

# President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President  
January 18, 2010

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Watching the news this past week, it is difficult to comprehend the full scope and scale of the earthquake disaster in Haiti. The devastation, need, and suffering of Haitians have moved our entire nation to respond with much needed help. While there will be ongoing needs in the days ahead, the present requires financial support above all. If you have not contributed already, I encourage you to do so. There are many ways to give, including a program through cell phone texts. Dr. Dan Burcham and Dr. David Pilgrim are coordinating our University's responses. They want to hear your thoughts and ideas about how Ferris State University can make a difference.

During a time when we consider the legacy of Martin Luther King and reflect upon how he changed our world, I am reminded of his words -

*Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?*

I urge you to consider how we might make a difference today for others in desperate need.

## **The Present and the Future**

January is a time when we settle back into the daily routine of the University. In the busy and sometimes hectic daily activity, it is possible to lose track of important, perhaps even historic, work that is taking place.

Two years ago this spring your efforts resulted in a shared understanding of the University's values, mission, and vision. From this emerged a strategic plan that today is guiding both of our present and future direction. This set the stage for a careful and thoughtful reconsideration of general education at Ferris. This is now underway in a broadly consultative process, ably guided by Professor Fred Heck and the General Education Committee. This reflects an academic maturity, a continued growth and evolution of our academic efforts, and a growing source of pride for our University.

In addition to the examination of our general education mission, our University is engaged in a careful study and review for the upcoming Higher Learning Commission visit. This work has been underway since the fall of 2007 and is led by a steering committee co-chaired by Christine Vonder Haar, professor of Languages and Literature, and Mike Cairns, associate vice president for Student Affairs. These efforts are in preparation for HLC's visit on April 18-20, 2011.

In a third broadly based effort, the Strategic Planning and Resource Committee is reviewing progress on the University's strategic plan and working to identify ways the University can most successfully meet the goals of its mission and core values. I want to thank Professor Leonard Johnson for accepting the position of SPARC chair. Thanks as well to Robert von der Osten, the outgoing chair, who has done an outstanding job helping guide SPARC through such issues as drafting new mission and vision statements, and developing goals and initiatives for implementation of the strategic plan. SPARC meets this Friday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> at 3 p.m. in the Rankin Center Founders' Room to review progress on the Strategic Plan and to look at new and

innovative ideas to shape Ferris' future. SPARC meetings are open to everyone and you are always encouraged to attend.

## **Students**

We continue to hear very positive responses from students helped by the University's decision to fund the financial assistance they were to receive during Fall semester from the Michigan Promise Grant and Michigan Competitive Scholarship. Last November the Ferris Board of Trustees moved to extend this help after state lawmakers were unable to find funding for these programs even though students had already been notified of receiving the aid. The outpouring of thanks from our students has reaffirmed for me the importance of this course of action. Although it required a commitment of \$1 million, it was necessary to help students struggling to earn their Ferris education during a state economic downturn of historic proportions.

Our concern for students, together with the quality and value of education we provide, is reflected in record enrollment for spring semester. For the first time spring headcount exceeds 13,000 students with 3.66 percent growth over last year to 13,151 students at Ferris State University system-wide. Spring enrollment continues strong trends in the increased diversity of our student body and the growth of Internet-based learning. The Spring Enrollment Summary: 4<sup>th</sup> Day Extract is accessible at:

[http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/president/memos/Spring\\_2010\\_Enrl\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/president/memos/Spring_2010_Enrl_Summary.pdf)

Thank you for your very successful efforts to recruit, retain and assist our students.

## **Budget Outlook**

Last Monday's Revenue Estimating Conference in Lansing estimated that the 2010-11 budget will have to deal with a further \$1.6 billion shortfall, which would result in a \$1.2 billion gap in the general fund. This will have a serious negative effect on education in the state. For perspective, last year's budget process resulted in a reduction of \$400 million in the general fund, and even greater cuts were only avoided thanks to more than \$1 billion in economic stimulus funding. This year the economic stimulus is gone and the state will need to cut more than three times what it did last year. It is unlikely we will again be protected by the stipulation of the federal economic stimulus package the state received, that higher education could not be cut below 2006 levels, so deep, significant reductions are ahead.

You may recall that last year we took two \$2.5 million budget reductions. The first of those was used to balance this year's budget and restrain tuition for our students. The second was to prepare for what lies ahead. It is now clear these reductions will not be enough as we anticipate additional state cuts. In preparation for this, our vice presidents are asking the deans, directors and the University community to work together to facilitate an additional \$2.5 million reduction. Half of this amount will come from the divisions and half from central funds. My hope is that decisions in this budget cut process can be concluded by mid-February.

There is no denying that the economic losses for Michigan have been stunning. In 2000 Michigan ranked 20<sup>th</sup> among the states in per capita income - by 2011 it is predicted we will be 40<sup>th</sup>. Michigan lost nearly 900,000 jobs between 2001 and 2009, and it's predicted that our unemployment rate will remain near 15 percent through 2010. In short, we have gone from being a prosperous state to one that is struggling. We will continue to see the real-world implications of this wrenching global economic shift.

There are some hopeful signs that the economy in Michigan may be leveling out. While at near historic highs, the unemployment rate held steady – and perhaps even improved slightly – in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2009. Thanks in part to this modest improvement, we do not currently expect an executive order that would result in further funding reductions for the current fiscal year.

Now is the time to plan for the challenges of next year, while students, faculty and staff are on campus. These hard realities, together with a look at the University's unrestricted net assets, will be the backdrop for my budget forums this week. These are scheduled for January 20 and 21, Wednesday and Thursday, 1 p.m. both days in the Rankin Center Centennial Dining Room. I hope to see you there.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler  
President

