

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
September 9, 2005

Today is another amazing Michigan day. We have been truly fortunate to have wonderful weather this summer and fall. It seems difficult to believe that this is already the end of the second week of classes. I love the beginning of Fall semester and the excitement it brings to our campus. The bustle of activity is evident everywhere. It is easy to sense the engagement of students in campus activities. We have seen record involvement in a number of events so far.

As we conclude this second week of the semester I want to take this opportunity to update you on campus activities to support victims of hurricane Katrina and other campus information. I would encourage you to write or visit with me to share your thoughts on these and other topics.

Hurricane Katrina Campus Response

A number of you have taken time to write me encouraging strong involvement by our campus in helping victims from hurricane Katrina. The loss of life, disruption of lives, and damage to property in the New Orleans and Gulf Coast area is beyond anything I have witnessed in our country and is almost beyond comprehension. A campus fund drive for victims of this hurricane is underway headed by Vice President Dan Burcham. You will notice that Hurricane Relief Fund donation cans have been placed in a number of buildings on campus. Contributions may be sent to the Vice President for Student Affairs Office in Rankin Center 255. Checks should be made payable to the Mecosta/Osceola Area United Way with Hurricane Relief Fund as the designation. This is receiving significant support from faculty, staff, and students across our campus. There is another Hurricane Relief Fund meeting planned for next Tuesday, September 13th, at 7:00 p.m. in the Rankin Center Student Lounge.

While many colleges and universities have reopened in the storm, those in New Orleans will not for fall semester. As a University we have worked to develop an approach to assist these students, without disadvantaging their home institutions during this challenging time. We are now admitting students who have been displaced by hurricane Katrina to our campuses in Big Rapids, Grand Rapids, and at the Kendall College of Art and Design. Students will be admitted on a visiting or provisional basis, so that they remain students of their home institution. Students who have already paid tuition to their home institution will not be charged tuition or required fees. Students who have not already paid tuition or fees will be charged our tuition and that amount will be remitted to the student's home institution. We have made space available in campus housing and will work with students in terms of financial aid and other support for room and board. Both Tulane University and Xavier University in New Orleans have pharmacy programs and we encourage these students to contact our Dean's Office in the College of Pharmacy directly.

This approach to displaced students is based upon guidelines suggested by institutions impacted by hurricane Katrina. It has been endorsed by the American Association of Community Colleges, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Council of Education, Association of American Universities, Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. Since students who do enroll with us will be at least two weeks behind in their classes, we will work to develop support to help them succeed this semester.

There are a number of places where you can become aware of educational needs in the storm areas or learn of ongoing efforts of assistance -

- The American Council of Education and National Association of College and University Business Officers have created a web site with information on affected campuses and resources for students, <http://www.campusrelief.org/>
- Educause has set up a similar site for information technology needs and assistance, <http://www.educause.edu/8584>
- The Chronicle of Higher Education has established a site for information from affected campuses, associations, and government agencies, <http://chronicle.com/katrina/>

It is still unclear about the number of people from the storm area that will be moving to Michigan. As more information becomes available on the needs of these victims, we are working with state agencies to offer workforce training and education where needed or desired.

The American Red Cross sessions on our campus for people who want to work to go on assignment in Louisiana are full. We will share information on additional opportunities when they are available. There is a significant need for blood and extra donation drive dates have been scheduled beginning today. Beyond this, a number of campus individuals and organizations are involved in efforts for the victims of hurricane Katrina beyond the above. If you or an organization you are associated with is working on hurricane relief, I would appreciate you sharing it with me. There may be ways to combine related efforts to maximize the results.

From the number of messages received, I know that the devastation of hurricane Katrina has moved many on our campus to reach out and help those disadvantaged by this tragedy. Thank you for being willing to reach out your hand to those in need.

Closing Thoughts

Together with this fall's excellent enrollment news was some very exciting data regarding freshman retention. This fall we retained 70% of last year's first-time bachelor's degree students, and 69% of all first-time freshmen overall. These are the highest rates ever for freshman retention on our campus. As a bit of historical perspective, in 1999-2000 we retained 59% of freshman students, and in 1994-1995 we retained 52%. To state the obvious, the objective for our students is not to attend college, but rather to graduate from it. This improvement in retention is a

wonderful achievement. It results from your strong efforts to connect with, assist and support our students. Thank you so very much for your efforts to retain our students.

Next week I will begin small group meetings with our faculty. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about our University and its values. When you receive your invitation, if this conflicts with your teaching schedule, please let us know so we can find a time when you can attend. Small group meetings with staff and students will be scheduled during spring semester.

We are off to an excellent start for fall semester. I look forward to seeing you on campus and at our events. Thank you for the difference you make for our students and our University.

Best wishes,

Dave