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Pioneer

April 10, 2007

Division of faculty, Eisler is troubling (Opinion)

It was disappointing to learn that a "resolution of no-confidence" in the leadership of President Eisler will be voted on.

Being a resident of Big Rapids for more than 40 years, it was a privilege to work at the university as a teacher, coach and administrator. I have witnessed both sides of the picture.

Did the FFA exhaust all the options before taking this drastic action? Previous "no-confidence" voting took place on former Presidents - doesn't the Board of Trustees determine the status of Dave Eisler? One would think that educated people can sit down and work out a reasonable solution. Will future students and people want to come to Big Rapids?

I've worked for seven good Presidents at Ferris and Dr. Eisler ranks very high! The president is extremely active with faculty, staff, students, unions, alumni, donors, friends and the community.

He does have integrity and understands the mission of FSU and has a vision for the future. Alumni and fund-raising efforts have greatly improved since the "one man" operation that I served.

FSU is a leader in higher education despite experiencing hard economic times. Unity and cooperation by all is necessary to move ahead in an orderly fashion.

It hurts me to observe division at Ferris. I *love* and take great *pride* in Big Rapids and FSU! For growth to take place, we need to be loyal, positive and supportive. Let's do what is *best* for Big Rapids and the university - support President Eisler!

BOB LEACH
Big Rapids

Pioneer

April 10, 2007

Concerned about FSU or a bunch of crybabies? (Opinion)

Having lived in Big Rapids for 36 years I have watched the Ferris Faculty Association on various occasions behave immaturely. They bring out their club of no confidence whenever things do not go their way.

I've also seen the same FFA group trash another organization's charts and architectural drawings (Riverwalk's). It is my opinion that we are dealing with a group of intellectual people acting like crybabies.

JEROME A. CONRAD, M.D.
Big Rapids

Pioneer

April 10, 2007

Harris returns to FSU faculty in May

Ferris State University Vice President for Academic Affairs Michael Harris announced Monday he will step down from that position May 6 and return to faculty.

According to a press release distributed Monday, Harris said he believes the time is right for him to complete his tenure and allow for FSU and him to move in new directions.

"My time as VPAA has been immensely productive, and I believe we have made significant progress in enhancing the academic wellbeing of the institution and in maximizing each students potential for success," Harris said. "I am excited to return to the faculty and have an opportunity to follow my passion for teaching and research."

FSU President David Eisler said Harris's made many contributions to FSU, especially his "strong commitment to academics. An excellent example of this is his work with the Political Engagement Project, where his initiative and leadership have helped make Ferris State University a national leader in this field."

Before working at Ferris, Harris was a teacher at Eastern Michigan University.

Pioneer

April 11, 2007

FSU students head to Hollywood

Ferris State University Rube Goldberg Machine team is going Hollywood.

The engineering students will be traveling to California next week for an April 20 appearance on ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live!"

It's all part of the team's victory tour, after placing first in the national Rube Goldberg Machine Contest at Purdue University on March 31. Students also made an appearance on NBC's "Today show Sunday and the team also has appeared in newspaper articles across the country by creating a machine that set a record of 345 steps to squeeze an orange and pour its juice into a glass.

Ferris' effort of more than 3,000 hours invested was being submitted to Guinness World Records, which currently recognizes Purdue University's record of 125 steps for "Largest Rube Goldberg."

Team Advisor Daniel Wanink said the experience of being on TV was unforgettable.

"Before the show we were setting up, and it seemed like a pretty relaxed atmosphere," Wanink said. "But when it was show-time everything was on such a strict time regiment."

Team Captain Tom Sybrandy said recreating the machine was the biggest challenge.

"The show was taped outside, and the cold weather made a lot of the plastic parts change shape," Sybrandy said. "We had to make a lot of adjustments without much time before we went on the air, and we just barely made it."

Student and team member Matt Tomaszewski said the exposure has gotten the team recognition in places they least expected.

"We were on our way back to Ferris in Pennsylvania with our Rube Goldberg jackets on," Tomaszewski said. "And somebody just came up to us and asked 'weren't you on the 'Today' show?' We never expected this much publicity."

The team plans to head out to California April 19 and return on April 22. The team is scheduled to appear April 20 on ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" at 12:05 a.m.

However, they do plan on having some fun during their stay.

"There are some people doing a documentary on Rube Goldberg who said they're going to take us surfing," Tomaszewski said.

While the team doesn't expect to break the record it set at next year's competition, it does hope to improve in its machine building approach.

"We're going to start over for next year," team member Michael Dunakin said. "Our emphasis is going to be on the quality of our steps next year."

Pioneer
April 11, 2007

Free lecture at FSU Thursday

It's back.

Ferris State University College of Arts and Sciences Department of Humanities have begun its 2006-07 Colloquium Series.

Thursday it will present "The Re-Evolution of Business: New Duties and Why the New Environmental Responsibility Movement Will Not Last," a lecture/presentation by Dr. John Scott Gray, FSU assistant professor of philosophy, from 11 to 11:50 a.m. Thursday in the Founder's Room located in Rankin Center 238. This event is free and open to the public.

This paper considers the motives that are found behind the recent changed perspective in the corporate world toward environmental responsibility. I argue that the movement is based on an ethical egoist framework whose primary concern has been and remains profitability. Furthermore, the stance that roots corporate environmentalism in corporate profits does not offer a basis for permanent change in the ways in which businesses do business, but instead merely allows for a new trend that can easily be abandoned in the future.

John Scott Gray holds a PhD in Philosophy from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. His philosophical interests involve applying philosophical methods to issues involving technology and the environment, medical ethics, and the concepts of sex and love.

For information on this presentation, contact Dr. John Gray, at (231) 591-3515.

Pioneer

April 11, 2007

No confidence vote an outdated 'tool' (Opinion)

I am in total amazement that some of our "educated" and self-portrayed "lifeblood" of FSU are claiming to be the "institutional memory" of the university. The Ferris Faculty Association still does not get the fact that a "no confidence" vote is a historical disaster in the fact that it is an overused, non-effective "tool" and often times is an embarrassment to the initiating organization using it, such as the FFA.

In today's "real world" tactics such as the NC vote, result in nothing more than a theatrical posturing that can make the initiating "actors" out of touch with the realities of public opinion. A continuation of this type of "public statement" does nothing more than discourage parents in sending their offspring to FSU due to the continued use of such tactics, and creates an impression of "professor elitism." May I remind the FFA that the "lifeblood" of the university is the students, not the faculty. The bold statement "we are the guardians of academic integrity" certainly points to this type of status claim.

In my opinion, the realities of life and the type of economy in which we live, certainly should suggest to the members of the FFA E-board, that their actions as it pertains to this "no-confidence vote" could actually create an embarrassment to the self-proclaimed faculty "guardians" of this institution.

The FFA's statement that they need to "stand up to preserve the quality of the education we offer to students" does not indicate to others that this outdated vote "tool" supports any faculty integrity.

CLARE KWANT
Big Rapids

Pioneer

April 11, 2007

Eisler goes out of Way to recognize students and faculty

(Opinion)

I rarely send letters to the editor, and in this case I am representing myself only not Big Rapids Public Schools.

When I came to Big Rapids, Dr. David Eisler was one of the first persons to welcome me to the community. He was gracious and offered any help he could to make my adjustment here a positive one. That gesture has been repeated on many occasions since then.

Dr. Eisler has helped make many improvements at Ferris State University in these last several years. He has shared those accomplishments with all of his staff and the student body. I have never once heard him brag about what he has done; rather, he gives credit to all.

More telling is that just about every time I see Dr. Eisler he is promoting the university, faculty, and ancillary staff in some way or another.

Simply put, his enthusiasm for Ferris State University is contagious.

This is not a letter intended to stir the water, or to point blame at anybody for anything. I don't intend to be an expert on all the ins and outs at Ferris. I do know that Ferris has a fantastic faculty and president.

I hope that this situation does not diminish its standing in the educational world.

All of the people at Ferris have worked too hard for that to happen.

THOMAS M. LANGDON, ED.D
Superintendent, Big Rapids Public Schools Big Rapids

Grand Rapids Press

April 11, 2007

FSU president fires back

In web post, he takes issue with faculty union claims

In a recent union document, Ferris State University President David Eisler was portrayed as inefficient, wasteful and deceitful.

Now, he's fighting back.

Eisler said he spent last weekend compiling a 22-page rebuttal to the allegations the Ferris Faculty Association has been using this week to call for a staff no-confidence vote against him. Those results are due Thursday.

"I used this as an opportunity to get the information and the facts out to the community," Eisler said of his response, posted online.

On Monday, faculty leaders spent more than two hours discussing the union's resolution and Eisler's rebuttal, FFA president Mike Ryan said.

The union's no-confidence resolution stated Eisler's performance was poor in eight areas: contract negotiations, enrollment, management, responsible use of public funds, vision for the future, honesty and integrity, fundraising and diversity.

Anticipating Eisler's response, the union modified part of its resolution - fixing some inaccurate numbers and deleting the diversity section - before presenting it to its membership for a vote.

Eisler said it was frustrating not being able to speak freely in the past because of contract negotiations or specific personnel matters.

Those obstacles were lifted over the weekend. In his response, Eisler talks about how Ferris has maintained its enrollment while other Michigan universities have struggled to do so; how new technology is helping FSU; and he stresses Ferris' accreditation is not at risk, as the union claims.

He also took issue with a statement by a union member who said a strike and no-confidence vote are the two arrows in the union's quiver.

"Weapons exist to harm, while tools exist to build, create and improve," Eisler wrote. "That's the approach we need to continue creating a great university."

Tension between union leaders and administrators has been mounting for months. In August, a last-minute deal averted a faculty strike. The union also has questioned Eisler's decision not to renew the contract of the vice president for academic affairs and other personnel moves.

Ryan said some members have been calling for a no-confidence vote for more than a year. Difficult contract negotiations only made things worse, he said.

"There was a lot of frustration. I told the people, 'Give the president more time, focus on getting a contract,'" he said, adding that, after an agreement was reached, things spiraled downward.

"We need to look for better ways to settle our differences," he said. "The president needs to meet with the faculty. (Resolution) is not going to happen through e-mails."

Eisler agreed: "Once the vote is concluded, whatever the result, we're going to move forward and work on the issues and help the students."

Pioneer

April 12, 2007

No confidence in Eisler

158 of 417 faculty cast ballots against FSU president

A majority of Ferris State University Faculty Association members who participated in the union's vote this week approved a resolution of no confidence in FSU President David Eisler, 158 to 124, according to union officials.

On March 20, the Ferris Faculty Association Executive Board unanimously approved conducting a vote of no confidence in Eisler and approved a draft of the resolution March 27. Voting began following a general union membership meeting Monday and continued until Wednesday, when the ballots were counted.

Of the union's 417 voting members, 282, or 67.6 percent, cast ballots. Pointing to the nearly 68 percent voter turnout, FFA President Mike Ryan said, "I think that makes it a fairly valid kind of response. ...

"We consider 44 percent to be a failing grade," he continued, referring to the votes cast against the resolution and in support of Eisler. "We believe this is a clear signal President Eisler needs to talk to the faculty."

That is exactly what will happen later this week. Union leaders are scheduled to sit down for a discussion with Eisler on Friday. The meeting was set in a telephone conversation between Eisler and Ryan on Wednesday evening when Ryan called to share the vote tallies with Eisler.

Others, however, are not so sure of the clarity the vote sent. Tom Cook, secretary of the Ferris State Board of Trustees, said the vote has no effect.

"The vote of no confidence really doesn't affect anything," Cook said. "We feel the action wasn't warranted or demanded. Thirty-eight percent of the Ferris faculty voted for no confidence. ... The board supported the president very strongly before this vote and supports him after. ... We will continue to seek ways to work with the faculty for our students. The Big Rapids community and campus demonstrated amazing support for Dr. Eisler."

Cook spoke on behalf of the board because chair Art Thebo was dealing with health issues Wednesday evening. Thebo did, however, prepare a statement earlier in the evening: "As chair of the Ferris State University Board of Trustees I wish to release this statement on behalf of our members. I want to again reaffirm the board's confidence and support in the leadership of President David Eisler. The support exhibited by students, alumni, the Big Rapids community and many faculty members make it clear that President Eisler is effectively leading our university.

"This unmerited action by some members of the faculty union was undeserved. We have reviewed the concerns of the FFA and President Eisler has addressed them with the board earlier this year and in a document released to the campus this week. Votes of no confidence have no

standing with the board. In a time of reduced resources from the state, President Eisler has led Ferris State University on a path of increased enrollment, higher academic achievement and greater support.

"The board commends the president for having represented the university with great integrity through a range of challenges. It is the full confidence of our board that he will lead our university successfully in the future."

While the vote may not have affected anything in the board's eyes, it has had some definite outcomes.

"I think this really hasn't worked out as people expected," Eisler said. "There's more support for my leadership - both on campus and in the community - than before the vote began."

Eisler also expressed a wish he believes the community and campus at large share that the union had chosen another avenue to address its concerns.

Ryan is hopeful the meeting between the union and Eisler on Friday will be the first of many.

"The intent was to stimulate the president to talk to the faculty," Ryan said. "This was one test and one polling point. ... Hopefully, we can increase dialogue with the president."

Voting was conducted at four polling places, with union members assigned to voting locations by the college in which they teach. At each location, members had to state their names and be checked against a list, if necessary showing identification, Ryan said. Each person had to sign in on two sheets to vote. Union members voting at the wrong polling place were subject to safeguards to ensure they only voted once and multiple people were present at the vote count.

"We're quite comfortable these are good numbers," Ryan said. The next step for the union will be the meeting with Eisler Friday and informing the membership of the vote tallies, Ryan said.

For Eisler, the vote is over.

"We've already moved on to the next challenge for the university," he said.

Pioneer

April 12, 2007

FFA member calls vote fraud; urges apology

A Ferris State University professor and voting FFA member called the union's vote of no confidence of President David Eisler "fraudulent."

The professor, who agreed to be interviewed by the Pioneer on the condition of anonymity, said, Wednesday's vote tally should be followed by an -apology to Eisler and former Special Assistant to the President and Officer of Minority Affairs Raymond Gant.

In a no confidence resolution, under the heading "Diversity," the FFA leadership wrote: "Whereas, President Eisler has failed to support the efforts of the Minority Affairs Office in enhancing the cultural diversity of the institution, resulting in the resignation of the Special Assistant to the President and Officer of Minority Affairs, who noted on his departure that Ferris State University has "become an institution whose focus has been on the interests of a few"; and"

This paragraph refers to the comments made by Gant to the Ferris State University Board of Trustees in November. It "misrepresents" his position, Gant said, emphasizing the only reason he left the university was to advance his career. A story clarifying Gant's position on diversity issues at the university and FFA President Mike Ryan's admission that the resolution language was incorrect also was published in Friday's edition of the *Pioneer*.

"During the meeting there were questions about whether it was proper to do the vote since some of the original charges against the president were wrong. There were motions made by several people that the election be delayed until it could be done in a more professional manner. We needed a third (of the FFA membership) and there were not enough people at the meeting," the professor said.

Because a quorum of union members was not present Monday, members of the FFA e-board explained it could not entertain a vote from the audience to postpone the poll on the resolution. Ryan said about 103 or 104 union members out of 417 attended the meeting. Additionally, union by-laws require any votes taken at a general membership meeting be announced in advance and this meeting had been billed as an informational meeting.

At the meeting, union leaders announced several changes to the resolution to be voted upon, including the deletion of the entire section headed "Diversity," Ryan said. Other changes included correcting the spelling of some names and the dollar amount relating to the academic affairs budget cut. The changes were made and announced before voting began.

Union leadership agreed to e-mail FFA members a revised resolution at 8 a.m. Tuesday, the professor said.

The e-mail was reportedly sent by the FFA 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, according to the time signature in the professor's e-mail inbox. By the time the e-mail was received, the professor had already cast a vote. The professor worries that many faculty members who did not attend Monday's meeting voted without the knowledge that at least part of the resolution was untrue.

"To make those kinds of statements and then to be in no hurry to correct them ... A lot of people were concerned (at the Monday meeting) `Are we doing the right thing? Are we rushing to judgment,'" the professor said. "We were told at the meeting that the diversity issue was wrong and it was going to be dropped from the resolution. Polls would open at 9 a.m. and they would get us the e-mail at 8 a.m. I got it after I had voted. I would have never known that this was untrue and a misstatement if I hadn't been at the meeting.

"To me this is a fraudulent vote. It's unfair to those who voted and to Dave Eisler and Gant."

The e-mailed resolution did not go out as quickly as expected, Ryan said.

"We planned to send out a copy as soon as we could," he said, adding the resolution went to the person who was to distribute it at 11:30 p.m. Monday, but that person didn't send it until later on Tuesday.

However, the e-mail wasn't the only way the FFA informed its members of the change.

"Copies of the amended resolution were available at the polling places," Ryan said. "There was no intent to deprive anybody (of information)."

Ryan also personally informed members voting at the polling place he worked there had been changes and handed them a copy of the amended resolution. The professor said there were no hard copies at the polling place when the professor voted Tuesday.

Others within the education community are curious about the FFA vote, the professor said. The unflattering attention it has brought to campus has other educators wondering "what is going on over at Ferris?" the professor said. Commenting on the low attendance of the membership meeting the professor said, "I think it shows the lack of connection of the e-board and the general membership of the union. That's just my feeling - one person out of 400.

"It was not a smart thing for us to do at this time, especially now that this whole thing stinks. I think Eisler deserves an apology."

Strong pro-Eisler and anti-Eisler opinions were raised during the two-hour meeting. Those questioning the reasons for holding the vote asked if indeed the union was seeking to oust Eisler rather than "evaluate" him as was stated in letters to the editor by faculty and previous interviews with Ryan.

"That was discussed to a point. In almost every case that was given, the result of a no-confidence vote was that the president left. This was a little bit severe based on what these charges were. I think the e-board was a bit surprised by the voices of dissent," the professor said. "Nothing good is going to come from this."

It is not the policy of the *Pioneer* to publish on-the-record interviews with anonymous sources. The professor did not want to be identified for fear of retribution by other union members.

"I would be ostracized. It has never happened to me, but I have had other faculty here tell me they have had those experiences, to be made 'not comfortable' within their departments," the professor explained. Ryan denied any retaliation on the part of the union.

"I'm not aware of any kind of organized harassment one way or the other," Ryan said. "I don't think anybody was intimidated to vote for or against the resolution. ... I know of no retaliation of any sort. If it's occurring, I certainly want to know about it. ... Certainly, if there's any kind of harassment of any sort, I am certainly four-square against it. I entertain all opinions ... I think differing points of view expounded in public is important."

Ryan pointed to the Monday union meeting as an example. He characterized it as "lively" and said people both for and against the resolution shared their opinions.

"Nobody was shouting anybody down," he said. "It was lively, but I don't consider it intimidating."

The professor's hope is that a new leadership emerges from within the union's ranks. Union members openly questioning the e-board's decision to go ahead with the vote gave the professor hope that the "adversarial" role the FFA has chosen in the past may be changing.

"I've been here for many presidents, and nobody is perfect," said the professor. "I think the first thing is the apology, which is past due. Next, there should be an open meeting with all the principals so they can talk like adults. My message to FFA leaders would be to apologize for the false charges.

"We do have things we need to work on at Ferris. Certainly, there is some validity in the entire list of charges in the resolution, but there are also some absolute misstatements."

Pioneer

April 12, 2007

Seeing support for Eisler, FSU in Lansing (Opinion)

I had the opportunity to go to Lansing on the bus to meet with state legislators. I was impressed with the way Ferris State University and President David Eisler were received at the state Capitol. I hope we as a community and university can give him the same support.

PETE KENT

Big Rapids

Pioneer

April 13, 2007

Vote has accomplished nothing helpful (Opinion)

I do not consider 158 votes out of 417 a majority. Of course not being a member of the FFA, I am not considered the "lifblood" of Ferris, so the FFA is probably not concerned one bit about what I think.

Then again, they don't seem concerned with what hundreds of other people at Ferris think: secretaries, grounds crew, plumbers, carpenters, dining services employees, housing staff, part-timers, administrative assistants, custodians, directors. Each of these groups at Ferris contributes to the overall education of students, each group in a different capacity. According to the 2006-2007 Ferris Fact Book, there are 1989 employees at Ferris State University, not just 417.

If the FFA truly felt that Dave Eisler was demonstrating poor leadership, why didn't they get the consensus of everyone on campus that is affected by his leadership, instead of just a small group consisting of 417 members?

The FFA leadership claims that this was for the benefit of the entire Ferris community to conduct this vote, yet they didn't consult the entire Ferris community in their decision to take this action. Who is the FFA to make that decision alone? Obviously from the way they have described themselves recently, "the lifblood of Ferris, the memory of Ferris," they have decided that what any other employee on campus thinks doesn't have any significant value.

This entire resolution was an embarrassment to Ferris State University, not just to the president. It was filled with half truths, kernels of truth and out right lies. It knocked a world record breaking accomplishment (Rube Goldberg victory) by a group of our students' right out of the headlines in the paper ... shame on you FFA. While I realize that the FFA doesn't control what the newspaper prints, it is well aware of what kinds of publicity a vote of no confidence will create, since they have conducted them so often in the past. Without a second thought to the deserving students in the College of Technology and their national accomplishment, the FFA chose this time (7 months after the contract has been settled) to announce it's resolution.

And what did it accomplish? This Friday the president will meet with FFA members. The president would have met with FFA members, and has offered to, in the past. No temper tantrums were necessary. No bad publicity for Ferris all across the state was necessary. It accomplished nothing positive.

When the FFA leadership says they took this action for the betterment of Ferris, they needed to examine their motives and actions more clearly. I hope certainly hope their "quiver" is finally empty and we can now go back to the business of educating our students. My only fear is how much damage this may have caused for future enrollment. What parent wants to send their child to an institution that appears to be so unstable? So if in the future when enrollment or donor dollars are down, the FFA leadership needs to look inward and take partial responsibility for it. Don't be so quick to cast arrows of blame at the president if this happens. This entire vote of no confidence may have scared potential students and potential donors away.

The FFA leadership can justify their actions with lofty quotes in the newspaper, but the result of this vote was a step backward for the entire Ferris community, and this was reiterated to the e-board repeatedly through letters to the editor in the Pioneer prior to the vote. But the FFA e-board had tunnel vision and refused to reexamine their motives.

Also, this was definitely not a way to "help" the president, nor was it a way of evaluating him as was claimed by FFA leadership in the Pioneer. Arrows are used to attack, not evaluate. In my entire educational experiences and my time in the work force, I have never been graded or evaluated with an arrow from my instructor's/ boss's quiver.

Let's hope we can all move forward now. Let's let the president continue to do the excellent job he is doing for Ferris State University and stop trying to impede him.

PAIGE CLARK
Ferris State University

Pioneer

April 13, 2007

Majority is in Eisler's favor (Opinion)

I read with interest the outcome of the vote by FFA members. It seems that 282 FFA members voted while 135 for whatever reason chose not to vote. From this I draw the conclusion that 259 or 135 plus the 124 who voted "No" at the polls, show a decided majority of the FFA that do not support the union position. The 259 FFA members who did not support the union position is a very significant majority favoring Dr. Eisler. This doesn't seem like a victory to me.

The union leaders have tried to make a case out of the fact that their performance as faculty is periodically evaluated, and they see this a fair exchange in which the faculty evaluates the president.

It was my experience that faculty evaluations were done in private and were not only confidential, but they generally were designed to uncover deficiencies within the program, course supply needs, etc., as well as faculty performance. It would appear that the FFA has a rather warped idea of the meaning of fairness.

Now Mike Ryan is quoted as saying that they are looking forward to meetings with Dr. Eisler. Dr. Eisler's door has always been open for any discussion in behalf of the university. If Ryan had been an effective leader, he would have requested such meetings without all the posturing and confrontation on the part of the union. Now such meetings will be had in an adversarial climate, which is unfortunate. If the union wanted to act in behalf of the university and its welfare, they stumbled badly.

It is encouraging to note that the great majority of the FFA membership did not support the union position.

JOHN R. FLEMING
FSU Professor Emeritus

Pioneer

April 13, 2007

Ferris trustees back president

Board chairman says faculty no-confidence vote has no effect

Ferris State University trustees continue to throw their support behind President David Eisler, despite faculty's approval of a no-confidence vote against the school's leader.

"Votes of no-confidence have no standing with the board," Chairman Arthur Lebo said in a statement.

"In a time of reduced resources from the state, President Eisler has led Ferris State University on a path of increased enrollment, higher academic achievement and greater support."

The board's backing comes after the Ferris Faculty Association on Wednesday approved a no-confidence resolution with 56 percent approval from those voting. The vote is seen largely as a faculty statement, as it has no practical effect on Eisler because he reports solely to the trustees.

Of the 417 eligible voters, 282 - or 68 percent of the membership - participated in the vote.

The union had accused Eisler of lacking leadership and questioned his use of public funds, among other issues.

Board Secretary Tom Cook said trustees reviewed the union's concerns more than a month ago. He said the union did not have all of its facts right, and Eisler recently addressed the other issues.

For example, Eisler has hired a consultant to come up with a strategic plan for the university, Cook said.

"We were disappointed with the fact that the union went ahead with the no-confidence vote when the issues had been addressed," Cook said. "The board supports the president. We think he's doing a fine job. There are always things that can be improved, and we'll continue to work on that."

Three members of Ferris' board live in West Michigan: James Haveman Jr., of Grand Haven; Gary Granger, of Byron Township; and Ronald Snead, of Greenville.

Union President Mike Ryan and Eisler planned to meet today for what Ryan hoped would be a serious discussion to address the union's concerns.

"We believe (support of) 44 percent is a failing grade," Ryan said of Wednesday's vote. But Eisler said he was satisfied with it.

"I don't think this worked the way it was planned. The support for me as the president is much bigger now than when the vote began," he said, adding the experience was a good teaching moment.

"I've learned a lot. I've learned that communication is a two-way street. That facts and data are the way to respond. And (before the vote), I didn't realize there was so much support for the university."

Pioneer

April 14 & 15, 2007

Tour the world Sunday on the campus of FSU

The Ferris State University International Student Organization will be celebrating its 19th annual International Festival of Cultures from 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday, April 15, in the Rankin Center Dome Room.

The festival, in collaboration with the Asian and Hispanic Student Organizations and the support of the Finance Division of Student Government, aims to educate people about other cultures.

This year FSU students and faculty from over 30 different countries will display traditional crafts, clothing, facts and photos of their countries and cultures.

Another popular attraction to the festival is the food. There will be traditional dishes from 20 different countries provided by students and faculty for visitors to sample. International students also will perform traditional dances, as well as teach songs and games from their countries.

"It's an opportunity to get people from the community as well as students to meet with our international students," Festival Advisor Luzia Tartari said. "The food is certainly one of the more popular parts of the festival, because it's not food you can get in Big Rapids."

Tartari said it is wise for visitors to arrive at the festival before 3 p.m. if they want to sample some of the food.

"There might not be very much food left if they show up late," Tartari said. "There are so many things to do and see, but the food is always in demand."

Event Organizer Natalia Pinto said the event is designed to give people throughout the area a broader perspective of the world.

"The goal of the festival is to bring education and diversity to our campus and community," Pinto said. "It's important for people to know that there's a world outside of own."

Pinto said the event has become widely recognized and successful across the campus and community with an average of 1,500 people attending every year, including 120 student volunteers this year.

"It's a great event," said Pinto, who is from Brazil. "I think the more aware we are of each other's cultures, the better we will be able to understand each other."

Entertainment also will be provided for children with an international arts and crafts section, where they can color African masks, Mexican maracas and learn how to make small paper crafts from Asian and Latin American countries. Admission to the event is free, with food samples on sale for 50 cents a piece. Students receive three free food samples.

Pioneer

April 14 & 15, 2007

FSU students take university to a higher level (Editorial)

Ferris State University's Rube Goldberg Machine team will appear on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" Friday, April 20. The ABC talk show host will be talking to technical engineering students who won a "David vs. Goliath" confrontation March 31 with other universities including Purdue, a renowned engineering school where the competition originated.

When they appear on the show in Hollywood Friday, they undoubtedly will have to demonstrate their winning entry that not only defeated a team from Purdue, but smashed a currently recognized record set by the Indiana institution of higher education.

The FSU team's entry set a new record of 345 steps to squeeze an orange and pour its juice into a glass. Purdue's current record for "Largest Rube Goldberg" involves only 125 steps. The Ferris team's effort is being submitted to Guinness World Records to grab the record from the Boilermakers.

Yes, tiny little Ferris State University has claimed a slice of fame by beating up on a powerful Big Ten school and many other competitors from around the country - not in a sporting event, but in a battle between the ears. The six-member FSU team has offered evidence to the rest of the nation that it can compete academically with institutions of higher education around the country, many with "better" credentials and larger student bodies. What a lift for a university whose own faculty seem to be disillusioned with the efforts of its administration to lift FSU name recognition in academic circles.

The team has already appeared on NBC's "Today" show and stories of its accomplishments have appeared in newspapers around the country.

So, when they appear in Hollywood Friday they'll just be adding icing to a cake of notoriety that will continue to boost the reputation of our little "college on the hill" where its students are proving that they can compete with the best in the U.S.A.

Pioneer

April 14 &15, 2007

Shame on Pioneer, anonymous FSU professor

My name is Susan Behler and I teach third grade at Hillcrest Elementary in Big Rapids. Every year for at least the past 10 years I have taught, in my classroom, the topic of Core Democratic Values. I have enjoyed every year. I love being able to get young children excited about living in America.

We discuss what our country has done to protect the rights of its citizens. We discuss the freedoms afforded to each and every one of us. I teach my students that they have rights *and* responsibilities. I tell them how lucky they are to be able to express their opinions without fear of reprisal.

The discussion in the paper recently concerning the vote of no confidence at FSU has been tense and problematic to some. I am sorry for the anxiety it has caused. And yet, I smile, because to me, it is the American way of life at its best. We are free to disagree with each other. We are free to express our own opinions, and be held accountable for what we choose to say. We are free to write letters to the editor of our local paper - and be heard by others. What? We disagreed and yet no one got a gun and shot someone? No one committed suicide and blew people up? Bravo, America! Thank you for following the legal paths laid out for you. Thank you for an excellent example of my rights as a U.S. citizen.

And then I read Thursday's paper and my smile disappeared.

Editors of the *Pioneer* - shame on you. Ferris professor who would not identify yourself - shame on you.

The Ferris professor acted like a "rat" and the *Pioneer* fed him the cheese. You, the *Pioneer*, refuse to publish any letter without a signature and yet you published this person's remarks! They were not necessary. This was not a criminal case where a witness had to be protected. It was not good journalism. You took the low road for sensationalism. You took the low road to promote *your* opinion of the FSU situation. You have sunk to the level of the tabloids. Shame on both of you.

I still believe in the strength and goodness of our Democratic society. I will still teach Core Democratic Values to my students.

I am choosing to exercise my right of free speech with this letter. And I am signing my name to the words I say.

SUSAN D. BEHLER
Big Rapids

Pioneer

April 17, 2007

FSU to present honorary doctorates

The two recipients will speak during ceremonies May 5.

Ferris State University will confer honorary doctorate degrees upon William Dansby of East Lansing and John Fenn of Sterling Heights on the second day of the university's spring, commencement May 5.

William Dansby has been executive vice president of the Michigan Optometric Association since 1967. During his 40 years at the helm of the association, membership has doubled in the organization and MOA assets have increased from less than \$25,000 to more than 2.5 million. Dansby spearheaded the efforts that led Michigan lawmakers to pass legislation allowing optometrists to use diagnostic and therapeutic drugs in their practice, resulting in better care for sufferers of glaucoma and other eye diseases.

Dansby helped establish the Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University in 1975. Thanks to his efforts, MCO graduates are an integral part of providing state-of-the-art eye care to residents of Michigan and beyond.

For many years, Dansby has served as a member of the MCO's advisory committee, working to help secure general and capital outlay funding and accreditation for a new building.

As editor of the Michigan Optometrist, Dansby has worked with MCO's administration, faculty and students to promote the College's activities, publish articles, advise students and assist graduates.

John R. Fenn founded Fenn & Associates in 1978. The company is a leading land surveying, civil engineering and consulting firm, serving industrial, commercial, professional, residential and institutional clients. The Michigan Society of Professional Surveyors named Fenn Surveyor of the Year in 1998, and he is recognized as an honorary member of Lambda Sigma national honor society.

In 2005 the University dedicated the John R. and Lynda D. Fenn Digital Photogrammetry and GIS Laboratory, made possible through the Fenns' generosity.

Fenn has served as president of the National Society of Professional Surveyors and chaired the NSPS' Practice Committee. He serves as a member of the Surveying Engineering Program Advisory Committee at Ferris and has been a member of curriculum advisor - committees at a number of other Michigan institutes of higher learning.

Dansby will speak at the 12:30 p.m. May 5 ceremony to graduates of the Michigan College of Optometry and College of Education and Human Services, while Fenn will speak at the 4 p.m. ceremony to graduates of the College of Technology.

The university is expecting approximately 1,400 graduates to participate in commencement ceremonies.

Grand Rapids Press

April 17, 2007

Ferris shooting seen as 'different scenario'

Just over 27 years ago, Philip Sawa was the student who saw a classmate toting a gun in a plastic bag, and rushed to alert campus officials at Ferris State University. He waited in an adjacent room for help to arrive.

Moments later, Tim Hans and some 30 other students watched in horror as a distraught 20-year-old pumped six bullets from a 9 mm pistol into the professor instructing their cost accounting class that Wednesday afternoon.

Hans recalls the teacher imploring "Help me," and slumping to the floor. Sawa, in the room next door, heard the bullets ring out. In exiting the building, he glimpsed the body.

The question is: What effect did yesterday's massacre at Virginia Tech have on those two eyewitnesses?

The answers may surprise you.

Sawa and Hans, now both 47, were in the same building when Tom Kakonis Jr. entered Robert Brauer's classroom and killed the 34-year-old teacher.

Kakonis, then 20, was charged with first-degree murder, but eventually was found to be innocent by reason of insanity. He spent seven months in state and private psychiatric hospitals before being freed.

A motive for the deed never was officially confirmed, but authorities know Brauer had informed Kakonis a day before the shooting that he earned a failing grade of 52 percent on an accounting exam.

Brauer, married two years to a secretary working that day in the same building, was struck in the chest by four of the six shots. Kakonis was arrested without incident.

Hans, who now lives near Rockford and owns his own business, says the events of Monday didn't even trigger a memory of that afternoon in Big Rapids until I phoned him and advanced the possibility.

"It didn't even enter my mind," he said of the 1980 shooting. He characterized the Virginia Tech tragedy as "a totally different scenario."

The only lasting effect the Ferris State shooting has on him is tied to the way he picks out a seat in a crowded room or classroom setting. He wants to be able to see the doorways. "I subconsciously position myself," he said, "and I know that's why."

Sawa, who hails from Detroit and now lives in Chicago and works for McKesson Corp., watched continuing coverage of the Virginia Tech massacre while in Atlanta on business.

But it's not because he felt especially affected on account of what happened nearly three decades ago. "It's not that I had any flashback to that day," he said, "but it was interesting to me because I was involved in something like that."

Sawa said the Ferris killing has made him more conscious of his surroundings, especially when he is with wife and two daughters.

Others deeply affected

What's intriguing is that two people who taught at Ferris in 1980 but were not near Brauer's classroom when he was killed were stirred profoundly in comparing his death to the 33 who perished yesterday.

"The following night, it hit me hard, because I realized that the room in which the shooting took place was my room," recalled Edward Dorman, who in 1980 was a part-time instructor at FSU.

"I can't begin to tell the grief and fear that struck me then," said Dorman, 63, who now teaches full-time at Ferris. "Today, I couldn't help that my mind flashed back to that day when that took place. It brought it back fresh again."

Richard Santer remembers, too. Now retired at 69, Santer was teaching four buildings away when someone informed him that there was a shooting. He confirmed it with campus police, then informed the associate dean of the School of General Education.

It was Thomas Kakonis Sr., the shooter's father.

"He did not say anything," Santer remembers. "He just kind of nodded."

Santer wasn't aware of the bloodbath at Virginia Tech until a daughter called Monday afternoon.

"So sad, and disappointed," he said. "We have serious behavior problems in the country. What is triggering this anger that leads to the wanton killing of innocent people, and in what should be one of our safest environments?"

Pioneer

April 18, 2007

Ferris students react to college shooting

Ferris state University students reacted to the Virginia Tech massacre with feelings of grief, while questioning their own sense of security while living in a college town.

"This sort of thing could happen anywhere," student Todd McGee said. "That's one the risks in being part of a free society."

Student Briana Richardson said the random nature of the killings was what she found most shocking.

"In past school shootings it was at a high school where the student knew and saw the other students on a daily basis," Richardson said. "This just seemed more random, which is even more troubling."

Students also questioned the university's handling of the emergency and whether it did enough to warn students and protect them after the first burst of gunfire.

"You have no choice but to question the university's approach," student Justin Osentoski said. "It was too late by the time the warnings had gone out to students. It's just such a terrible thing to have happened."

Despite the incident, Osentoski said he still feels safe being on the FSU campus.

"Ferris has pretty good security," Osentoski said. "You do the best you can, but you can only do so much in a situation like the one yesterday (Tuesday)."

McGee added that the incident at Virginia Tech will likely open up a debate about gun control and other safety issues.

"You talk about all the measures you can take about keeping the campus safe," McGee said.

"But you can only talk about those issues for so long before you get into the whole gun banning issue. I think the most important thing is for people to stick together during this tough time."

Pioneer

April 19, 2007

Life-saving efforts of women are honored

Duo offered aid to Ferris student who collapsed at the Student Rec Center.

When you're given a 5 percent chance to survive due to an emergency heart condition, you need all the help you can get. Fortunately, Ferris State University student Brian Gilman, who collapsed during a workout at the FSU Student Recreation Center, had plenty of people ready and willing to save his life.

The people who were responsible for saving Gilman's life were recognized for their heroic actions by FSU President David Eisler and FSU Department of Public Safety Captain Marty Bledsoe on Wednesday at a ceremony in the recreation center.

In late January, Gilman, who collapsed due to Sudden Arrhythmia Death Syndrome, was quickly responded to by FSU student Kaeley Olsen and alumna Jill Newberry, who rushed to him and began chest compressions. Within minutes, Ferris DPS Officer Bill Saunders administered shocks with an Automatic External Defibrillator.

The conditions responsible for SADS cause a cardiac arrest by bringing on a disturbance in the heart's rhythm, even though the person has no structural heart disease.

Gilman also received help from students and recreation center employees Jenna Yancich, Stevie DeLaney and Audra Pera, who responded to Newberry and Olsen's request for help in dialing 911 and retrieving life-saving equipment.

"I'm very thankful that so many of them were able to help me when they did," Gilman said. "Their quick response made all the difference." People who suffer due to heart rhythm abnormalities like Gilman's normally have about a 5 percent chance of survival if gone undetected. Gilman's father, Arnold, said the actions of those who helped save Gilman cannot be overstated.

"It's not that they had the know-how to help save his life," Arnold said. "It's that they had the willingness to help him immediately. Without the early response, he might not be alive, or functional."

Gilman is still recovering from the effects of SADS, but said he hopes to be at 100 percent in the next few weeks.

"I've got three more weeks of therapy," Gilman said. "Right now I'm taking a driver's course so I can be on the road and driving again." Newberry said it was nice to see Gilman again under different circumstances.

"I hadn't heard anything about how he was doing until shortly after all of it happened," Newberry said. "It's nice to see that he's doing all right now."

Also receiving recognition for their actions were members of the Big Rapids DPS Fire Division and Mecosta County Emergency Medical Services who helped in getting Gilman to the hospital.

Bledsoe said the incident was another example of how help can be found where it is unexpected.

"This is what public safety is about," Bledsoe said. "Public safety is everywhere. It's wonderful that the people who assisted Brian had the skills to help him the way they did."

Pioneer

April 19, 2007

FSU stands to lose \$4.5 million in House version of 2007 budget

Hundreds of Michigan residents swarmed the state Capitol on Wednesday, adding their voices to what already is a noisy debate about the state's government budget problems.

Groups opposed to tax increases warned lawmakers and Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm that they should fix the state's budget problems without asking them to pay more. Educators and arts groups lobbied to avoid cuts to schools and other programs, even if that means taxes must be raised.

The competing interests congregated outside the Capitol as lawmakers met in committee rooms inside the downtown Lansing building.

One area that Tuesday's proposed budget cuts by the House will affect is higher education, with roll backs or delayed state aid payments for state universities.

Ferris State University President David Eisler said the proposed cuts made by the House would not have an affect on vital programs at the university, despite the possibility of losing \$4.48 million.

"Even though the amount is larger than we expected, we plan ahead for things like these," Eisler said. "We're not going to be reducing personnel, we're not going to alter our academic quality, and we're not going to raise tuition." Eisler added that while a decision hasn't been made on the budget, the proposed cuts by the House are disappointing nonetheless.

"I'm disappointed that the House didn't reflect the governor's plan in terms of support for higher education," Eisler said. "The scary part is by the time a decision is made, there will only be one-sixth of the budget year remaining."

Organizers led the anti-tax crowd in cheers of "They want our dough. We say heck no!" They carried signs that read "The power to tax is the power to destroy."

Educators were making the same arguments Wednesday, saying steps must be taken to avoid cuts to funding for K-12 schools, universities and community colleges.

Some lobbied lawmakers indoors. Others held up signs outside reading "Invest in Our Kids" and "No More Cuts."

So far, Granholm, the Senate and House have agreed on only about one-third of a \$1 billion combined deficit in the state's general and school aid funds for the budget year that began in October. And the deficit is likely to grow because the state isn't bringing in as much tax revenue & expected because of a sluggish economy.

Democrats would like to see tax increases as part of the budget solution, saying the state can't cut its way out of the deficit without gutting vital programs.

Republicans disagree, saying there is more government waste to cut. Both the Democrat-led House and Republican-controlled Senate have each passed their own versions of plans to start eliminating budget deficits for this fiscal year. While that is a sign of progress, the plans passed by the two chambers are quite different - and Granholm has her own proposals to try and fix the budget situation.

"We're pleased the House has moved forward a plan so negotiations can begin," Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop of Rochester said that fact that the House has passed some budget legislation "is a positive step forward and breaks a major logjam" in the budget process.

He noted differences in philosophies, however, about how the issue ultimately should be resolved.

"My colleagues and I will work quickly to thoroughly examine the details in the Houses long-awaited plan," Bishop said in a statement. "We expect negotiations with the House and administration to proceed in a timely manner and we will move quickly to negotiate a final resolution

In another budget-related issue, Senate Republicans planned to announce legislation Thursday that would let local governments and school districts pool employees' health insurance plans in an attempt to lower rising health costs.

Pioneer

April 19, 2007

FSU leaders move forward after vote

Ferris State University campus leaders have begun to move forward after the faculty union's vote of no confidence in FSU President David Eisler last week.

Members of the Ferris Faculty Association voted on a no confidence resolution April 9 through 11. More than 67 percent of the faculty cast ballots, resulting in a vote of no confidence by a 158-124 margin.

On Friday, Eisler and members of his administrative team met with FFA President Mike Ryan and other union leaders.

"We're attempting to create a dialogue with the president," Ryan said. "(Communication) certainly not only could improve, it's essential it improves."

The meeting "was a good first step," Eisler said.

"There was progress made and we agreed to meet again," he said, adding he was "hopeful" that a schedule would be worked out soon.

The vote of no confidence has no effect on Eisler's job status because the FSU Board of Trustees controls whether or not the president's contract is extended.

FFA Executive Board members unanimously approved conducting a vote of no confidence in Eisler on March 20 and approved a draft of the resolution March 27. Issues included in the resolution covered eight areas: bargaining, enrollment, mismanagement, irresponsible use of public funds, vision for the future, lack of honesty and integrity, fund raising and diversity. The diversity section was later dropped due to clarity issues with the text.

Pioneer

April 19, 2007

Ferris to host Virginia Tech memorial service

Ferris State University will have a memorial service for the victims of the shootings at Virginia Tech at 11 a.m. today at the southern edge of the University quad near Clark Hall.

Minister and Ferris Alumnae La Mira King will open the ceremony with welcoming comments, prayer and introduction of Ferris President David Eisler, who will also make remarks. Other speakers at the event include Ferris Department of Public Safety Director Martin Bledsoe; Birkham Health and Counseling Center Director Paul Sullivan; and Student Government representatives Libby Schmidt and Carnel Richardson.

Also, students will recite the victims' names and there will be a moment of silent followed by the tolling of the carillon bells. There will be a banner that those in attendance can sign to express their condolences. After the service, the banner will be sent to Virginia Tech as a sign of support.

Ferris Students, faculty, staff and community members are all invited to attend.

Pioneer

April 20, 2007

FSU spring concert set for Sunday

The Ferris State University West Central Concert Band directed by Richard Scott Cohen will perform at 4 p.m. Sunday at G. Mennen Williams Auditorium the FSU campus.

Admission is free and the event is open to the public. For assistance with attending this event, please call (231) 591-3676.

This year's Spring Concert by the WCCB features a very special collection of nostalgic and new music commemorating the 100th year of music instruction at FSU. Ferris' traditional Alma Mater and Fight Song will be performed with vocalist Rachel Schumann. Everett J. Allen's brand new work "Suite for Band" will also be premiered at the concert.

Of special interest is the second performance ever of "Woodbridge," a musical tribute to Woodbridge N. Ferris, composed in 1999 for FSU by Ferris music professor Harry Dempsey. The piece will feature narration by FSU President David Eisler.

Additional pieces composed for Ferris by Dempsey and others will also be featured, as well as period music from 100 years ago by Henry Fillmore and John Philip Sousa. FSU student and Big Rapids native Jeff Jernstadt will be the featured euphonium soloist on Sousa's waltz, "I've Made My Plans for the Summer."

The program will include the following works: "Fanfare from Suite for Band" by Everett J. Allen, "Prelude" by John Zdechlik, "I've Made My Plans for the Summer" by John Philip Sousa, "Woodbridge" by Harry Dempsey, "Ferris Fidelity" by Graham T. Overgard, "Fighting Bulldogs" by Graham T. Overgard, "Ferris Fantasy" by Harry Dempsey and "Miss Trombone" by Henry Fillmore.

The FSU West Central Concert Band (the "WCCB") is currently celebrating its 15th Concert Season. It is comprised of talented musicians from the area, including Ferris students, adult community members from throughout West Central Michigan, and talented musicians from area high school music programs.

The WCCB is sponsored by FSU as part of its "Music for Life!" program, and presents a series of varied and diverse concerts throughout the concert season.

Music performance opportunities at Ferris State University are designed to supplement and enrich the lives of students by assisting them in making the transition from the high school musical setting to the world of adult amateur musical ensembles. FSU students can continue to develop their musical skills and be prepared for a rewarding musical life after college" by participating in Ferris' musical ensembles that include both university students and members of the community - the format of the majority of community ensembles throughout the country.

Contact the FSU Music Center at (231) 591-2501 for more information.

Pioneer

April 20, 2007

Cleaning up local waterways

Ferris students pick up trash in Muskegon River, Mitchell Creek.

Spring is historically a time to clean both inside and outside.

Recently, Ferris State University Instructor Cindy Fitzwilliams-Heck gave her students an opportunity to do some outdoor cleaning by dividing 55 students from her nature study class into four groups to clean areas along Mitchell Creek and the Muskegon River within the City of Big Rapids.

Mitchell Creek and the Muskegon River are integral waterways within the city and Fitzwilliams-Heck wanted her class to experience first-hand the importance of keeping these waterways free from trash.

Trash is not only unsightly, but is a source of pollution to waterways and a breeding place for mosquitoes. Animals also can become injured or die when they are entrapped by trash.

The FSU students collected more than 250 pounds of trash while they recorded the different plants, birds, mammals and fungus they observed. They found the most abundant type of trash was plastic bags and bottles.

"I'm amazed at how much trash the students collected. The areas didn't look that littered." said Terry Stilson, program coordinator for the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly (MRWA). The MRWA helped organize the cleanup and provided pizza for the participating students. The City of Big Rapids provided trash bags and gloves.

The MRWA is a nonprofit organization whose mission is "to preserve, protect and enhance the natural, historic and cultural resources of the Muskegon River Watershed through educational and scientific initiatives while supporting positive economic development, agricultural and quality of life initiatives of organizations working in the river watershed."

If you would like more information about the MRWA, contact the MRWA at (231) 591-2324 or visit the Web site at www.mrwa.org.

Grand Rapids Press

April 20, 2007

Ferris State team's machine gains national attention

Rube Goldberg award puts students on `Today' show, `Jimmy Kimmel Live'

The Ferris State University Rube Goldberg team started with a number: 300.

Their goal - finding an elaborate way to make a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice, using no fewer than 300 steps, as part of a competition.

With a remote-controlled car, a Slinky, dominoes, a Jenga tower, a hobby horse and many other items, the team built a complicated contraption that has won a national contest in March.

Tonight, the team - whose members mostly are from West Michigan - will appear on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" to demonstrate how the machine works. The show airs at midnight on ABC.

The charge of a Rube Goldberg team is "to take a simple task and make it complex," said Tom Hollen, a Ferris State associate professor of mechanical engineering, a faculty adviser to the team.

Goldberg was a cartoonist famous for his drawings of fantastical machines that perform basic tasks at an unnecessary degree of complexity. (Think of the old Mousetrap board game.) Rube Goldberg teams, which exist at a growing number of colleges nationwide, bring such machines to life.

Last month, Ferris' five-member team won this year's national competition, defeating about 20 other groups, including the squad from Purdue University, traditionally a powerhouse in these events. The team appeared Easter Sunday on the "Today" show.

Rube Goldberg teams have been competing on a national level for several years, gradually increasing in number and exposure. The Ferris team started competing at nationals four years ago.

"The first year, we showed up with a small machine, not knowing what to expect, and we took second," said team member Matt Tomaszewski, of Byron Township.

At last year's competition, Ferris' machine malfunctioned, and Purdue won.

Their goal this year was to not only snatch Purdue's title, but also its world record of 125 steps for a machine.

With its 345-step juice maker, Ferris won the competition and beat the record nearly threefold.

"To me, it was very satisfying after four years, starting the team from the ground up and being such a small engineering school." said Tom Sybrandy, the team's captain.

The students found out last fall what their assigned task would be, although the machine itself was under construction since the summer. Contest rules stipulate the machine must be smaller than 5 feet high by 6 feet wide and deep, and it must complete its task in a specified amount of time.

"There's a lot of imagination involved," Sybrandy said.

While the competition is somewhat fanciful in nature, the machines and their builders are serious. The Ferris students, all of whom study some aspect of engineering, worked on it for about 3,000 hours, applying principles of design, engineering and problem-solving. The machine was tested extensively to guarantee it would run smoothly during competition.

The team also includes co-adviser Dan Wanick, an associate professor of CAD drafting and tool design; student Mike Dunakin, of Grand Rapids; student James Travis III, of Cedar Springs; and Fred Rienecke, of Muskegon (who is unable to travel to the "Kimmel" appearance because he is stationed in Iraq).

Hollen said the Rube Goldberg competitions have been beneficial for the students involved, and the victory has attracted some attention for Ferris' engineering programs.

"This has been an experience for us, winning this thing," he said. "It's been good for the university."

Muskegon Chronicle

April 20, 2007

Contraption engineer on patrol, not talk shows

Fred Reinecke is serving the U.S. National Guard in Iraq with his band of brothers, making it impossible for him to share the media spotlight with his other team back home.

Reinecke, 22, of Fruitport Township, was in his fourth year as an engineering student at Ferris State University when he got his marching orders in February for Iraq.

His FSU "Rube Goldberg Competition" team recently won a national tournament for an invention Reinecke helped build. It's a contraption fashioned from a toy train, a Slinky, a Jack-in-the-box and other items that combine to make an orange juice squeezer.

The impressive part: It takes 345 steps to squeeze an orange – qualifying the contraption for the Guinness Book of World Records.

The team is hitting the national television talk-show circuit displaying the invention, but without Reinecke. He was called up and sent to Iraq before the final competition.

The team, which beat perennial powerhouse Purdue to take the prestigious Rube award, appeared on NBC's Today show on Easter Morning.

The next stop for the Ferris State Rube Goldberg team: ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" tonight.

The competition is named after Rueben Garret L. Goldberg, a famous cartoonist whose claim to fame came to be known as Rube Goldberg machines. The contraptions were extremely complex, but served simple tasks – like squeezing orange juice.

The Ferris State juicer is set up for a spot in the Guinness Book of World Records for the "Largest Rube Goldberg." Purdue was the previous record holder for a machine with 125 steps.

Reinecke's father, Fred, said the Fruitport High School graduate is not unhappy to be in Iraq and does not mind missing out on the glory of winning the award.

"He's not disappointed," the father said of the son. "He's surprised by the whole thing. When he found out they beat Purdue, he was real excited about it."

The two talked on the telephone Thursday morning.

Reinecke, whose National Guard unit is based in Big Rapids, is serving on a security detail with Iraqi police in southern Baghdad.

"He's a very upbeat guy and he's happy to serve," Reinecke's dad said. "He wanted to go (to Iraq). He said 'there's times when it's boring' and I tell him 'that's good because exciting is when bad stuff happens.'"

Reinecke said he'll watch Jimmy Kimmel Live and he'll record it for his son.

Tom Hollen, associate Professor of mechanical engineering at Ferris State, served as an advisor for the Rube team. Hollen recently sent Reinecke an e-mail to share the good news.

"We want to let you know that the team is thinking of you," Hollen wrote.

Even though the competition has its humorous side, school officials said it takes dedication and engineering skills to pull off such a feat.

The Ferris team spent 3,000 hours building its juicer.