SPARC  
March 6, 3:00pm  
Founders Room, Rankin Center  
Meeting Summary

In Attendance:  
Dan Burcham  
Warren Hills for Rick Christner  
David Eisler  
Don Green  
Kim Hancock  
Mike Hughes  
Michelle Johnston  
Paul Kammerdiner  
Ken Kuk  
Sheila MacEachron  
David Pilgrim  
Matt Pinter  
Allen Sutherby  
Luzia Tartari  
Nate Tymes  
John Urbanick  
Robert von der Osten  
John Willey

Not in Attendance:  
Shelly Armstrong  
Amber Balmer  
Mike Cron  
Oliver Evans  
Rick Griffin  
Nancy Hogan  
Miles Postema  
Jim Rumpf  
Mike Ryan  
Tom Weaver

Guests: Don Flickinger and Robbie Teahen

Introduction:  
Chair von der Osten reminded Council members to be strong advocates for SPARC with a clear message about what is being said in the budget meetings/open forums. We need to represent the state of affairs at the University when asked.

The President reminded members that the Strategic Plan part of SPARC (Strategic Planning and Resource Council) has gone well; however, we are now at the And Resource part and must consider the budget and budgetary reductions. We to think strategically to not only get our budget to July, but to effectively plan out for three years.

Presentation:

President David Eisler shared information on the implications to higher education from the economic stimulus package, repercussions from the Governor’s proposed tuition freeze, and the expected budget questions/discussions being held throughout the university.

Economic Stimulus: There are very specific parameters in the economic stimulus bill for higher education:

- 2010 higher education state budget cannot be less than 2006 budget
- If 2010 state budget is less than 2008 or 2009, replace difference with stimulus funds for 2010 and 2011
- For Ferris this would be $1.6 million
  - Replace general and operating, mitigate tuition
  - Not to endowment
  - Not for infrastructure or capital projects
- What are the best uses for economic stimulus funds?

We cannot afford to gamble on what the state will do to replace funds in 2012; they do not have a good track record of funding higher education over the last thirty-plus years. There is a separate bucket of money for capital projects, but those funds are not just for higher education.
**Tuition freeze:** The Governor has requested that Michigan universities freeze tuition. This is too much of a reduction for Ferris. We have annual increased costs of:

- $1.4 million = to continue current student scholarships
- .5 million = to cover increased MPSERS costs
- .5 million = to cover increased utility costs
- 3.8 million = to cover increased employee salary and benefits costs

This $6.2 million is **not** to fund new initiatives or programs, but to maintain current operations. A tuition increase of one percent generates approximately $900,000; so you can see why a tuition freeze would be so painful to Ferris. We use a robust tuition model with eight pieces flowing into it and are expecting to recommend to the Board of Trustees a 5.9 percent increase in tuition. The President then presented scenarios (attached) in which Ferris could freeze tuition or use tuition restraint, showing the amount of budget reductions required under each condition.

**Budget Discussions:** The following questions will be discussed at college/division/unit levels across the university:

- What are the *Opportunities* for savings?
- What are the *Challenges* for these opportunities?
- What *Work* is needed to realize opportunities?
- What are the *Impediments* to reaching these opportunities?

The message is that there are no bad ideas – we will be able to act on some suggestions and not act on others. The priority lists of budget reductions and revenue increases should be sent to the President by the end of March. He recommended that SPARC meet in April to review the budget reductions. Even after the reductions, Ferris will be spending money and growing. He also stressed that we are in good shape and doing well, but must be careful and intelligent in decision making, and we must protect our people and academic quality.

**Discussion/Action:**

**Budget Discussions:** Chair von der Osten initiated discussion on the role of SPARC regarding budget reductions and priorities.

- There was an understanding that SPARC would prepare the strategic plan and move the university forward through years 1, 2, and 3. Should this group evaluate things that departments are putting forward in planning - is this going beyond the charge? The SPARC charge is to ensure ongoing implementation of the plan. We need to evaluate the plans; there is no separation of the two. Planning and budget reductions that emerge will be part of the strategic plan initiatives, so we need to be part of the discussions.
- This group has not prioritized initiatives, so can we prioritize funding for the budget? The President’s Council prioritized the initiatives brought forth from SPARC, whose membership cuts across the university and serves in an advisory role. Money set aside for specific initiatives, such as Rankin Center, needs to be used in that way since it is one of our strategic plan initiatives. Continuing to prioritize initiatives and funding is the way to accomplish the charge.
- How can SPARC ensure ongoing implementation of the plan? SPARC is aware of the things Ferris is trying to do, so evaluating priorities after a review of the budget reduction suggestions would be very helpful and useful to the President. Frequently suggested cuts are reorganizations of administration, buyouts, released time, and travel reductions. Sometimes savings are really savings and sometimes not when you consider the full costs and implications; this group can assist in the review.
- Ferris needs to stay on the strategic course. How do we accomplish that?
We need to constantly reevaluate our priorities and reexamine the impact of our strategic initiatives by analyzing before making decisions. We have obligation to consider our initiatives in a fair and strategic way, and then give feedback to the university community. We must be good listeners and liaisons to our departments.

- **SPARC** should educate the university community.
  Some employees don’t feel a fiduciary responsibility to the university; this group could find a way to make them aware of ways to be more efficient and to understand their cost to the university. For example, small class size may benefit an instructor, but is not efficient for the university. We could establish certain standards or levels of expectation and do things smarter. We should shape communication across the university that we are building a better university in a time of budget reductions so that we can build for new times, turning this into an affirmative discussion. We are interested in hope and expansiveness of student opportunity.

- **MOTION**: All in favor of participating in document review of budget reductions as an advisory group to the President? **VOTE: Unanimous.**

**Online Learning Initiative**: Chair von der Osten initiated discussion on moving the online learning initiative to an earlier year in the Strategic Plan.

- **Can we afford to wait to begin this initiative with its fiscal implications?**
  Groups all across the university are already working on online issues and many areas are already moving forward. There is some disconnect between these groups, but pulling them together as an initiative would be helpful. To list it as a later year initiative, the progress will continue, but the disconnect is likely to continue. It affects so many resources. If the initiative is moved to Year 2, we can make better decisions regarding funding resources and workload issues for online education.

- **International issues regarding online:**
  International students are not allowed to take online programs, and the classes are not set up to be taken abroad. Programs need to be available to these students.

- **Infrastructure issues:**
  This is a complex issue. We certainly need adequate infrastructure. Online classes are growing at 25-30 percent. There is a plan, including goals and objectives, which has been sent to the faculty for comment.

- **What about the Academic Senate in this and what is the impact on academic issues?**
  The Senate group is for syntheses and feedback – to take in all facets, combine the information, and oversee the groups. There are some concerns with e-learning and integrating information.

- **MOTION**: All in favor of recommending to the President’s Council to move Goal 1, Initiative 6 (Develop and implement a plan for the Ferris State University online learning environment.) to Year 2? **VOTE: Unanimous.** The President’s Council will determine who should be responsible for the initiative.

**Retention Initiative**: Chair von der Osten initiated discussion on adding retention as an initiative to the Strategic Plan and distributed a retention data document.

- **There is concern because some employees believe that if we don’t have a topic in the strategic plan, it is not important to the University.**
  Several issues are important, however, are operational in nature, and are not listed in the plan. Members discussed retention as an operational matter or a university initiative.
• Ferris is currently developing a plan to improve retention. It was suggested that a task force might accomplish this objective through a survey to gather reasons for students leaving since we don’t have a full set of data, but merely some indicators. Demographics show that fewer students are available, so retention is as important as anything we do in the next 24 months. Retention is critical to Ferris and is not one of those operational things like mopping the floor – that implies that it gets done. We need to have discussions and intentionality about retention. There is some expertise and retention could be improved and assessed in an intelligent way with coordinated efforts across the University. We must adopt a strategy where in a coordinated way we increase our retention rate as much as possible.

• Some members felt strongly that retention must be an initiative. In our vision, Ferris is “the preferred choice for students.” We can make that true when retention is improved. There is a problem when those who start here don’t finish with a degree – we are settling them with debt and no degree to show for it.

• MOTION: All in favor of adding retention as an initiative under Goal 2 to the Strategic Plan? VOTE: Yes - 14, Opposed - 1, Abstained - 2; Motion Passed. (Exact wording, such as “enhance retention at Ferris State University” will be determined at the April meeting.)

Master Plan Initiative: Chair von der Osten initiated discussion on implementing the master plan recommendations concerning parking - Goals 4, Initiative 4.

• Do we need to move forward immediately with the transportation piece of the facilities master plan? Should we begin the process to review implementation of this initiative? The suggestion of perimeter parking and use of shuttles was brought forward during the master plan open forums; many felt that it was a workable idea. It will take the better part of a year to do that study regarding roads, lots, bus route and pedestrian traffic. There was confusion regarding moving the initiative needs in that it is set for Year 2 and may begin as other initiatives have

• There was misunderstanding of the meaning of the initiative – it is for communication to the university community or to fund a study? Does it include transportation to other areas/campuses; i.e. to/from Grand Rapids. As a diversity issue, international and minority students many times require transportation.

• Result: This topic will return at the April meeting. Mike Hughes will report back about the results of the Transportation Plan, the cost of a Transportation Study and the cost of a separate study of the Shuttle Service. David Pilgrim will share information on the relative feasibility of a Grand Rapids - Big Rapids shuttle, given its implications for diversity in general and the Grand Rapids Hispanic population in particular.

Communication to the University community:

• We need to place the reports and all informational pieces online at a central location.

• We need to redesign a better “dashboard” on the entire Strategic Plan progress. There is a lot of progress, and we need to find the best way to get the information to everyone.

Next meeting date:
Friday, April 8, 3:00-5:00pm, Founders Room

Adjourned 4:45pm
Submitted by Elaine R. Kamptner