

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
February 18, 2013

During the 2006-2007 academic year, Ferris State University embarked on a university-wide effort to define its values, create a mission statement that would embrace all stakeholders, develop a vision for the future, and create a strategic plan that would be the blueprint for our collective efforts. With Languages and Literature Professor Robert VonderOsten leading an inclusive process, the University identified its six core values as –

- **Collaboration**
- **Diversity**
- **Ethical Community**
- **Excellence**
- **Learning**
- **Opportunity**

Next, through many discussions, we crafted a new mission statement –

Ferris State University prepares students for successful careers, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. Through its many partnerships and its career-oriented, broad-based education, Ferris serves our rapidly changing global economy and society.

A vision statement was also drafted through this process –

Ferris State University will be the recognized leader in integrative education, where theory meets practice throughout the curriculum, and where multi-disciplinary skills important in a global economy are developed with the result that Ferris State University will also be:

- **The preferred choice for students who seek specialized, innovative, career- and life-enhancing education;**
- **The premier educational partner for government, communities, agencies, businesses, and industries through applied research and joint ventures;**
- **A stimulating, student-centered academic environment that fosters life-long engagement, leadership, citizenship and continuing intellectual development.**
- **A university that aligns its practices and resources in support of its core values of collaboration, diversity, ethical community, excellence, learning and opportunity.**

I remember well the day when our Academic Senate without changes, unanimously approved these two new statements. This resulted from a process that was inclusive, engaging and effective. Finally, a strategic plan was forged; it was the first strategic plan adopted by the entire University since 1999. You can access this planning document at

http://ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/president/strategic/docs/Strategic_Plan.pdf

This plan has served our University well, and many of its initiatives have been successfully implemented. It is time now to create an updated strategic plan. There are new challenges for our University to address – changing population demographics, rapidly increasing student debt, threats to federal student aid, calls for greater control in a context of reduced state investment. The evolution of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) emphasizes a line of thinking that a college degree is just a collection of courses. Some people now think of education as a commodity. We understand that a college education is much more than that, including experiences both in and outside of class that help develop a student both as a learner and a person. I believe strongly that we need to stress the value of the campus experience, something that can be thought of as a “Sense of Place.” To build our strategic plan will require the active engagement of all who are willing to contribute to charting our future. It is my hope that this will be both aspirational and practical.

To lead this process I have asked our Provost, Fritz Erickson, to both develop the conceptual framework and the process to achieve this. He in turn enlisted Languages and Literature Professor Sandy Balkema to co-chair this with him. Sandy is an inspired choice; having served as editor for our last two Higher Learning Commission self-studies, she has a broad view and understanding of our university.

Last Tuesday, Sandy and Fritz presented a new approach for strategic planning to Ferris’ Strategic Planning and Resource Council. Highlighting “strategic thinking,” this approach will focus less on specific initiatives in favor of connecting our core values to the goal of achieving excellence. As defined by the Higher Learning Commission, the elements of this goal are

- Mission
- Integrity
- Teaching and Learning, including quality, resources, support, evaluation and improvement
- Resources, planning and institutional effectiveness

Leading this process will be faculty and staff members from across the university, who will represent, or “champion,” how each of our core values – Collaboration, Diversity, Ethical Community, Excellence, Learning and Opportunity – will shape the future of Ferris State University. There will be two “Co-Champions” per core value. These people will take on the responsibility of establishing work groups of 8-10 participants who will establish a central goal for their area and define a focus that can be used for planning, action and evaluation.

These groups will endeavor to build upon the goals of the most recent Strategic Plan. These goals are fostering

- Excellence in educational quality and student learning
- Communities where all are valued, welcomed, informed and engaged
- State-of-the-art, sustainable and safe learning, living and working environments
- Collaborative internal and external working relationships
- Innovation and improved processes

Much of the initial focus of this strategic thinking will be to create innovative and creative “what if” scenarios to envision ways the university can best embody its core values to create the best possible learning environment for our students. The impetus for these might come from identifying problems stemming from a current practice, from recommendations identified in the HLC self-study, or from new ideas developed within the teams. A fourth source of ideas will come

from outreach to some of the university's many stakeholder groups. These include, among others, input from college-wide and university-wide meetings bringing together faculty and staff, current and future students and their parents, alumni, donors and friends, business and industry leaders, and members of communities where Ferris has a presence.

To give just one example of putting a core value into practice, a team focused on the core value of Excellence operating under the guiding question, "How can we provide a university that is committed to innovation and creativity," might ask, "What if we recognized and rewarded excellence differently than we do now?"

Too often traditional planning can take the plans from previous years, dust them off, update them a bit, and put them back on the shelf. This process hopes to break down barriers between groups to see if there are more ways we can work across colleges, divisions and programs.

No matter what you do or how you connect with Ferris, you can contribute to our next strategic plan. The hope is that your involvement in this process will lead to a plan that is useful, understandable and practical. The intent is that the university-wide plan forms a framework upon which our university's various units can build their own strategic plans. At the end of this process, you should have a clear picture of how your projects, initiatives and day-to-day responsibilities advance the mission and vision of the university.

The intent is to begin this process immediately. I hope that when approached to give your perspective on the ways in which our university can best move forward, guided by its principles, you will share your insights, experience and expertise. Additional information on the strategic planning process is accessible here -

<http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/president/newsletters/memos/> (2/12/13 document).

Thank you in advance for your willingness to take part in this important envisioning of our university's future. We know that when we bring the people of our university community together, that our combined efforts will far exceed what any of us could do in isolation.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler, president