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Detroit Free Press, South Bend Tribune

August 21, 2006

Ferris State faculty authorizes strike

BIG RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) - Faculty members at Ferris State University have authorized their union bargainers to call a strike if the school rejects its latest offer.

Classes at the Big Rapids school are scheduled to begin Aug. 28.

More than half of the Ferris Faculty Association's 400 members met Sunday when ballots regarding a strike authorization were cast, said Michael Ryan, FFA president.

Ryan told the Pioneer that 92 percent of those in attendance were in favor of authorizing the bargaining team to call a strike on the basis of unfair labor practices exercised by school trustees.

"The goal in all of this is to get a fair and equitable contract," Ryan said. "What the faculty are saying today is they don't want to strike, but they will. After six months of negotiations, the faculty are in no mood to go to work without a contract."

Ferris State spokesman Marc Sheehan said the university has made plans to deal with a strike.

"We have a plan in place, but the general assumption is the semester will begin as scheduled," Sheehan said. "Should there be any work stoppage, the university's expectation is it will be short in duration and would not have an impact on our students getting their degrees."

The teachers want 4 percent pay increases each of the next five years, and they want the school to cover 90 percent of health care costs, Ryan said.

Both sides will meet with a mediator Saturday.

The last Ferris State faculty strike was in 1997, and it lasted 4 1/2 days.

9 & 10 News

August 21, 2006

Negotiations Could Lead to Strike at Ferris State University

Faculty members at Ferris State University gave their bargainers the green light to call a strike. More than half of the school's 400 members met yesterday 92% of them voted to authorize bargainers to strike if they --hose. Six months of negotiations failed to produce a contract for the faculty members. A Ferris spokesman says the university has made plans to deal with a strike, but expect the semester to begin as scheduled. Classes are set to start a week from today.

Grand Rapids Press

August 21, 2006

No deal; Ferris nearer to strike

Faculty authorizes union leaders to call for strike vote

Ferris State University administrators and faculty are running out of time to resolve a contract dispute after negotiations failed to produce a deal Sunday.

After four hours of negotiations, Ferris Faculty Association members authorized union leaders to call for a strike vote if an agreement is not reached in next weekend's negotiations. Classes begin Aug. 28

"We will not work without a contract," said Mike Ryan, president of the Ferris Faculty Association. "We remain willing and able to meet with the board... but the faculty is in no mood to work without a contract."

About 250 of 450 FFA members attended Sunday's meeting. A final vote would have to be approved by union members Sunday before a strike could take place. The last mediation session is scheduled for next weekend.

University leaders are "cautiously optimistic that with additional effort on the part of both parties, an agreement can be reached before classes begin," University spokeswoman Shelly Armstrong said in a news release.

Armstrong said administrators anticipated the FFA would vote to authorize a strike, but "we don't see this an impediment to successfully completing these negotiations."

Ryan said the union offered to pay 10 percent of the cost of health care and asked for an annual 4 percent raise for the next five years. The PFA previously asked the board to cover all insurance costs and give faculty a 5 percent salary increase.

Currently, professors pay about 40 percent of health care costs.

The five-year offer includes a 2 percent pay increase for this year and 2.5 percent increases for subsequent years.

Professors have criticized Ferris President David Eisler for not getting involved in the negotiations and not attending a welcoming ceremony for faculty scheduled for today.

Marc Sheehan, a Ferris spokesman, said Eisler does not want to interfere with negotiations.

"The president is not going to micro-manage the negotiations," Sheehan said.

When contract negotiations stalled in 2002, faculty walked out of then president Bill Sederburg's welcoming speech. That year union members were ready to strike when a last minute deal was reached.

Gaylord Herald Times

August 22, 2006

Kirtland, Ferris sign credit transfer agreement

ROSCOMMON - Kirtland Community College has signed articulation agreements with Ferris State University which will assist students who wish to transfer into Ferris' respiratory care or medical laboratory technology programs.

The agreements aid Kirtland students by outlining the courses they should take if they wish to transfer to Ferris to earn an associate in applied science degree in either of these two programs. Ferris also offers a path to a certificate in phlebotomy early in the medical laboratory program, which allows students to work as a phlebotomist while they are completing their degree requirements.

Students interested in the respiratory care program would take 28 credits toward their program at Kirtland; those interested in the medical laboratory technology degree could take approximately 40 credits toward their degree at Kirtland.

Cadillac News

August 22, 2006

Looking for a job?: Cadillac area attracting businesses, jobs

Whether it is a new restaurant, retail store, hospital or even an ethanol plant, the Cadillac area is doing something most of the state wants to - attracting businesses and jobs.

There are jobs where extensive education or certification is needed as well as jobs where a good attitude and friendly smile are the only requirements.

One place that is expecting to employ 60 to 80 people for a Sept. 11 grand opening is the new Culver's in Cadillac. These jobs include full-time and part-time positions ranging from management to cash register and cooking, according to Cadillac Culver's Owner/operator Jim Gerry.

"All we need is a good attitude, good smile and a hard work ethic. Our management team has been hired but we will be hiring crew chiefs," Gerry said. "It will be continuous but we will always accept walk-ins."

A retailer also is going to call Cadillac its new home.

Peebles is scheduled for a Sept. 20 opening and Human Resources Director Tim Moyer said the store should employ between 15 to 18 part-time and full-time positions.

"What we typically do is hire between 40 and 50 associates but we over-hire," Moyer said. "Two to four weeks after the opening we will employ three to five full-time associates and 10 to 12 part-time associates."

At Mercy Hospital in Cadillac, there is a constant search for talent, according to Human Resource Director Peter Lanc.

Through various ties with colleges and universities like Baker College and Ferris State, Lanc said the idea is to have the employment pipeline always flowing. Likewise, he said the hospital is always willing to take applications for most positions.

"Health care is the biggest employer in Michigan, it isn't automotive or manufacturing. For youngsters, health care is up there for opportunities," he said. "We are constantly looking for talent in the area. It is one of the things where you don't want the pipeline to be dry. We always have contacts and links to fill positions."

A new industry that will create jobs and produce alternative fuels also is coming to the Cadillac area.

NextGen Energy LLC of Southfield announced McBain was chosen as the location of the new \$106 million plant. NextGen also looked at Cadillac, Kingsley, Gaylord and Manistee as possible locations.

The plant, which is likely to begin production in early 2008, is expected to create 40 jobs in the community and affect others as well.

Pioneer

August 22, 2006

FFA Prepares to Strike

Photo caption: Getting ready for the picket line: Before being interviewed by a television station Monday afternoon in Big Rapids, Ferris Faculty Association President Mike Ryan stands in front of signs that could be used on a picket line if the faculty honors its strike vote. Phil Stich pounds in staples on signs that were made by FFA members.

Pioneer

August 22, 2006

Welcome Week activities planned for students

BIG RAPIDS - Ferris State University is planning to let the `Dawgs out over the next seven days to a variety of Welcome Week activities.

Students return to campus this week, with events kicking off Wednesday evening with an ice cream social and pool party at the Student Recreation Center from 8 to 11 p.m.

"Welcome Week is to get our students connected, have fun and have a positive first experience at Ferris," said Cindy Horn, director of Student Leadership and Activities.

Highlights for the week include Meijer Madness on Thursday evening from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. at the Meijer store on Perry Street. About 3,000 Ferris students attended the event last year, with 4,500 expected this year. Buses will transport students from dorms and married housing to the store, with FSU President David Eisler riding the first bus to cut the ribbon for the event. Discounts will be given when students present their Ferris ID. Community businesses also will be present in the parking lot, providing giveaways to students.

The fun continues with a party in the Rankin Center Saturday evening from 8 p.m. to midnight. Rockin' in the Rankin will offer a casino room, airbrush tattoos, a giant game of Twister and more.

After classes begin Aug. 28, activities continue with the Food Dude, Kevin Roberts, presenting easy nutritious recipes beginning at 7 p.m. Aug. 29 in Williams Auditorium. Free samples of the tasty treats will be available.

The Welcome Week series winds up Aug. 31 with Founder's Day from 4 to 7 p.m. on the Campus Quad. Inflatable games, novelties and a picnic dinner will take place before the band Sorryville takes the stage. Students on a meal plan eat by using their ID; anyone else may dine for \$5.

Afterward, students will be encouraged to visit downtown Big Rapids through Destination Downtown. This event runs from 7 to 10 p.m. along Michigan Avenue.

"It's an effort to try and get students interested in downtown, acquainted w6th business owners," said Mark Gifford, Downtown Business Association director. "It's a good time to invite them downtown to enjoy what we have to offer." A schedule of Welcome Week activities is as follows:

Wednesday:

- Ice Cream Social & Pool Party, 8 to 11 p.m., Student Recreation Center

Thursday:

- Get a Clue at FSU Game, 4:30 p.m., Campus Quad
- Minority Student Orientation, 7 p.m., Merrill/Travis Hall
- Meijer Madness; 10 p.m. to 1 a.m., Meijer

Friday:

- Bulldog Values Day, attendance hall
- Big Screen Movie - "Click" at dusk on Campus Quad

Saturday:

- Rockin' in the Rankin and Save-A-Life Tour, 8 p.m. to midnight, Rankin Student Center

Sunday:

- Scholar Program Peer Mentor Kick-off, 1 p.m., Student Recreation Center

Tuesday, Aug. 29:

The Food Dude – Kevin Roberts, 7 p.m., Williams Auditorium

Thursday, Aug. 31:

- Founder's Day, 4 to 7 p.m., Campus Quad
- Destination Downtown, 7 to 10 p.m., Michigan Avenue area of downtown

These events are open to the public.

Pioneer

August 23, 2006

MEA surveys community on strike

Group works with Ferris faculty to see what local people think about a possible strike. BIG RAPIDS -The Michigan Education Association is conducting surveys of community members to "get a pulse" on public opinion surrounding a potential Ferris State University Faculty Association strike.

Patrick Bolen, of the MEA's local office, said the surveys were designed to "get a pulse on the community - find out how they would react" in the event of an FFA strike.

"We want to make sure it's the right thing to do," Bolen said. "We're always looking for the best way to get a settlement. Sometimes, we get ideas from the community we hadn't thought of yet."

Bolen said 50 to 60 surveys would be done on the FFA. Most of the surveys will be done in the Big Rapids area, but some will likely be done in other places around the state. This type of survey is done for any MEA affiliate looking at "job action," he said. In this case, "job action" refers to a strike, Bolen explained.

Community leaders, members of various clubs and organizations will be surveyed, he continued.

Bolen said the survey results will not keep the professors from going on strike, but they would be used as an indicator of whether it would be helpful to educate the community about the issues.

"If we can get community pressure that would help us, we look for that ... if we're going to have to take a lot of pressure, we look at that, too," Bolen said. "We're very sensitive.

... We represent public employees and we want to make sure that we've covered all the bases, basically."

Sunday, the FFA membership voted to authorize union leaders to call for a strike. The faculty union and FSU have been negotiating since February on a five-year contract to replace a three-year agreement that expired June 30. A mediator became involved in the talks July 21.

The university is seeking to increase the number of part-time and temporary faculty from 15 percent of the total to 25 percent and proposing alternate insurance plans, in use by other groups of FSU employees. The university's latest salary offer includes across-the-board increases for each year of the agreement, starting with 2 percent this fiscal year and 2.5 percent each of the remaining four years.

The faculty is seeking 4 percent pay increases each of the next five years, to have the university pay 90 percent of health care costs and resolutions on a number of other issues, including matters of discipline, due process and post-tenure recommendations.

Pioneer

August 23, 2006

Ferris unveils hotline, Web site

BIG RAPIDS—Ferris State University is broadening its public information efforts regarding the ongoing contract negotiations with the faculty member's union.

A link from the university's home page, www.ferris.edu, takes Internet users to a page with the latest university press releases on the issue, a message for students and parents, answers to frequently asked questions and the phone number for the negotiation hotline: 591-2800 or 1-800-519-3425.

The Web page is a way for the entire campus community -- students, employees and staff - to remain informed of the latest developments in negotiations, said Leah Nixon, assistant director of news services at FSU.

"It's a quick and easy way to update everyone on what's going on with the bargaining process," she said, adding the most up-to-date information was available on the hotline and the Web site. "It's a way to say, 'Today, this is what happened.'"

The site also will list other information, such as contact names and numbers for further information, Nixon said.

At this time, both the Web site and the telephone hotline inform people the university is expecting classes to go on as scheduled Aug. 28. In the event of a strike, new information and directions will be made available.

Sunday, the Ferris Faculty Association membership voted to authorize union leaders to call for a strike. The faculty union and FSU have been negotiating since February on a five-year contract to replace a three-year agreement that expired June 30. A mediator became involved in the talks July 21.

The university is seeking to increase the number of part-time and temporary faculty from 15 percent of the total to 25 percent and proposing alternate insurance plans, in use by other groups of FSU employees.

The university's latest salary offer includes across-the-board increases for each year of the agreement, starting with 2 percent this fiscal year and 2.5 percent each of the remaining four years.

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Pioneer

August 24, 2006

Faculty association walks picket line as students, parents arrive on campus

BIG RAPIDS - The line of late registering students stretched out the doors of the Timme Center for Student Services and down the sidewalk in the bright August morning sun on the campus of Ferris State University Wednesday.

Dave Boedeker of Eaton Rapids, a FSU senior, was waiting in line with his younger brother, a freshman, as members of the Ferris Faculty Association union walked by with their picket signs.

"I can see both sides of the story," Boedeker said. "I can see where they'd want health care and raises. But from the student side, it's one more hoop to eliminate before the semester starts, if the semester starts. I think they're being unrealistic with some of their demands."

The university and the 450-member faculty union have been negotiating a new contract since February to replace a three-year agreement that expired June 30. The two sides have been working with a mediator since July 21. Sunday, 92 percent of FFA members at a union meeting voted to authorize union leaders to call a strike. The next mediation session is Saturday.

Students and parents arriving at Ferris were less than pleased with the state of negotiations. Many parents, pressing their lips tightly together, chose not to share their comments on negotiations with the Pioneer.

"I just hope they get it settled fast and the FFA and (FSU) Board of Trustees figure something out pretty soon," Boedeker said. "A lot of students come to Ferris, and pay pretty good money, and don't want to pay it for an adjunct professor in pharmacy or optometry classes where you just can't get someone off the street to teach."

Mary Quinlan, a student herself and the mother of an incoming freshman, also was not happy.

"I think it will be difficult for incoming students to have to make up time if they actually do strike," she said.

Other students took a more laissez-faire attitude to the talks.

"We can't do anything about it," shrugged Rebecca Burgess of Byron Center, a sophomore at Ferris.

Many freshmen were more concerned with the coming few days of meeting new people and being on their own than they were with whether classes would start on time next week.

"It's nerve-wracking because I'm starting all over," said Stacy Sherbutt of Port Huron. Amanda Paquette of Iron Mountain shared Sherbutt's worries.

"It's exciting but kind of scary because I don't really know that many people," she said.

Changes at home will be evident for Paquette's father, Keith, as well.

"It's going to be quiet and different," he said of home in the coming weeks. "We're seven hours away, so it's not like you can jump in the car and go see her every weekend."

He paused from unloading a refrigerator to comment on the negotiations.

"It's not a very nice way to start your first year of college," he said, watching his daughter walk down the sidewalk.

Professors on the picket line Wednesday represented every department on campus, said FFA President Michael Ryan. Joining the FFA on the line were some of the 215 members of Ferris' American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union, which represents physical plant workers and others.

Tom Weaver, AFSCME union president, explained why his group, which won't be negotiating with the university until July 2007, was on the picket line.

"Ferris used to be the best employer in town - we had really good benefits," Weaver said.

"That's slowly being eroded; we're losing more and more to keep up with health insurance costs.... I don't blame Mike (Ryan) for not accepting the proposal we pretty much had to accept. It's a lose lose situation."

Professors on the line said the university's 2 percent pay increases and 4 percent cap on health insurance cost increases is disrespectful.

"People's paychecks have been going down," said humanities professor Randy Groves. "In what profession is that acceptable?"

Ferris officials are "cautiously optimistic" a new contract can be reached before the start of school.

"Negotiations throughout the summer have not yet resulted in agreement on a new contract with the faculty union in Big Rapids. These talks are dealing with very difficult issues of healthcare and compensation. I remain hopeful that responsible solutions to

these issues will soon be found," wrote FSU President David Eisler in a memorandum to the campus posted on the Ferris negotiations update Web page.

The university is seeking to increase the number of part-time and temporary faculty from 15 percent of the total to 25 percent and proposing alternate insurance plans, in use by other groups of FSU employees. The university's latest salary offer includes across-the-board increases for each year of the agreement, starting with z percent this fiscal year and 2.5 percent each of the remaining four years.

The faculty is seeking 4 percent pay increases each of the next five years, to have the university pay 90 percent of health care costs and resolutions on a number of other issues, including matters of discipline, due process and post-tenure recommendations. Currently, the university pays 62.3 percent of health insurance costs.

University figures show the 400-Plus faculty members have an average full-time salary - including professors who are paid year-round and those paid by the academic year - of \$65,254. The top salary, a year-round position, is \$119,684; the lowest, also a year-round position, is \$39,140. Average compensation at Ferris, according to State University Profile Sheets compiled by the state Senate Fiscal Agency, is \$73,285; this number is an average of all faculty members and includes contributions to health care and other compensation.

By contrast, the state average is \$75,435; Central Michigan University's average is \$66,061; Grand Valley State University averages \$70,562; Michigan State University averages \$85,212; and Michigan Technological University averages \$76,462.

Pioneer

August 25, 2006

FFA may reaffirm decision to strike at Sunday meeting

BIG RAPIDS - Ferris State University professors walked the picket line again Thursday morning to complete two days of informational picketing on the Big Rapids campus.

The university and the professors have been at odds since February to replace the contract that expired June 30. Major issues still unresolved include salary increases and health care benefits. Both sides began meeting with a mediator July 21. The next mediation session before the scheduled start of classes on Monday will begin Saturday morning.

The Ferris Faculty Association has a general membership meeting set for Sunday afternoon. In a similar meeting last week, with more than half of the 450 union members in attendance, professors voted to authorize union leaders to call a strike. Ninety-two percent of those in attendance approved the possible walk-out, said FFA President Michael Ryan.

Sunday, the membership will convene for either an informational session or a reauthorization of the bargaining team's ability to call a strike, Ryan said.

"Hopefully, there will be a tentative agreement to present, on the entire contract," Ryan said. "If that's the case, we'll present it to the faculty and they will get a recommendation from the bargaining team. Classes will be held Monday."

If a tentative agreement is reached over the weekend, it would not be ratified Sunday. Written copies would be distributed to, faculty members and a ratification vote scheduled, Ryan said.

Should the two sides fail to find middle ground, Ryan said the bargaining team would recommend the faculty reauthorize their ability to call a strike.

"The strike would begin 8 a.m. Monday - the beginning of classes," he said.

"Traditionally, we go back to the faculty the night before (a strike for a reauthorization vote). Our purpose is not to have a strike - our purpose is to have a contract. ... At this point, we're prepared to negotiate as well as prepared to go on strike."

Should a strike occur, university officials are instructing students to go to their regularly-scheduled classes, where more information will be posted. Ferris also has set up a Web site, www.ferris.edu/news/negotiations/, and telephone hotline, 591-2800 or 1-800-519-3425, to keep students and others up-to-date on the progress of negotiations.

"Our expectation is that we are going to start the school year with a contract," said university spokesperson Leah Nixon, assistant director of news services for FSU. "We're willing to bargain until we get one. We're looking forward to the new school year beginning Monday with students and faculty back in the classroom."

The university is proposing a 2 percent increase for the first year of the five-year deal and 2.5 percent each of the remaining four years. The faculty proposal calls for 4 percent wage increases each of the next five years.

University figures show the average full-time salary of faculty members - both those paid year round and those paid by academic year - to be \$65,254. The top salary, a year-round position, is \$119,684; the lowest, also a year-round position, is \$39,140.

FSU is offering professors a choice of health insurance plans, with the faculty given the option each year to select between two packages, the first with the current health insurance plan and one other by the Michigan Education Special Services Association (MESSA). The second package offers a variety of insurance options, including Blue Cross/Blue Shield PPO plans and Priority Health. The health care proposal also includes raising the university's contribution to health care up to the level currently paid for non-bargaining employees who had given up raises in favor of higher health care contributions.

Currently, the university pays \$9,612.84 per year for faculty members' insurance, with the professors paying \$5,806.65. The current plan does not differentiate between families and single individuals for premium costs. The following insurance quotes are for 2006-07 only; rates are subject to change with each new plan year. For the first package, the university would pay \$10,740.30 per year for families and individuals, with the professors paying \$4,679.10; for the second package, the university would pay \$10,740.30 per year for families and \$3,554.30 per year for individuals.

The amount professors would pay varies depending on the type of insurance they select. The second package offers individuals a lower rate than families, but the percentage paid by the university for individuals is higher for three of four insurance choices. For the fourth choice, the university would pay 86.1 percent of the cost for families and 76.1 percent of the cost for individuals.

The faculty proposal for health insurance calls for the university to pay 90 percent of health care benefit premiums. Currently, the university pays 62.3 percent of health insurance costs.

Average compensation at Ferris, according to State University Profile Sheets compiled by the state Senate Fiscal Agency, is \$73,285. This number is an average of all faculty members and includes contributions to health care and other compensation. By contrast, the state average is \$75,435; Central Michigan University's average is \$66,061; Grand Valley State University averages \$70,562; Michigan State University averages \$85,212; and Michigan Technological University averages \$76,462.

Pioneer

August 25, 2006

Our View: Negotiators must be willing to deal for betterment of all or they'll damage FSU

Summer break is over for Ferris State University students. The same could be said for university negotiators and the Ferris Faculty Association. Both groups have spent a good number of sunny afternoons holed-up in a conference room this summer, trying to hammer out a new pact that will appease both parties. As of today, the negotiations are ongoing.

On Monday, classes will begin for thousands of students who have paid a lot of money to learn from qualified instructors. There's little time left to come to terms and avoid a faculty strike and the detrimental effects that will come with it.

Students, and their parents, expect to see faculty in their classrooms Monday.

So do we, University officials say classes will go on regardless of a faculty vote taken Sunday. That's all fine and good, but it's clear to all involved the university cannot provide quality instruction across a broad array of specific curriculums without the faculty, even if on a temporary basis.

The students, of course, are the biggest losers if professors walk. But they won't be the only ones to suffer. Ferris, Big Rapids and even the faculty members themselves all have much to lose if the eyes of the state's media focus on a faculty walkout. The university has worked hard for more than a decade to shed an image damaged by the downsizing of its degree programs, sports and faculty in the early 1990s. After those lean years when enrollment plunged to 8,000, the university is now boasting of record enrollments of more than 12,000 students.

Ferris employees, students and the greater Big Rapids area spent many long hours - and a lot of money - restoring the university's reputation of providing a first-class education that results in high job placement for graduates.

The frowns on the faces of some of the parents who brought their children to Ferris this week gives one an indication of the imminent damage a strike would cause. With this in mind, students and parents might take a hard look at what other state universities have to offer.

Big Rapids has gone through a period of major commercial growth over the past few years in anticipation of a continuing enrollment increase. The community can't afford declining enrollments again.

Faculty, who have suggested that they are not getting the respect they deserve, also can't afford to place themselves on pedestals above the general populace of an area that is traditionally among the poorest in the state. University figures show the average full-time

salary of faculty members - both those paid year-round and those paid by academic year - to be \$65,254. Currently, the university pays \$9,612.84 per year for faculty members' insurance, with the professors paying \$5,806.65.

According to the Housing and Urban Development Department, the median household income for Mecosta County this year is about \$47,000.

We suspect that a Michigan Education Association survey conducted among area people earlier this week revealed that most area residents have little sympathy for striking professors in the upper echelon of wage earners in Mecosta and surrounding counties.

Most people in this area want to see the administration and the faculty resolve their issues at the bargaining table. The faculty are well within their rights to try to negotiate a better contract for themselves. We applaud them for being tenacious. Now it's time to look seriously at what the university has to offer and weigh that deal against the long-term consequences of a strike.

We call, once again, for both sides to get to the bargaining table and finalize a deal that is livable. We urge negotiators to go into this session with the willingness to bend a little for the betterment of everyone involved.

We all have a great deal to lose if you don't.

Pioneer Editorial Board

Pioneer

August 26 & 27, 2006

Ferris, FFA plan weekend of contract talks

BIG RAPIDS - Ferris State University officials and Ferris Faculty Association leaders are calling for a contract settlement to be reached this weekend.

At stake is the first day of classes for students and the potential bad publicity a faculty walk-out could cause the university.

University negotiators and the professors have been at odds since February to replace the contract that expired June 30. Major issues still unresolved include salary increases and health care benefits. Both sides began meeting with a mediator July 21. The next mediation session before the scheduled start of classes on Monday will begin Saturday morning.

"I believe, that working together, we can find a way that ends these negotiations and has classes opening on Monday," said FSU President David Eisler.

Both sides appear poised to talk. Faculty members called a press conference Friday to display their sleeping bags and suitcases while calling for a "marathon bargaining session" to resolve the dispute. The same day, Eisler broke his long-standing silence on negotiations.

"The faculty do not want a strike," said FFA President Michael Ryan during the press conference.

The FFA has a general membership meeting set for Sunday afternoon. In a similar meeting last week, with more than half of the 401 union members in attendance, professors voted to authorize union leader; to call a strike with 92 percent in approval. Ryan said.

Both sides want a fair contract - the professors are seeking respect in the form of nationally-comparable compensation and the university is trying to balance any faculty agreement with other concerns, such as other employee groups and increasing costs.

Specific issues holding back an agreement are concerns over wages, health care benefits, discipline procedures and part-time faculty numbers.

The FFA's proposal calls for 4 percent across-the-board salary increases for the next five years and to have the university pay 90 percent of health care costs. Currently, the university pays 62.3 percent of health insurance costs. Professors also are seeking changes to the due process structure in discipline hearings and are opposed to university desires to increase the number of part-time faculty.

Ferris State University bargainers have offered a 2 percent pay increase for the first year and 2.5 percent increases each of the next four years. The offer includes \$300,000

per year in supplemental market adjustments that would equate to an additional .9 percent of compensation. Those adjustments, however, would not be across-the board; they would be to "get rid of specific disparities in wages," said university spokesperson Leah Nixon, assistant director of news services.

University figures show the average full-time salary of faculty members - both those paid year-round and those paid by academic year - to be \$65,254. The top salary, a year-round position, is \$119,684; the lowest, also a year-round position, is \$39,140.

FSU is offering faculty members a choice each year between two health insurance options, one with MESSA insurance and the other with Blue Cross/ Blue Shield or Priority Health coverage. University figures show savings of \$3400 a year in health care contributions for faculty members under the FSU proposal.

The university also is seeking to increase the number of part-time and temporary faculty from 15 percent of the total to 25 percent. Those numbers are not a true reflection of the numbers of classes taught by part-timers, Ryan said.

"There are a variety of exceptions (to the number counted toward the 15 percent)," he said.

About one-third of classes at Ferris are taught by part-time faculty members, Ryan said.

Increasing the allowed percentage would bring the number of classes to more than 50 percent, he continued.

The issue revolves around the fulltime faculty's ability to serve students, Ryan said. For example, only full-time faculty serve as advisors. With fewer fulltime faculty, the time students would be able to spend with advisors would go down. Also, he believes course development would suffer with fewer full-time faculty members.

Union vice president John Caserta emphasized the faculty's position. "We're determined to get an equitable contract or we'll be walking," Caserta said.

In the event of a strike, the university is telling students to go to class. "We are asking if there is no one at the class, that they wait for 15 minutes and a member of the administration will be there to talk with the students, to explain what they should do in preparation for the next class and to take attendance and to answer any questions," Eisler said.

Any further action on the part of the university, such as a seeking a court injunction against the strike, has not been determined, said university spokesperson Marc Sheehan, editorial services coordinator. -

"We really don't want it to get to that point," he said of legal action. "We really would have to evaluate (it) at that time. We're doing everything we can not to get to that point."

University officials remain hopeful a contract will be hammered out.

"We are going to negotiate to prevent a strike, to reach a contract. There are financial constraints on the university. We are talking about a university that's received \$9.2 million dollars in cuts from the state the past five years. And we're talking about a university dealing with issues that are out there: utilities, the rising cost of minimum wage - these are all costs that impact on the university, but we're committed to getting a fair contract for all of our employees," said Eisler, who has decided to make statements regarding negotiations to help talks along this weekend.

The union has alleged he is distant and not involved closely enough in negotiations.

"First of all, I've tried very hard to keep personalities out of the negotiations. This is not about personalities - this is about very important issues for our faculty and our university of salary and health care," Eisler said.

Personally, he is pleased with the progress made in the negotiations to date.

"I think these are complex negotiations with lots and lots of issues but I believe they have brought this down to what is the ultimate issue in this negotiation, which is salary and health care. I think it's very good work to be here at this point," Eisler said.

Though students are just arriving and getting settled into their dormitories, some have paid close attention to what is brewing at the negotiation table.

"I hope they can reach an agreement this weekend," said Tim Bergman of Clarksville. "We're paying them to be in class."

Although optimistic, Bergman believes FSU professors won't be in attendance Monday. Kyle DeHaan of Grand Rapids is disappointed that there's a chance there will be a substitute instead of his professor in class Monday morning.

"I am paying for this education and they are not doing their job," he said Friday.

"Instead, they're going to probably put in substitutes for what the professors should be doing."

Elise Rigoli of Allendale and Alecia Thomasco of Hudsonville believe the professors deserve what is being asked in negotiations.

"They deserve it, but I'm not expecting them to settle," Rigoli said. "They do a great job."

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Strike or not, Ferris St. hopes students show

BIG RAPIDS -- With a possible faculty strike vote today, Ferris State University administrators are encouraging students to show up for classes Monday, even if professors are absent.

"We're telling students it's important to show up," university spokesman Marc Sheehan said. "At the very least to get information about what's going on."

Negotiators with the faculty and administration met with a state-appointed mediator for eight hours Saturday in an attempt to reach a contract before classes begin Monday, but could not reach a deal.

They plan to meet again today before a scheduled 4 p.m. union vote on whether to strike.

"The clock is ticking and we're not really making much progress," said Mike Ryan, president of the Ferris Faculty Association. "No real progress was made on any of the key issues."

The negotiations surround issues over wages, health care costs, disciplinary processes and part-time staff, Ryan said.

He was not certain what would happen Monday if there is a strike, but said faculty would continue to negotiate on a contract.

"Typically, one would expect there wouldn't be much instruction going on," Ryan said.

The union, with about 450 members, has offered to pay 10 percent of health care costs and wants an annual 4 percent raise for five years.

Administrators have offered a 2 percent raise for the first year, followed by 2.5 percent annual increases the next four years. The administration said faculty members would save up to \$3,400 per year in healthcare contributions under the university's proposal. Currently, professors and other faculty pay 40 percent of health care costs.

In a statement issued Friday, university President David Eisler pointed to declining state funding of public universities as a key issue, forcing administrators to be "careful managers of their funds to keep education affordable."

Sheehan said the last Ferris contract four years ago also came down to the last minute, so he still believes a deal can be reached.

"I'm remaining optimistic until something happens to make me not optimistic," he said.

In the event of a strike, the 12,000-student university has arranged to staff each class so students can learn about the faculty issue and possibly get syllabus's, if available.

Ryan said negotiations are tedious because the mediator must go back and forth between rooms where the two sides are situated.