their colleagues. This is becoming a wonderful characteristic of our campus and is something I support strongly.

The Ferris Foundation Gala was the most successful in our history. Over 400 tickets were sold and \$100,000 in sponsorships was received. Interviewer and entertainer Roy Firestone presented a wonderful program. We premiered the new scholarship video to rave reviews. Proceeds from the Gala will fund grants for faculty/staff and scholarships for Ferris students. As college costs continue to rise, scholarships help keep our education affordable for students.

Our students, faculty, and staff are actively engaged in the United Way fund drive. Coming directly on the heels of fundraisers for Hurricane Katrina victims, this is proving to be a particularly challenging time for the United Way, not just here, but across the country. For me one of the strengths of the United Way is that it provides a single mechanism of support for so many useful and deserving

programs. The local agencies funded by the United Way make a significant difference for those who are less fortunate right here in Big Rapids and Mecosta County. If you have not yet given to the United Way, I would encourage you to do so.

Perhaps you had the opportunity to see some of the news reports regarding enrollment at Michigan public institutions this fall. The largest numerical increase in new freshmen was at Ferris State University. I want to extend my thanks to everyone who helped in this success. Enrollment growth helps support our University during these times of continued state funding reductions. As a result we were able to accompany this year's 8.9% increase in tuition with a 17.4% increase in financial aid. This type of funding support is critical to keeping our education affordable for our students.

Nearly every Saturday morning the admissions office together with faculty, staff, and students conduct Dawg Days, a very successful on-campus prospective student visitation program. Experience has shown that prospective students who attend this activity both apply and enroll. These events are especially important as we recruit next year's new students. For Fall 2006 we have continued the process of gradually ratcheting up admission standards. The expected ACT score is now a 17. While in the past as standards were raised, we experienced a temporary lull in enrollment, we are hopeful that our many successful initiatives such as Dawg Days would counter-balance any loss of momentum in our enrollment. If you know of a prospective student for our University, please email me, eislerd@ferris.edu, so that we can contact them.

Closing Thoughts

This fall I have been visiting with faculty, listening to their thoughts on the values of our institution. Additionally these have been times to share information and hear both ideas and concerns. I appreciate that so many faculty have been willing to take time to visit with me. I look forward to visiting with staff and students during the spring semester.

Thanksgiving is a time when many families come together to give thanks for the many blessings we receive. As we take this brief break before the final weeks of the semester, I want to take this opportunity to wish you and your family a happy Thanksgiving.

Best wishes,

Dave