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Pioneer

March 1, 2006

'Seek out the free money': As interest rates climb, students and parents advised to watch financial aid opportunities

BIG RAPIDS - While it's hard to put a price on the chance an education offers for a better future, it's becoming increasingly easier to see the price of the education.

Tuition rates tend to increase at colleges and universities ... but so do the interest rates on student loans.

President George W. Bush signed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 into law Feb. 8. The law, which will take effect July u, will cause interest rates on federal education loans to change from variable to fixed - and those fixed rates will be higher. The student aid budget was cut \$12 million, explained Ronnie Higgs, assistant vice president of student affairs at Ferris State University. Most of that money will come from the loan program, in the form of the higher interest rates.

"That's where the savings (to the federal government) come from," Higgs said.

Stafford loans will have a fixed interest rate of 6.8 percent, compared to the variable rate of 4.75 to 5.38 percent. Parent Loans for Undergraduate Students, known as PLUS loans, will be fixed at 8.5 percent, up from 6.125 percent. Some paperwork regarding PLUS loans gives the fixed rate at 7.9 percent, but that rate is an error. The error will be corrected in time for the 8.5 percent rate to take effect July 1.

Higgs and others in the financial aid department at FSU are doing what they can to educate students about the coming increase and help them make financially sound decisions.

"We try to educate the students as to the impact of the act," Higgs, said. "It's the only thing we can do."

Higgs said current students are being encouraged to find scholarships and grants as opposed to taking out student loans. Unlike student loans, scholarships and grants do not need to be paid ' back, Higgs explained, calling those financial aid sources "free money.

"Seek out the free money first and rely on student loans last," - Higgs advised.

Former students also would do well to pay attention to the coming interest rate hike, he added. For those looking to - consolidate their student loans doing so before July 1 would be' beneficial because they can get - the current, lower interest rates.

"If you're going to consolidate your' loans, do it before July 1," Higgs said. "If you consolidate after July 1, you're going to get the higher fixed rate."

July 1 is the crucial date every year, he continued. The federal government looks at the student loan program each year and determines the interest rate. In the past, that rate, which was variable, usually went up somewhat but not as much as it will this year.

"We see a big run on consolidating loans prior to July 1. Interest rates change every July 1" Higgs said. "It typically goes up a little bit. But this year, we'll probably see a whole lot more significant increase in interest rates. .

"If you're going to consolidate, consolidate prior to July 1 to get a lower interest rate and save money in the long run," he emphasized.

Pioneer

March 10, 2006

Career-technical education's role in high school reform

BIG RAPIDS - With the proposed high school reform bill already passed by the State House of Representatives and sent on to the Senate, career-technical education professionals from around the area gathered for a conference focusing on the role of career and technical education in high school reform at The Inn at St. Ives in Canadian Lakes.

The day-long "West Central Career-Tech Partnership Region Comprehensive Guidance Conference" took place March 3 and included speakers such as Ferris State University President David Eisler, West Shore Community College President Charles Dillon, Baker College of Cadillac President Robert Van Dellen, Michigan Department of Career Development Director Patty Cantu, Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Education Policy Manager and the Michigan Department of Education Office of School Excellence Director Sue Carnell, Diane McMillan from the Michigan Department of Education's office of the superintendent and Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals Executive Director Jim Ballard.

According to Carnell, Gov. Granholm wants to double the number of people in the state who have either a two-year degree, four-year degree, or a technical certificate.

"The more choices we give kids in high school, means less choices for them in college," Carnell said in regards to high school reform.

According to Ballard, with the proposed high school reform a high school diploma will no longer be the entry point into the workforce, instead a two-year degree, four-year degree, or technical certificate will be necessary for most employment opportunities.

Van Dellen spoke out against high school reform citing that it may increase the drop-out rate and become a serious threat to traditional high schools and even more of a threat for Career-Technical Centers.

"We need more flexibility, not less. The more mandates, the more we limit students," Van Dellen said. "The high school reform standards are too rigid with not enough resources available."

In regards to the current high school curriculum, Dillion said, "We already have a superior model in place.

Mecosta-Osceola Career Center Principal David Cot had this to conclude, "The conference demonstrated that CTE is a viable player when it comes to high school reform and that we (CTE) are part of the equation. Gov. Granholm is pushing for higher standards for students and she is bringing CTE along. As our M0ISD motto states: Helping Schools Help Students, we will strive to provide the services asked of our local schools regardless of the results of this pending bill.

Pioneer

March 11 & 12, 2006

'Fair commerce:' Barnum unveils latest mural

Robert Barnum, Ferris State University's Resident Artist, doesn't do things on a small scale.

His style, which has been described as having a "sweaty muscularity," uses figures to create a sense of movement. It's a style that "works better bigger," Barnum said.

"I think the style is evolved by scale, he said. "Size makes a difference in the impact of my work."

And his latest work to be unveiled - a four-panel mural entitled "Fair Commerce" is certainly big. Located in the Community Central Bank in Mount Clemens, the mural spans two floors. The smallest panel is 7 feet by 10 feet; the largest, 10 feet by 22 feet.

"It actually requires the viewer to move to read the whole story. I think that's important," Barnum said. "For the viewer to actually participate in this, I think it's critical they have to move around, put some effort into it. The advantage of an environment like that (in a bank), is you can stroll pretty easily."

"Fair Commerce," unveiled Feb. 21, relates the growth of commerce in Mount Clemens as a single day.

"When you create a mural... you try to create an atmosphere," Barnum began. ("Fair Commerce") starts in the early morning and continues until late evening."

Working within a 24-hour time span is one way to tie the elements of the story together and create movement, he explained.

"It's kind of subtle, but it actually kind of works," he said.

Barnum believes that to be effective, public art should be personal to the location meaning it needs to "fit the site physically but also philosophically."

"In this case, it was a way of tying the evolution of commerce in the area into a larger, more dramatic story," he said.

The mural begins with a man and a woman planting a field, follows with the emergence of food and textile production, then manufacturing and housing and finally with medical care and the role of the banker in the community.

"It's somewhat targeted to Mount Clemens, but you could probably write the same story for 90 percent of Michigan," Barnum said. "Some of the touches are specific in the larger, generalized story."

One of those specific touches is found in Panel C. An older man is located on the left side of the panel, with clothes floating out of his right hand and a building in his left hand. That man represents Gabe Anton, a Mount Clemens native.

"Only one figure is based on a real person," Barnum said. "(Anton) is specific to Mount Clemens - he was born and raised there."

Anton made his living in the clothing industry and has given back to the community in many ways, Barnum said.

"He's going to head up the remodeling of the Mount Clemens Art Center," he added.

Barnum was selected to create the mural by winning a national competition Mount Clemens offered. He is one of about seven artists selected to create art in the city. Each artist was selected on a type of art

Barnum was chosen as a mural artist.

The project was long-range; in Barnum's case, it was about four years from the start of the competition to the completion of "Fair Commerce."

Of those four years, the creation of "Fair Commerce" took a little more than a year to paint, plus four or five months of concept work. First, a series of scale drawings was presented to the bank's board. Once a concept was approved, Barnum went to work.

All of the panels were painted in Mecosta County, with the majority of the work done in his studio in Midstate Industrial Park in Mecosta. Panel B, the smallest of the four, was painted on the FSU campus as part of the resident artist program.

While most students study art by looking at finished works or prints of finished works, Ferris students have an opportunity to get a look at projects throughout the creative process, Barnum - also a Ferris art professor - explained.

Throughout the approximate four-month time period Barnum was working on the panel, his students came into the studio area to discuss the design and process "stage by stage by stage."

"There's nothing like it in Michigan," Barnum said of the resident artist program. "We may be a small art program, but we're very unique."

Barnum may teach art at Ferris, but he had to do some learning to create large works such as "Fair Commerce."

When the artist is actually painting on the canvas, he can't see the whole painting to create an idea of scale, Barnum explained.

"Walk up to 'The Visionary' (a Barnum mural located in the FSU Arts and Sciences Building)... within an arm's length and look at what you can see visually," Barnum began. "That will give you an idea how difficult it is (to paint a mural). It really is a learned process ... to imagine scale when you can't see it."

Barnum grids his canvas into 4-foot sections to be able to maintain the correct proportions in his work. Still, he double checks his efforts.

"It's important to get down off the scaffold every half hour to get to the back of the room (and look at the painting)," he said.

In addition to "The Visionary," several other of Barnum's work are accessible on campus and in the area. Another mural, "Of Thought and Reason," hangs in FLITE and he also has one on the Grand Rapids Community College campus. Also a sculptor, Barnum has pieces in the Timme Student Center - "Journey" - and in the Student Rec Center, Wink Arena and the hallway between Wink arena and the ice arena.

Detroit News

March 12, 2006

Professors paid not to teach

Sabbaticals cost ailing Mich. schools \$23.2M; universities say they're needed to recruit top talent.

Michigan universities paid more than 500 professors \$23.2 million to be absent from the classroom during the 2004-05 school year, even as the state's economy nosedived and parents and students struggled to pay double-digit tuition hikes.

And lax systems are failing to make sure professors use their sabbaticals -- paid time off intended for research, expanding skills and recharging mental batteries -- in ways that benefit universities and students.

Critics question the value of sabbaticals as college affordability recedes and professors already are relieved of many routine tasks by graduate students and other assistants.

"Why do people in higher ed have to recharge their batteries when people almost nowhere else in the world recharge them?" asked Richard Vedder, an economics professor at Ohio University and author of the book, "Going Broke by Degree: Why College Costs Too Much."

At Michigan's 13 public universities, 558 full-time faculty members received paid sabbaticals in 2004-05, a Detroit News analysis found. That's about 4.4 percent of full-time instructors.

The \$23.2 million cost -- calculated using sabbatical and pay records The News obtained under Michigan's Freedom of Information Act -- represents only the salaries paid to professors while they were away from their jobs. When health insurance and other benefits are included, the cost of the sabbaticals increases to about \$31 million.

The \$31 million, which does not include the cost of temporary instructors frequently hired to fill in for absent professors, represents less than 1 percent of the 13 universities' 2004-05 general fund expenditures of \$3.9 billion.

But Michigan's cash-strapped colleges socked students with tuition and fee hikes this year of between 7.5 percent and 19 percent. The schools blamed cuts in state funding.

Sabbaticals are approved time away from the university, typically used to conduct research, publish books and articles and upgrade skills. Proponents say they allow professors to gain fresh insights they share with students, and are critical to attracting and retaining top-flight professors and researchers.

But critics say professors typically work only nine to 10 months per year, their teaching loads have dropped dramatically since the 1960s and their schedules already allow ample time to conduct most research.

Systems vary from school to school, but tenured professors typically are eligible for a sabbatical every six or seven years. They receive their full salaries if away for one semester and half of their salaries if they take off an entire academic year.

"It is an expense, but it is part of being an academy," said Virinder Moudgil, provost and vice president of academic affairs at Oakland University in Rochester. "We need faculty who are up-to-date and have these opportunities to renew themselves and their talent."

A 1999 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education pegged the rate of faculty sabbaticals at public universities at about 5 percent per year.

The combination of half-year and full-year sabbaticals by 558 Michigan professors amounted to 350 professor years -- more than the number of full-time faculty at either Northern Michigan University, Michigan Technological University or Lake Superior State University. But it's difficult to say whether sabbaticals at Michigan universities are out of line because costs haven't been analyzed nationwide.

At Ohio State University, 45 professors were on sabbatical in 2004-05, representing less than 2 percent of the school's full-time faculty.

Lake Superior State, Michigan's smallest public university, limits sabbaticals to four professor semesters per year and eliminated them entirely for next year as a cost-cutting measure.

"It's a considerable savings," of about \$50,000 per sabbatical semester, said Bruce Harger, provost and vice president of academic affairs at Lake Superior State.

"Sabbaticals are full pay, so we have to hire replacements."

Weaknesses in monitoring

Professors are required to submit proposals to get sabbaticals approved and to write follow-up reports detailing how they spent their time away from the university.

In 2005, Michigan's auditor general identified weaknesses in sabbatical monitoring at three of the four state universities he analyzed. At Michigan State University in East Lansing, 77.8 percent of professors who took sabbaticals and were sampled by the auditor had not submitted reports within 30 days of their return, as required.

At Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, auditors found reports were overdue by 19-21 months in 21 percent of sabbatical files sampled. And at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, a sampling by auditors found nine professors who had been approved for new sabbaticals without ever filing reports on their previous sabbatical leaves.

Records supplied to The News by Michigan's public universities also suggest sabbaticals are not closely tracked. In fact, the University of Michigan said it cost more

than \$200 in staff time just to determine which professors at its Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint campuses were on sabbatical in 2004-05, and for how long. Wayne State University, Central Michigan University and Michigan State University each listed a professor as having been on sabbatical when in fact the teacher had left the university without taking the planned leave.

"My impression is that probably 25 percent of sabbaticals are totally abused -- people just don't do what they say they are going to do," Vedder said.

This year, Michigan Technological University posted reports from 2004-05 sabbaticals on the university Web site. Of the 16 sabbatical reports posted, seven professors reported failing to complete their proposals for reasons ranging from grant denials to personal circumstances.

"In my application I indicated that I wished to study Swedish iron making history and coincidentally confer with Swedish colleagues regarding ongoing collaborative research projects," M^{TU} archeology Professor Patrick Martin said in his report on his yearlong sabbatical leave in 2004-05.

"As it happens, the funding applications that I depended upon to support these efforts were not successful, so a change in plans was necessary."

Instead of going to Sweden, Martin reported spending his time conducting research in New York state, Washington, D.C., and Mexico. His wife Susan Martin, an associate professor of archeology at Michigan Tech who shares some of the same research interests, was on sabbatical for the same year and reported conducting research and learning Spanish in North Dakota, New York state, Washington, D.C, and Mexico.

"We worked our butts off," Martin said.

With the Martins away, two of the three full-time archeology faculty at Michigan Tech were gone for a full year at the same time. The university hired a replacement to teach their courses. The Martins, whose combined 2004-05 salaries were \$162,573, received half pay and full benefits.

"I have a hard time seeing a downside to sabbaticals, frankly," said Patrick Martin, who handles one course that requires him to teach three hours a week. He said he spends another 10 hours a week meeting with students and also is involved in ongoing research projects.

At Oakland University, biology Professor Charles Lindemann said his yearlong sabbatical in 2004OS actually helped the university's bottom line. He spent part of the time writing a successful research grant to the National Science Foundation, one he said is worth \$750,000 over four years, of which \$315,000 will go into university coffers.

Lindemann said he also published three papers in scholarly journals, among other work. He said it's a case where his own interests of advancing his career dovetail with the public good.

"It brings federal dollars back into the state of Michigan and it keeps your own institution at the forefront in research," Lindemann said.

But William Coplin, a professor of public affairs at Syracuse University in New York, said the cost of faculty sabbaticals should be investigated "big time."

"I do think there's huge waste," Coplin said.

Sabbaticals are one manifestation of a university bias in favor of research at the expense of teaching, he said.

"I don't think the kids get the product they need and that they're paying for."

Critics agreed that restricting sabbaticals could put schools at a competitive hiring disadvantage, but one said that does not justify continuing what he sees as a wasteful practice.

"My mother always used to tell me, 'If your friends drive off a cliff, would you follow them?'" said state Rep. Fulton Sheen, R-Plainwell, who chairs the House tax policy committee and wants to eliminate university sabbaticals.

'Lack of understanding'

University administrators reject the arguments that accountability for sabbaticals is lacking or that professors' workloads allow sufficient time to conduct research.

At the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, many sabbaticals are paid for from funds that don't draw on tuition revenues. Salaries for highly paid teaching staff at the university hospital are, for example, largely paid from hospital revenues.

Throughout Michigan, it was not the research universities, but Grand Valley State University in Allendale and Oakland University in Rochester that had the highest proportion of full-time faculty on sabbatical in 2004-05, records show.

Statewide, the percentage of full-time faculty who took a sabbatical ranged from a high of 7 percent at Grand Valley State and Oakland to a low of 1.9 percent at Lake Superior State.

The sabbaticals across the state varied in length. When full sabbatical years as a percentage of fulltime faculty are calculated, Grand Valley also comes out on top at 4.2 percent, followed by Oakland at 4 percent.

Gayle Davis, provost and vice president of academic affairs at Grand Valley State, said professors at research universities such as U-M and Michigan State have lower teaching loads than non-research universities and also offer leaves of absence other than sabbaticals that professors can use to do research. Those are a couple of the reasons a school such as hers might top research universities in its rate of sabbaticals, Davis said.

Professors work hard, probably 60 hours a week on average at Grand Valley State, Davis said. However, "we have faced this kind of lack of understanding in the public since time began."

The Grand Rapids Press

March 12, 2006

Pharmacy Student Valarie Franklin Obstacle Course Champ

Put up for adoption as a baby because she might be too much to handle, 20-year-old Valarie Franklin has become an expert at overcoming challenges.

She's somewhat of a celebrity in her hometown of 5,500 people and has met a fair number of celebrities herself, including golf legend Tiger Woods and former Detroit Pistons center Bill Laimbeer.

Franklin likes shopping for clothes, listens to Blink 182, chows down on pizza and catches every horror flick that comes to the big screen.

She has a passion for animals, especially a golden retriever named Sunny who's been at her side every day for four years, including the past two years at Ferris State University where she is studying to be a pharmacist.

Trained by Wayland-based Paws With A Cause, the 5-year-old retriever lives up to its name. Sunny fetches items out of reach, opens doors and stands up on counters when store clerks are oblivious to Franklin's presence.

Franklin, who is 3 feet tall, was born with osteogenesis imperfecta, or brittle bone disease, a condition that makes her bones prone to breaking.

The dark-haired dynamo with a squeaky voice is persistent when it comes to being treated like others, and her biggest challenge has not been from peers or insensitive clods.

The biggest have come from institutions: a suburban school district unwilling to install an elevator so Franklin could get to class, and most recently, a scholastic powerhouse unnerved by Sunny.

The Davison School District near Flint eventually installed the elevator a week before Franklin started class, and Hartcourt Assessment let Sunny accompany her while she took a delayed pharmacy school entrance exam. She and Sunny were ejected from a previously scheduled test last summer in Grand Rapids.

"They honestly thought Sunny would bark or bite someone," Franklin said while running a brush across the sleeping dog's coat. "Can you see that? This is what he does. He was already asleep when they told me I had to leave."

Franklin's pursuit of a college degree is a natural progression for this voracious reader, who in fourth grade breezed through more than 100 books during a two-month program.

She graduated in the top 10 of her high school class and was described by teachers as "balanced" and "motivated."

"I've been lucky, and with all the people I've ever known in my life, no one has ever made it an issue," Franklin said of her physical limitations. "She has a spark that draws people in because she never feels sorry for herself and wants to do everything other people do each day," said James Binkley, of Davison, a Shriner and Masonic Lodge member who has known Franklin since the Shriners began helping her with medical expenses when she was a toddler.

Numerous events have been held to help the Franklins pay their bills, including an annual golf outing called "On the Tee for Vafarie."

When she needed a customized van for college, a spaghetti dinner sold 275 tickets, part of \$8,000 collected.

Since her arrival at Ferris State University in 2004, she has met dozens of people who've come up to introduce themselves and talk to her. Part of the attraction is Sunny, which suits her just fine.

"Sunny gets all the attention now instead of me, and I think that's great," Franklin said.

"He's a much bigger deal now for people, and when we go out in public, they'll stare at him instead of me."

Her tenacity and outgoing personality come from her parents, DyAnne and Harry L. Franklin.

"We've been fighting for Valarie ever since we adopted her," said Harry, a retired GM skilled tradesman who is running for Davison School Board of Trustees. "All we want is for her to have the same opportunities as everyone else."

A rough start

Valarie was born at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak to parents she never knew. The young couple from the Oak Park area apparently were overwhelmed when they learned she had a genetic syndrome affecting about 50,000 Americans. In some cases, bones break simply as a result of sneezing or coughing.

"The birth parents were afraid they couldn't raise her properly," DyAnne said.

Valarie immediately was placed in foster care, landing in the Goodrich-area home of Homer and Pat Bassett, friends of the Franklins.

"(Pat) brought the foster children to church, and that is where I met Valarie," DyAnne said. "I baby-sat for her on weekends while they ran a church camp."

At the time, the Franklins' two children were 17 and 19. They decided to adopt Vafarie.

"I guess God decided for us," DyAnne said. "I certainly wasn't looking for a child, my husband wasn't either. We thought we were going to be empty nesters."

"Besides that, we fell in love with her," Harry said.

DyAnne was 45 and Harry 43 when they jumped back into the parenting game.

Valarie's surgeries and broken bones began as soon as she learned to walk.

The former Easter Seals Society of Genesee County poster child has endured 20 major bone breaks. She has undergone six operations over 16 years at the Shriners Hospital in Chicago and Flint-area hospitals to repair major breaks in her legs, knee and arm.

As she gets alder, she has tried to tough out the minor breaks without seeking medical attention.

"I've toughened up the last few years because I might fall now and nothing will be broken," Franklin said. "I'll usually deny I've broken something anyway."

Her most recent injury was a broken collarbone, which happened during summer 2004 when she fell off a donkey in Mexico "It went under a branch, and it knocked me off," she said. "I had to go to a scary Mexican hospital."

It was the youth pastor's first summer, DyAnne recalled. "That poor fella, he was terrified. He thought she died, and he was terrified to tell us."

To keep herself strong, Franklin pilots her wheelchair along a maze of concrete sidewalks that leads to the Student Recreation Center on the east edge of FSU's campus and walks a mile on the indoor track.

"My arms are very strong so I generally walk or go to the mats and do crunches," she said.

Fighting for equality

For most of her life, Franklin and her parents have been at odds with an education system reluctant to make accommodations for her special needs.

The most recent situation occurred last summer when Franklin was told she could not take the PCAT exam at Grand Rapids Community College because she did not list Sunny as an accommodation on her application form. The presence of her service dog violated the policies of the testing company, she was told.

Franklin left the test room in tears and waited more than two hours for friends inside also taking the test.

"If it was just about me and Sunny, I could have let it go pretty easily," Franklin said.

"But it's a lot bigger than that. What if someone else wanted to bring their service dog to a test? You can't just walk away."

She filed a police report with GRCC campus police on the grounds her civil rights were violated under the Americans With Disabilities Act. The issue quickly was settled when the brass at Hartcourt Assessment in San Antonio, Texas, scheduled a special make-up test for Franklin at the Ferris campus in Big Rapids.

It was also a growing experience for Franklin. Her parents fought many of the earlier battles. This time, Franklin took the lead

It is difficult for her parents to let go.

"It's harder now with her being gone because new things will always pop up, and we get just as frustrated as she does," Harry Franklin said. "We're not done because we don't want this to continue."

Satisfied the testing company had changed its policies, the Franklins took no further action.

Franklin and her family clashed with Davison school officials over classroom access at Davison Middle School, which lacked an elevator. In the tri-level building, her access to computers and other resources was limited.

Valarie, then in fourth grade, was keenly aware of what was going on. "Since I was in kindergarten, I've been mainstreamed, so I don't want to go anywhere else. I want to stay in public school," she said in a newspaper interview at the time.

Her parents saw her passion for learning at an early age.

"First of all, she wanted to be a football player, that was when she was really little," DyAnne said. "Then, she wanted to be a veterinarian, and then a doctor of some sort. We thought it would be difficult to birth a calf or deaf with someone in a lot of pain who is thrashing around. She's not big enough to hold 'em down."

Franklin eventually embraced pharmacy, which lead her to Ferris.

She is in her second year at Ferris. If she is accepted into the College of Pharmacy, Franklin's education will last another four years, and she will graduate in 2010 with a doctorate in pharmacy.

Its not all work, however. You'll also find posters of actors Orlando Bloom from "Lord of the Rings" and Daniel Radcliffe from the Harry Potter series.

She brought a bit of her Davison bedroom with her to college, including a wicker basket filled with stuffed animals. The toys, she says, are for Sunny.

"He also has a basket of toys at home," Franklin said, smiling and stroking Sunny's head.

"He is so spoiled."

A small dorm refrigerator is covered with photos of her parents, her brother, Stephen, 36, of Grand Blanc, and her sister, Barbara 39, who is married and living in Bloomington, Ill. There are photos of Franklin's two nieces and nephew and, of course, plenty of pictures of Sunny, who has been with Franklin since high school.

Franklin's taste in television leans toward comedy, a contrast to her affinity for horror movies -- "the scarier the better," she said. Recent movies she's seen are the remake of "Amityville Horror" and "When a Stranger Calls."

"The older ones tend to be funny," she said.

Schooldays

Franklin spent her 20th birthday on Feb. 24 participating in a 30-hour fast for World Vision, a hunger-relief program. It is a major sacrifice for college kids, who otherwise have access to an all-you-can-eat cafeteria offering dorm food that seems to have improved over the years.

On this day, Franklin wheeled over for the lunch-time taco bar in Westview Cafeteria.

Sunny disappeared under the table, napping at her feet.

Her favorite food is a good steak. For that, only her mom's home cooking will do. "I wait until I get home for that," she said.

Trips home are not as frequent as she would like. Big Rapids is a three-hour drive from Davison on two-lane state highways, and the price of gas is a major deterrent.

Instead, weekends give her time to enjoy the perks of college life. A favorite is the four-screen movie theater in Big Rapids.

"I just saw 'Eight Below,'" she said, referring to a PG-rated film about sled dogs left in Antarctica. "You know how Disney movies can be cheesy? It was very good. I cried."

Franklin attends class daily, which means waking up by 7 a.m. The large barrier-free bathroom attached to her room is a godsend, making it easier to reach the sink or take a shower.

"I can get ready in 20 minutes to a half hour," she said. "Then, I'll take Sunny out before I go to class."

Her routine was thrown a curve in September, when Franklin had braces put on her teeth. "I greatly dislike them," she said wryly.

Most of the time, she gets to class using a motorized wheelchair she received last summer. It replaced a model that lasted 10 years and is worth more than most of the cars college kids drive. The Permobil Playman pediatric power wheelchair comes with headlights, blinkers, a horn and a seat that raises up.

Organic chemistry is the most challenging class, but one Franklin enjoys. She is preparing for an upcoming test in genetics and juggling classes in creative writing and women in art.

"I pretty much like all my classes except economics," Franklin said. "But I don't go to sleep in class, not at all. I am there to learn."

The same cannot be said for Sunny. And the transition to college was an adjustment for both.

"We got here a week before classes started," she said. "The first couple of days, I was really freaked out, but I said, 'I can do this.'"

And she is letting others know she can do it. Franklin annually visits elementary students in Davison and talks about her disability, her challenges and her dog.

It is an exercise she knows well, having given her first presentation to second-grade students while in third grade.

"I hear a lot of the same questions each time, but they'll also ask some weird ones, like how do I get a glass of water," Franklin said after visiting with second-graders in May.

"After I'm done, I hope they're more comfortable around people who are different than they are."

Pioneer

March 13, 2006

Ferris receives \$1 million gift from The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation

BIG RAPIDS - The proposed Michigan College of Optometry and Center for Collaborative Health Education at Ferris State University has received \$1 million in funding from The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation in Midland.

The gift will benefit the university's "Realize the Vision" building campaign, which will house an eye and vision care clinic, center for collaborative health education; laboratory, classroom and office spaces; and distance learning facilities. The 91,000 square-foot facility will support the Michigan College of Optometry's teaching, -research and patient care missions.

"This is a gift that will change the lives of people across the state of Michigan," FSU President David L. Eisler said. "Through the efforts of The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation, we will be able to educate the next generation' who will help provide the highest quality eye care to citizens throughout Michigan.

"The Dow Foundation has a wonderful history of support for Ferris State University. We both appreciate and are excited by this donation, which will help support our optometry program, faculty, staff, students and patients who will receive eye care in this facility," Eisler added.

Established in memory of her husband by Mrs. Dow in 1936, The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation supports organizational missions that strive to improve the educational, religious, economic and cultural opportunities of Michigan residents.

"We trustees are pleased to support this project as it will greatly help the people of Michigan," Margaret Ann (Ranny) Riecker, president of The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation, said. "Ferris State University's Michigan College of Optometry has developed a reputation over its 30-year history of providing the finest optometric training in the United States producing more than half of the practicing optometrists in Michigan."

The Michigan College of Optometry was created in 1974 in response to a need for optometrists in Michigan. As the scope of optometric practice has grown more complex, the resource and learning environment needs of faculty and students have made necessary a move to an updated facility.

For more information or to make a gift to the "Realize the Vision" building campaign, visit www.ferris.edu/alumni/develop/realize.

Pioneer

March 16, 2006

Attendance rose at Ferris basketball games

BIG RAPIDS - The Ferris State Athletics Department has worked diligently to improve its basketball product - and fans have taken notice.

Jim Wink Arena attendance, at men's and women's basketball games, improved considerably from the 2004-05 campaign to his past 2005-06 season. The men saw their attendance average rise by 200 from 678, in 2004-05, to 878 this past season as the team earned a bid to the NCAA Division [I] Tournament for the second consecutive season. The crowd size, at women's basketball games, improved from 321, in 2004-05, to 380 this past winter - an increase that includes a season-high 1,007 against Grand Valley State Dec. 8 in Big Rapids.

Head coach Bill Sall's men, who recently had their season come to an end with a hard-fought 74-69 loss (March 11) to nationally-ranked St. Joseph's in the first round of the NCAA Division II Tournament in Rensselaer, Ind., had a season-best crowd of 1,710 Dec. 8 against the Lakers. Sparked by the play of exciting senior point guard Dennis Springs, the Ferris athletic administration felt the entertainment value and work ethic of Bulldog basketball was appreciated by fans - young and old alike.

"Attendance has gotten to the point where we're disappointed with the crowds when we're not up around what we averaged this season," Ferris State Athletics Director Tom Kirinovic said. "We've been very excited about the crowds we were able to draw throughout the season and it's been great to see the community come out and support the basketball programs as much as they have.

"We've also been ecstatic about our student support," he added. "We have averaged over 500 students this year and they have shown, when they're on campus, they are happy to come out and support our basketball programs and create the kind of great home-court atmosphere we have enjoyed."

Ferris' best men's basketball home crowds, this winter, were: 1,710 for the game against arch-rival Grand Valley (Dec. 8); 1,243 for a battle with Northern Michigan (Jan. 12); and 1,007 against nearby rival Northwood (Dec. 1).

In all, the men's team drew 9,656 fans this past season.

The Bulldogs ranked fifth in the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference in home attendance with their average of 878.

Findlay ranked first in the GLIAC as it averaged 1,352, Michigan Tech was second (1,301), Gannon third (1,184) and Grand Valley fourth (1,131).

On the women's side, head coach Tracey Bloodworth-Fisk's Bulldogs, led by the play of standout junior guard Erin Miller, ranked sixth in the league in home attendance with an average of 380 fans and a total of 4,554 in Jim Wink Arena.

Michigan Tech led the league with 1,127 fans a night. Grand Valley ranked second (750), Findlay third (619), Gannon fourth (465) and Northern Michigan fifth (448).

While attendance has yet to reach what Ferris hopes is its full potential, Kirinovic has been pleased with the progress.

"Whenever our students were on campus they showed great support for our basketball teams," he said. "The other thing that was pleasing to us was the fact that the community has been showing more support.

"There are so many other things that people in our community could be doing, with television and everything else, so it's nice to have them at our games and adding to the atmosphere we're building at our events."

The Ferris State women had their season conclude with a first-round loss in the GLIAC Tournament to Grand Valley State (79-47) on Feb. 28 in Allendale.

Dowagiac Daily News

March 16, 2006

SMC students show academic success

Southwestern Michigan College has once again proven that its quality education has lasting effects on its students.

During a regularly convened board meeting on Tuesday night, the Board of Trustees was presented with a recent report outlining the academic accomplishments of SMC students who transferred to Ferris State University (FSU) and Western Michigan University (WMU) in the 2004-2005 academic year.

The reports, which were provided to SMC by both institutions, showed that SMC students who transferred to either FSU or WMU earned the highest GPAs of all student groups at these universities.

SMC students who transferred to FSU earned a GPA of 3.32 at Ferris, which is significantly higher than the GPA of all other Michigan community college transfer students and FSU students in general.

Michigan community college students who transferred to FSU earned an average GPA of 3.10. Students who have only attended FSU had a much lower cumulative GPA of 3.04.

In addition to a higher GPA for SMC transfer students to FSU, the report also showed the difference in final grades of those students who graduated.

The average Ferris grades for a former SMC student was 3.39 compared to a 3.21 grade point average for all other FSU students who graduated after the 2004-2005 academic year.

Students who began their studies at Southwestern Michigan College and then transferred on to WMU earned an average grade point average of 3.24 at Western. In comparison, students at a comparable place in their studies who began at WMU had achieved a much lower GPA of 2.95.

Students who transferred from all other institutions to WMU earned an average grade point average of 2.97 at Western.

"The proof of our student success rate is in the numbers," said Dr. David Mathews, president of Southwestern Michigan College. "You hear us speak about how the education a student receives at SMC is top-quality, but now we have multiple independent reports backing up our claims.

"Both Western Michigan University and Ferris State University are excellent educational institutions. To know that our students transferring in to those schools are succeeding at a higher rate than any other student group is extraordinary."

As a result of this report, during the meeting, the Board of Trustees unanimously adopted a resolution expressing its appreciation to the faculty and staff of Southwestern Michigan College for the extraordinary academic success of its students.

Also at the meeting, trustees awarded a pin for five years of service to Amy Anderson.

Mrs. Anderson joined the SMC staff in 2000 as a part-time coordinator of alumni affairs.

She was appointed Educational Talent Search advisor in 2001, then ETS director in 2004. Mrs. Anderson holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Michigan State University and a Master of Arts degree from Indiana University South Bend.

Prior to coming to SMC, she taught earth science at Vincennes University and served as a substitute teacher with the Edwardsburg Public Schools. Anderson resides in the Edwardsburg area with her husband.

A pin for 10 years of service was awarded to Judy Cripe. Mrs. Cripe joined the SMC staff in 1995 as accountant for special federal programs. In 1998, she was appointed senior accountant, then in 2004 she was promoted to director of accounting.

Mrs. Cripe holds an AAS degree from SMC and a Bachelor of Science degree from Bethel College. Prior to joining the SMC staff, she served as an escrow officer with the Title Office in Niles. Mrs. Cripe lives in the Niles area with her husband.

A pin for 15 years of service was awarded to Becky Craft. Mrs. Craft joined the SMC staff in September 1990 as secretary to the dean of sports education. In 1998, she was named accounting assistant, then transferred to accounts payable and payroll clerk in October 1999.

In August 2005, Craft was named administrative assistant to the director of human resources. She is a graduate of Dowagiac Union High School and St. Joseph Beauty College. She served as director of the Sister Lakes Academy School of Cosmetology. Mrs. Craft lives in Dowagiac with her husband and two children.

Pioneer

March 17, 2006

Students test engineering skills during Spaghetti Bridge Competition

BIG RAPIDS - What do spaghetti, glue and a good plan have in common? They are all essential tools to successful bridge making during the seventh annual Spaghetti Bridge Competition at Ferris State University today (Friday) and Saturday.

The competition: Build a bridge that can withstand as much weight as possible, beginning with two kilograms. The end result: Earn one of four \$2,000, four \$1,000 or four \$500 Ferris scholarships.

The contenders include 20 teams from 14 high schools, with first, second and third place being awarded to the competition's overall winners and first through fifth place being awarded to teams in four categories including Authentic Bridge Design, Oral Presentation, Written Presentation and Load-Bearing Competition. Cash prizes for teams earning first through fifth place in each category range from \$500 to \$50 for school labs, classrooms or clubs.

"The Ferris State University Spaghetti Bridge Competition puts students at the heart of the learning process, engaging them intellectually through a team environment," organizers said. "This proactive approach to learning allows students to problem solve through theory and application."

Competitors don't show up today (Friday) without a plan, however. Teams have spent time creating oral and written presentations of their design theories, as well as constructing an authentic bridge before they arrive at Ferris. It's this hard work and research that makes or breaks on-site bridge construction Saturday, when students put their theories to the ultimate test: How much weight can each bridge sustain?

Teams have two hours to construct a freestanding bridge that crosses an open span of 24 inches with only spaghetti, glue and a mystery element unveiled to competitors Friday evening. Past mystery elements have included two pieces of lasagna, three feet of thread, manicotti and a three-foot piece of Duct tape.

Taking their chances this year are students from the following high schools: Big Rapids, Cedar Springs, Chippewa Hills, Clinton, Crossroads Charter Academy, Kenowa Hills, Lapeer Ed/ Tech Center, Morley Stanwood, Northwestern Preparatory Academy, Reed City, Regina, Sacred Heart Academy, St. Charles and Whitefish Township.

Pioneer

March 17, 2006

Transfer scholarships available at Ferris State

BIG RAPIDS - Ferris State University has a new incentive for transfer students who have performed well academically - extra cash. The money comes in the form of one of six transfer scholarships available to students making the move to Ferris from another academic institution.

The scholarships offer anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,700 per academic year or in state tuition for non-resident or international students and are two-year scholarships with an option for a third-year renewal. The 2006-07 academic year will mark the first year the scholarships are available.

"This is our way of saying 'Hey, Ferris wants you,'" said Ferris Dean of Enrollment Services Ronnie Higgs.

Director of Enrollment Services Kathy Lake added, "There is a great pool of transfer students out there. These scholarships are not only a good opportunity for students but they provide a way for Ferris to strengthen its partnerships with community colleges."

To be eligible for one of the six scholarships, students must be enrolled fulltime in an undergraduate, degree-granting program on Ferris' Big Rapids campus, Lake said.

Students who meet the requirements of more than one scholarship will be awarded the scholarship that provides the most funding. Priority will be given to students meeting the requirements who are admitted by May 15.

Other criteria for the scholarships are as follows: Transfer Academic Excellence Scholarship (\$2,700), 3.7 GPA with 24 accepted transfer credit hours, automatic renewal by obtaining a 3.5 GPA at Ferris; Phi Theta Kappa Scholarship (\$1,700), 3.5 GPA with 24 accepted transfer credit hours, automatic renewal with documentation by obtaining a 3.25 GPA at Ferris; Transfer Academic Achievement Scholarship (\$1,500), 3.3 GPA with 24 accepted transfer credit hours, automatic renewal by obtaining a 3.25 GPA at Ferris; Transfer Residential Life Scholarship (\$2,000), 3.0 GPA with an associate degree, must live in a residence hall to receive automatic renewal by obtaining a 3.0 GPA at Ferris; Non-Resident Transfer Scholarship and International Transfer Scholarship (in-state tuition), 3.3 GPA with 24 accepted transfer credit hours, automatic renewal by obtaining a 3.25 GPA at Ferris.

"We want to make student transfers a seamless process and we are kick starting the process by helping students with their educational costs," Higgs said. "This is one of the first steps of many to improve the transfer process at Ferris State University."

In reviewing enrollment records for transfer students from the 2005-06 academic year, 43 students would have been eligible for the Transfer Academic Excellence Scholarship and more than 100 would have been eligible for the Transfer Academic Achievement

Scholarship, according to Lake. University officials hope to see the number of eligible transfer students double for the 2006-07 school year, she said.

The Detroit News

March 17, 2006

Colleges open scholarships and grants to everyone

Threats of lawsuits, pressure from feds force schools to make aid available to all students.

Facing threats of litigation and pressure from Washington, colleges and universities nationwide are opening to white students hundreds of thousands of dollars in fellowships, scholarships and other programs previously aimed at minorities.

Southern Illinois University reached a consent decree last month with the Justice Department to allow non-minority students and men access to graduate fellowships originally created for women and minorities.

In January, the State University of New York made white students eligible for \$6.8 million of aid in two scholarship programs also previously available just for minorities.

Pepperdine University is negotiating with the Education Department over its use of race as a criterion in its programs.

"They're all trying to minimize their legal exposure," Susan Sturm, a law professor at Columbia University, said about colleges and universities. "The question is how are they doing that, and are they doing that in a way that's going to shut down any effort or any successful effort to diversify the student body?"

The institutions are reacting to two 2003 Supreme Court cases on using race in admissions at the University of Michigan. Although the cases did not ban using race in admissions to higher education, they did leave the state of the law unclear, and with the changing composition of the court, some university and college officials fear legal challenges.

It is far too early to determine the effects of the changes on the presence of minorities in higher education and how far the pool of money for scholarships and similar programs will stretch.

Firm data on how many institutions have modified their policies is elusive because colleges and institutions are not eager to trumpet the changes. At least a handful is seeking to put more money into the programs as they expand the pool of applicants.

Some white students are qualifying for the aid. Last year, in response to a legal threat from the Education Department, Washington University in St. Louis modified the standards for an undergraduate scholarship that had been open just to minorities and was named for the first African American dean at the university. This year, the first since the change, 12 of the 42 first-year recipients are white.