

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
February 25, 2013

Faculty Contract

Last Friday our Board of Trustees voted to not ratify a proposal extending the university's contract with the Ferris Faculty Association. This proposal would have extended the current contract, set to expire at the end of June, for five more years. It also would have delayed implementation of the newly passed "Right to Work" law for faculty members during this period. After their action, the Board issued a statement that provides the major reasons behind this. This is included in a press release issued on Friday and accessible here -

<http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/archive/2013/february/contract.htm> .

If you have not been following these developments, it is useful to understand how this unfolded. In December the FFA expressed to the Trustees their desire to extend the current contract at present terms for two years. In January we held two discussions with the FFA. The first was to determine if the FFA would consider a different proposal. The second was to present them with this 5-year proposal. The FFA accepted the proposal without change.

What I did not anticipate was how much and how quickly the political environment in the state would change after the proposal was presented. High-profile attempts to extend contracts or sign side agreements between universities and public employee unions became lightning rods attracting much attention. A number of lawmakers were quoted in the media as favoring reduced funding or other sanctions of some kind for universities that signed contracts or agreements delaying the impact of "Right to Work." This became a concern with the opportunities for increased funding contained in this year's state budget. Both the Board of Trustees and I felt that, ultimately, risking millions of dollars of funding or further sanctions was an unacceptable level of risk.

In early February we met with the FFA leadership, explained the change in position on the extension of the union security clause, and informed them that because of these unexpected, changing circumstances the trustees would not support this proposal. We hoped the FFA would consider the remainder of the proposal on salary and benefits, which they had accepted, or return to the table to discuss what could be done. They proceeded to a ratification vote although they did not have a signed tentative contract agreement.

The FFA presented the result of this vote to the Trustees on Friday - 175 votes were for the proposal and eight against. Slightly less than half of the FFA's approximately 420 members voted. In their action, the Board of Trustees understood the need to move forward so that all parties could return to negotiating a contract.

It is easy to appreciate how this contract extension could have been a good thing for our university. When these discussions began, I saw the possibility of reaching a five-year agreement providing good terms, consistency and predictability for faculty. Unfortunately, because of the political developments we were unable to extend the union security clause.

The FFA contract expires on June 30. I am confident that we will be discussing next steps with the FFA in the very near future and look forward to doing so.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler, president