

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
September 2, 2005

Yesterday's Founders' Day events were a wonderful opportunity to come together as a university community to celebrate the past, present, and future of our University. It was great to see how many people worked to create an event that was special, meaningful, and fun. I am hopeful that you were able to join us for lunch on the Quad and participate in some of the activities. If you were unable to hear my remarks at yesterday morning, I wanted to provide a copy of these. The slides from my presentation are accessible at <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/president/speeches/founders2005.pps> Each paragraph of text represents a slide.

Ferris State University: Past, Present, and Future

Thank you for joining us today for our first Founders' Day. In beginning I want to express my thanks to everyone who volunteered to create this very special event. At Ferris State University we are fortunate to have a wonderfully rich heritage and we are the only public university in Michigan named for its founder. One hundred twenty-one years ago today the Big Rapids Industrial School opened its doors to the first class of students. I am especially pleased that you, our faculty, staff, and students could join together today as we celebrate the past, present, and future of Ferris State University.

The Founding and Early Years

Who were these founders, Woodbridge and Helen Gillespie Ferris? How did they come to create this new school in Big Rapids? Woodbridge and Helen Ferris both grew up in the state of New York and met as students at the Oswego Normal School. After marriage they moved to the Midwest and Woodbridge was employed in several teaching and administrative positions. His most recent work before moving to Big Rapids had been as Superintendent of the Pittsfield, Illinois public schools. Mr. Ferris wanted to create his own school where he could set both the academic standards and put into place the educational philosophies he embraced. He looked at a number of locations in Michigan and decided upon Big Rapids because of interest expressed there and the lack of competition from other proprietary schools, normal schools, and universities. Mr. and Mrs. Ferris and their son Carlton moved to Big Rapids on May 16, 1884.

The public school in Big Rapids was considered to be quite good, but Mr. Ferris' school was to be for a different purpose. In his own words, he established the Big Rapids Industrial School for "lumberjacks, miners, farmers' sons and daughters, and girls who worked in Michigan factories." The school was located in two rented rooms on the northeast corner of Michigan and Elm. From the very first day it was co-educational, and

the first class picture shows ten men and five women. The teachers were Mr. and Mrs. Ferris. After this initial class, evening students were soon added.

What did this new school teach? We have some idea from a circular that was printed in January 1885. At that point, enrollment exceeded 40 students and education was offered in four different programs -

- Common English Course - Arithmetic, English Language and Literature, Geography, U.S. History, Civil Government, Penmanship and Drawing, Physiology and Hygiene, Reading and Orthography (1-2 years)
- Course in Industrial Science and Mathematics - Physics, Chemistry, Political Economy, Algebra and Geography (1-2 Years)
- Commercial Course - Commercial Arithmetic, Bookkeeping, Penmanship, Business Correspondence, Commercial Law (6 months to a year)
- Penmanship and Drawing

The common English Course was designed for students who had not graduated from high school and was intended to be followed by the Course in Industrial Science and Mathematics. The commercial course was for students who had graduated from a good high school. The penmanship and drawing course was an example of the entrepreneurial nature of Mr. Ferris, providing education to meet a perceived need. This would be followed rapidly by a course in shorthand. The coursework was provided in 12-week terms, with the following charges per term -

Common English \$8.00
Industrial Science and Mathematics \$12.00
Commercial \$25.00 or \$1.50 per week
Penmanship and Drawing \$6.00

Room and board could be obtained in town for \$3.00 to \$4.00 per week, or \$36 to \$48 a term. The requirements for admission were simple, a desire on the part of a student to work early and late. The approach was quite progressive. Students were permitted to elect as many studies as they could carry and advanced as fast their ability would permit. From the very beginning a grade of 85% was required to pass.

The school grew very rapidly and in 1893 Mr. Ferris set out to construct his own building, rather than remaining in rented facilities. The building was completed for a dedication in early 1894. The cost was approximately \$20,000. During the construction process Mr. Ferris faced significant financial challenges when the bank holding significant funding for the building went bust. This is the building that would come to be known as Old Main. It was also at this time that Mr. Ferris changed the school name to the Ferris Institute.

Ferris Institute post-World War II

Now let's fast forward to a critical time in the survival of our institution. We'll take up the story on July 10, 1946. This was when Byron J. Brophy joined Ferris Institute as its president. Mr. Brophy had experience in youth work. He had also headed Native American schools in the west and was completing a doctorate at the University of Michigan. As an institution Ferris was totally dependent upon tuition for its budget. This was of great concern to both the board and its president. A number of efforts were made to sell the school. Prospective buyers included the Mennonite Brethren, existing public colleges and universities (Central Michigan, Michigan State, and Michigan), the Episcopal Church and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). As president, Mr. Brophy developed quite a reputation for frugality. He would insist upon the use of 25 watt light bulbs and turned thermostats down regularly. Governor "Soapy" Williams signed the bill making Ferris Institute a state institution on July 10, 1946. This single act set in motion a train of events that were essential if Ferris Institute was to survive.

February 21, 1950 was the end of classes for the Winter term at Ferris Institute. Students studying in Old Main, faculty and administrators working in the building, and students practicing with the choir heard the fire alarm ring. What was first considered to be perhaps even a drill soon became a raging fire. Cold weather and low water pressure doomed the fire fighting effort.

In one horrifying evening Old Main burned to the ground. In pictures taken the next day you can see all that remains from this building are sections of a few walls and a chimney. Fortunately no one was killed in the blaze. Four students were slightly injured.

Students on the morning of February 22nd were greeted with a message President Brophy had written on a portable blackboard. The injured students were fine. Winter exams were cancelled and grades would be based on work throughout the semester. Registration for Spring would be Monday, February 27th and Tuesday, February 28th. Classes would begin the following day. He concluded his note with the emphatic statement, "Ferris Institute will go on." And the Institute did go on, rising like a phoenix from these ashes, to become the vibrant University we celebrate today.

Ferris State University Today

Over the past two years we have worked to develop a vision for Ferris State University and its future. This has three parts:

- We Need to Create A Learning Centered University
- We Must Work Together
- We Must Become An Engaged Campus

A Learning Centered University changes the focus from the delivery of education to the outcomes of the university experience. A University centered on learning also includes a commitment to continually improve learning with each year of experience. The strength of the FSU experience is not just learning, but learning from doing. We see this in student work, internships, and real world experiences. Our goal for students should be to go beyond learning for the present; through their education our students must learn how to learn. In doing so I am hopeful they will develop a passion for lifelong learning.

As a University we must continue to strive to work together. We come together as a University community to help our students and through our combined efforts help them succeed. Each person's contributions to the University and to our students help us reach this goal. As partners in the education process, our relationships are based on mutual respect, admiration, and trust. To foster the strong, supportive relations that create effective learning communities, we must listen and communicate effectively.

We must continue to work toward greater campus engagement. Most of a student's day is not spent in a class, but rather outside it. To maximize the University experience we must continually work to extend the learning experience beyond the classroom. As a campus we actively engage with our community, region, and beyond. The world our students will work and live in is increasingly global and more diverse. We must prepare our students for this rapidly changing and evolving society. Finally, it is not enough to graduate students prepared in their chosen fields of study. Our graduates must also be prepared to be productive citizens.

Our founder, Mr. Ferris, was a wonderful example of an engaged citizen, serving two terms as governor of Michigan and as a United States Senator at the time of his death in 1928. One of my favorite pictures of Mr. Ferris is included in the displays on the third floor of the Timme building. It shows Mr. Ferris standing in the front seat of an open roofed car addressing a crowd gathered all around the car in a campaign stop. He is a dynamic and engaged person projecting his message to the crowd. His efforts are an example to each of us in terms of what is possible.

During the last few days each of us has watched with horror the incredible devastation caused by hurricane Katrina. Many of you have emailed me asking how we might assist victims of this terrible tragedy. Vice President Dan Burcham is organizing an effort to accept donations for relief operations and support. This morning I have been working on the telephone with our national organization, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, to see if there is a way we can assist colleges and universities devastated by the greatest natural disaster we have experienced in this country during my lifetime. My hope is that working together we can adopt sister institutions and help them to address the challenges they face. I have proposed that we might assist these institutions with their communications, perhaps hosting their web services and email servers during this period. As rescue and evacuation efforts move toward conclusion, it will become clearer how we can be of most help.

Planning for the Ferris State University of Tomorrow

Today I want to propose to you three planning ideas for this academic year. The first is a grassroots effort to articulate and define our University values. During my first year as president I had the wonderful opportunity to visit with our faculty, staff, and students in small groups of fifteen to twenty-five people. Through this process I developed a much better understanding of our University, its strengths and challenges. This was an effort I immensely enjoyed and something I have missed. During this year I will again conduct small group meetings with our faculty, staff, and students seeking your thoughts on the values of our University and its future. Faculty meetings will be conducted during Fall semester with the first invitations distributed later today. Meetings for staff and students will be scheduled during Spring semester. I look forward to visiting with you and hearing your thoughts on our values and future.

Last year's cross university task forces were a wonderful success. The efforts of these groups helped move the University forward on a number of very important topics. Many wonderful approaches and ideas from these groups remain to be addressed and will be considered carefully. I believe it is time to continue to move forward. Later this month we will organize new task forces to address issues of significant importance to our future. We intend to organize task forces around the following topics-

- Transfer Students - We should be the University of choice for community college students looking to earn a bachelor's degree. Ferris State University graduates over 800 students annually with associate degrees. As a result we understand associate degree students and the integration of two- and four-year education. Working together we need to simplify the transfer process and develop supportive mechanisms to support these students.
- Grants and External Funding - As a University we offer a number of unique programs and specialized education. We need to leverage these strengths into greater support at the state and federal levels and work for increased foundation support. This group will consider how best to approach and organize for success in this area,
- Technical Support - Last year's technology task force recommendations have significantly changed our University. With a replacement strategy for faculty and staff computers and a wireless network plan for our campus, we have made significant strides in increasing our technical abilities. While we currently do an excellent job with very limited resources, I believe it is time to consider how we provide support to our people so they can better and more effectively use these technical capabilities.
- Student Engagement - We should soon receive the data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This task force needs to consider these results and how we move forward on encouraging student engagement. Additionally they

- should consider how we schedule events on our campus so that major events do not conflict with each other.
- Accreditation – The Higher Learning Commission provides two approaches for University accreditation. The first is the traditional self study and review that our campus has undergone in the past. The second is the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). Now is the time to consider these and choose the approach we will follow in preparation for our next accreditation.

These groups will be organized as last year with membership and leadership from our faculty and staff for a two-month working period, followed by a public report to the campus. The exception to this will be the Accreditation Task Force, which will need more time to facilitate campus dialogue on the two possible approaches. They will work throughout the fall and spring with a final report in March. If you would like to serve on one of these task forces, please send me an email expressing your interest.

Ferris State University will continue to face funding challenges for the immediate future. It is very important we continue to work aggressively to develop and increase our donor support. While donations will not produce base funding for our University, they can help provide that extra measure of support that will help enhance program quality, provide support for faculty, staff and students, and defray campus building costs. One of the keys to this strategy is encouraging our alumni to remain involved with our University. Over the summer Jeremy Mishler and the Alumni Office have organized a series of very successful events. Nearly all were sold out with waiting lists. To continue to expand this alumni circle of friends, I am proposing a National Caucus of Alumni. This will be a series of alumni meetings across our state, region, and country. Through these we will seek input from alumni on our future and encourage their support in making this a reality.

Congratulations and Thank You

It is fitting that we be considering the history and traditions of our University on a day that is in itself historic. There is much for us to celebrate today. This year's entering class is the best prepared in our history. Today Ferris State University stretches across Michigan with academic programs in twenty-five locations throughout the state. Perhaps most importantly this year we retained more of last year's first year students than ever before.

Last year's fall enrollment was 11,803. The 2005 Ferris State University fall enrollment is currently 12,547 students. **You are a part of the largest fall enrollment in our history.** Congratulations!!! I want to make special mention of growth at the Kendall College of Art and Design, whose enrollment now exceeds 1,000 students, a remarkable achievement. Additionally we recognize Ferris State University - Grand Rapids for an increase of over 100 students or 23% and the University Center for Extended Learning for an increase of nearly 200 students.

Our success as a University results from You, Your Hard Work, and Dedication.
Congratulations and Thank You.

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