Please describe your annual commitment to university-funded financial aid over the past four years (not including Pell grants, Michigan Competitive Scholarships, or TIP). What is the total amount committed and what are the sources of the financial aid (i.e. general operating fund, endowments, donations, etc.)? What percentage of this year's freshman class received university-funded financial aid?

Ferris State University has made, and will continue to make, a significant annual commitment to university-funded financial aid. This has been a priority in past years, and will continue to be a top concern of the university. For example, during FY09-10, Ferris’ ongoing state funding was reduced by $1.6 million and replaced by $1.38 million in federal stimulus funds. We cut the University’s budget by the larger amount and used the stimulus funds to replace funding students did not receive for Promise Grants and Michigan Competitive Scholarships. Between 2007 and 2011 we more than doubled institutional general fund aid from $8 million to $19 million. We provided additional one-time funds in FY11 to assist our neediest of students and those whose families experienced job loss. An additional $5.6 million was made available to students from endowments, donations and other university sources last year. For FY 12 the university budgeted $16,949,606 in institutional aid, representing 9.25% of the general fund budget. More than one-half, 54%, of this year’s freshman class received some form of institutional financial aid.

We know that to increase college degree completion in Michigan, we need to increase the number of first generation, minority, transfer, and non-traditional college students in our state. Is this part of your strategy, and, if so, what are you doing to make your university more accessible and affordable for these students?

As the four-year public university in Michigan that awards more associate degrees than any other, Ferris has for years structured many of its programs so that students can begin with a course of study to earn an associate degree, then “ladder” into a four-year program as they gain academic confidence. Additionally, Ferris’ focus on career-oriented, hands-on degrees appeals to students most comfortable with real-world learning situations.

Through our extensive network of articulation agreements with community colleges, students can make use of this “2+2” laddering of an associate degree to bachelor degree by starting at a community college. Currently we provide 32 bachelor degrees, 17 certificates and endorsements, and 10 master degrees on community college campuses. During the 2010-2011 academic year – Ferris provided 151 programs in partnership with 15 community colleges at 16 locations and provided degree access to 4,167 students. The average age of a student in these community college partnered programs is over thirty. In Big Rapids the average student age is 22.
Because of our many two-year programs and the laddering opportunities, this fall 745 students enrolled in Phase I and 135 in Phase II of the Tuition Incentive Program. To qualify for TIP support a student must come from a family that qualifies for Medicaid. The TIP program at Ferris has been a remarkable success, providing a great expansion of educational opportunity for students who otherwise would not have the resources to pursue a college degree.

Students who begin at other institutions see Ferris State University as a preferred destination. From Summer 2010 through Spring 2011 semesters, Ferris experienced a net increase of 877 transfer students. About 80 percent of students transferring to Ferris came from two-year institutions. Our university endeavors to make the process of a student attending their preferred institution as seamless as possible.

For example, Ferris was one of the first universities in the state to participate in the Michigan Transfer Network, which allows students, advisers and the general public to view transfer course equivalencies between participating colleges and universities. We were also one of the originators of reverse transfer where a student may earn their associate degree after transferring to our institution.

We are very pleased and excited about Ferris’ summer partnership with the Hispanic Center of West Michigan. This effort encourages Grand Rapids-area Latino high school students to pursue a college education. Under the program, Ferris faculty members present hands-on lessons about various career opportunities. They make students aware of resources that can help them pay for college, and also bring students to Ferris’ main campus in Big Rapids to get a feeling for the college experience.

What is your reaction to Governor Snyder's proposal to use a performance formula based on metrics to distribute a 3 percent funding increase to universities? Are there other metrics/criteria you would like to see considered in such a distribution? What other ways do you think we ought to be ‘measuring’ our universities?

Given that state support represents only 14.8% of our total budget, it would be our preference that performance metrics not be introduced. However, if increased funding will be dependent upon the introduction of performance metrics, Ferris State University believes the State Budget Office has done excellent work in developing these proposed metrics and supports them strongly for the following reasons –
1. It is a limited number of simple, easily understood measures.
2. These measures use clearly quantifiable data that is already collected by the state.
3. Finally the state will reward universities for enrollment growth and producing more graduates. Despite rhetoric that touts the importance of more students going to college, for the past decade Michigan has punished growth at its universities.
4. It recognizes the additional costs of educating students in needed high tech, high touch STEM fields.
5. It encourages universities to enroll and graduate students from poor economic backgrounds.
6. It rewards universities that work to keep tuition increases low.

While Ferris supports the Governor’s performance funding components, it does not believe they should be a one-time resource. The state is asking Michigan universities to minimize the rate of tuition cost increase, which will be difficult to do if the monies allocated on the basis of the metric benchmarks are not designated as base funding.

If the funding allocated as a result of an institution meeting or exceeding a standard is indeed considered base funding, future calculations could be based on universities staying within some range of performance to maintain the base dollars. If outcomes fall beneath that range, decisions in ensuing years may result in reduced base appropriations, or a lesser of increase. If this is not the case, at some point high-achieving institutions will become victims of their own success. When a university hits, or nears, the ceiling at which it is not feasible to maintain a prior rate of increase, then they could suffer a reduction in funds even as lower-achieving institutions see their appropriations increase. Granting these monies as base funding and establishing optimal target ranges would create certainty and stability for universities and legislators, alike.

Where is the University in posting expenditures found in Section 245 of the budget? If you have not done so, what is the timeline for completion?

The University has met the requirement for posting expenditures found in Section 245 of the budget. This is accessible at http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/president/budget-office/information.htm under the heading “State and Federal Reporting.”