

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
December 2, 2003
Ext. 2500

During the past weeks I have appreciated the opportunity to visit with you regarding suggestions on cutting costs and reducing our budget at Ferris. Others have taken the time to consider carefully our efforts and sent ideas for reductions through the web and by email. In our open forums I have explained that although this is a time of financial challenges for our University, we are in excellent shape. In fact it is difficult for me to imagine an institution that has already undergone a 10% reduction and that could be better prepared to meet this reduction. At the time of this writing, it is still unclear what the budget reduction amount of the pending executive order will be for higher education.

If this process is similar to my experiences in Utah, New Mexico, and Alabama, during this period I suspect there will be a variety of proposals, plans, and even published rumors regarding the budget. My understanding is that the governor will release her plan this Thursday. Many of you have shared with me your letters to the governor and legislators. Thank you for writing and expressing your support for higher education. If you have not yet done so, there is still time to write. Your help and support are most appreciated.

Summer School Initiative

In a time of reduced support for the State, it is important to pursue funding opportunities available to us. I believe that one of those revenue growth activities could be increasing enrollments in summer school. Summer is an especially appealing time to attend Ferris. We have a beautiful campus, the climate is ideal, and summer can provide the opportunity for students to move more quickly toward graduation. Throughout the summer we support and maintain our facilities; it makes sense to use these more effectively by attracting increased numbers of students to summer school.

One of the challenges to summer school enrollment is the difference in cost between living at home and staying in Big Rapids. While many of our students will not be able to afford to stay for the entire summer, I believe there are students who will stay for a portion of the summer for classes. I appreciate the assistance of Vice President Tom Oldfield and the college deans in working with me to develop a schedule for summer based on three four-week blocks of classes. This provides a model where four-week classes can begin in May, June, or July, twelve-week classes begin in May, and eight-week classes begin in June. I believe this schedule will prove attractive to students.

Vice President Rick Duffett and his people in housing and dining services have developed an approach to summer housing that should be quite attractive to our students. Students who register for six hours during a four-week or eight-week term, or for ten hours during the twelve-week term, and who purchase a 10-meal plan will receive a free private room in University housing.

I have asked VP Oldfield and the Academic Deans to work with department heads to propose a summer schedule that reflects student interest, provides opportunities to attract new cohorts of students to summer school, and allows us to try a limited number of new summer ideas. In doing so the intent is to provide the opportunity to test this new approach. As an incentive to departments to explore new approaches to summer school, I have asked that a portion of tuition dollars flow to departments as one-time expense support at the rate of \$200 for every gain of 50 student credit hours (SCH).

Summer 2003 generated approximately 25,000 SCH. This is approximately one fifth of the enrollment for fall semester enrollment at Ferris. I believe it is very possible to increase summer enrollment by 5-10% and in doing so to develop an approach that we can build upon in future summers.

Some caveats about this approach for summer - I do not want to encourage the teaching of any courses during the four-week term that the faculty instructor believes should be offered for longer periods of time to facilitate student learning. Additionally I do not believe we should use classroom facilities or faculty offices that are not air conditioned during the summer. It is important with a compressed schedule that students take no more than six hours during any four-week block. Based on the success we expect from this summer's efforts, it may be possible to consider additional permutations of this scheduling approach including some classes paired in six-week segments.

Changing for this summer will require some quick work and adjustment. I appreciate your willingness to consider these approaches as we seek additional revenue sources for the university.

Academic Affairs Review

In previous messages I have talked about my desire to use each administrative vacancy to seek outside review and analysis of the division or college. On December 8th and 9th a team of experienced chief academic officers will be on campus reviewing the academic affairs division. We are truly fortunate to have outstanding CAOs who will be conducting this review. The team is headed by Dr. George Mehaffy, Vice President for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Dr. Mehaffy coordinates the work of over 400 chief academic officers for AASCU and has served as a chief academic officer. He will be assisted in this process by Dr. Marlene Strathe, who is the Provost at Oklahoma State University. Before assuming her current position, she served as Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Northern Colorado.

Drs. Mehaffy and Strathe will be visiting with faculty, staff, students, department chairs, deans, and vice presidents. Included in their schedule will be an open forum at 3:00 p.m. on Monday, December 8, in Rankin Center Room 155 that you are invited and encouraged to attend. I hope you will have the opportunity to meet and interact with them during their visit. I am hopeful the document they produce will serve as a blueprint for our next Vice President of Academic Affairs and help guide the division in the future.

Closing Thoughts

Amidst the daily bustle of classes, activities, and meetings it is important you know the difference your efforts make for our students. As I visit with our students and alumni I continually hear the most wonderful stories about the difference you have and are making in their lives. At a time when as a nation we give thanks for all that we are given, I want you to know how much I appreciate you and your efforts for Ferris State University.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler
President