

The Ferris Foundation
ANNUAL REPORT



at a
GLANCE

ASSETS
\$127+ million

ENDOWED
FUNDS
777

DONORS
3,929

DONOR-FUNDED
SCHOLARSHIP
RECIPIENTS
1,464

DONOR-FUNDED
SCHOLARSHIP
DOLLARS AWARDED
\$3+ million



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WELCOME

From the President and the Foundation Board Chair



We're celebrating the 140th anniversary of Ferris State University's founding this year. We often wonder what Woodbridge and Helen Ferris would think if they strolled around our bustling campus today.

They would no doubt be awed by the buildings and the state-of-the-art technology that provide students with in-demand skills. But we're confident they would also be very pleased that the institution they founded has remained steadfast to the mission and values they set in place.

We're proud of that. Our world has changed so much and continues to change faster than we can imagine. But the blueprint they created in 1884 continues to serve us well and guides our decision-making.

As you read the stories in this annual report, you'll be introduced to students who overcame hardships and found success at Ferris State because of scholarships you supported. You'll meet alumni who benefitted from the programs our university offers in Big Rapids and around the state.

You will learn about programs that propel people, ideas, and industries forward. You'll be reminded that Ferris State makes a difference in our world.

We continue to think big. A year after the state-of-the-art Center for Virtual Learning opened, we continue to look

at our facilities, especially our residence halls, to ensure that students who come to Ferris State have all they need to be successful and have experiences they'll remember all their lives.

With your support, we continue to work toward establishing a standalone building for the Jim Crow Museum. This museum on the Big Rapids campus continues to be a place for stimulating discussions for eliminating barriers as we work together toward a more inclusive world.

The museum's traveling exhibit, "Overcoming Hateful Things," moved across Michigan from the Grand Rapids Public Museum to the Wayne County Community College District's campus in downtown Detroit. The exhibit, supported



by a grant from the Wege Foundation, is now on its way to new audiences outside of Michigan, starting with Memphis, Tennessee, and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Because of your generosity, we're reviving our marching band! This will add to the excitement of game days for students as well as more opportunities to connect with the greater community of Big Rapids.

Yet we have so many other students who need our help. Just as our world continues to change, so must our university, as we will always pursue the goal of meeting the needs of our students, and we will do this to the best of our ability. This was the desire of our founder Woodbridge Ferris 140 years ago, and it is still our desire today.

We humbly thank you for your generous support of the Ferris Foundation, our university, and our greater community. We will continue our focus on being relevant and responsive, and we are hopeful you will continue to join us on this journey.

Sincerely,

Bill Pink, Ph.D.
President, Ferris State University

Arlen-Dean Gaddy
Chair, Ferris Foundation Board

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Tenacious Philanthropy

Emily Cramer Hancock meets challenges with faith, friends, and generosity

Dr. Emily Cramer Hancock has had to overcome many unforeseen challenges in her life, but they haven't weakened her positivity or her generosity to others.

"Everything I am today, I am because of the parents who raised me and my choice to attend Ferris State," Hancock said. "Looking back, the foundations of my upbringing and the lessons I learned at Ferris State stand out as contributors to my success. When you choose to be a Bulldog, you make the best choice possible. Never look back — because you can change the world!"

Hancock, a '76 College of Pharmacy graduate, started her career at St. Lawrence Hospital in Lansing. She met her husband, Bruce Hancock, there, and the couple made their home in Indianapolis.

Emily Hancock continued her education while working as a hospital pharmacist at St. Vincent Hospital and Health Services. She earned her Doctor of Pharmacy degree from

Purdue University and later earned a master's in public affairs from what was then Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

Adversity swept in for the Hancocks on the heels of a 2011 storm. The couple got word that their Indianapolis home was struck by lightning and caught fire while they were at their Michigan cottage to evaluate damage from the same storm system.

Bruce Hancock, a faculty member at Purdue's College of Pharmacy, experienced an unrelated health issue while dealing with the challenges of property damage and passed away in January 2012. Shortly after, Emily Hancock lost vision in one of her eyes. While undergoing surgeries and examinations to correct her vision, a test discovered she had breast cancer.

Hancock credits her close friends and her faith for pulling her through her troubles.

"You sort of start to experience an attitude with life when you go through these things," she said. "You just say, 'Bring it on! You can't take me down!'"

She also credits her perseverance to her upbringing and the values instilled by her parents.

"My father was always clear," she said. "He said we had a responsibility to do our best and to serve our community. Together, we can overcome any challenge. Simple as that."

With her vision mostly repaired and more than 10 years beyond her cancer diagnosis, Hancock's devotion to philanthropy and giving back inspires all who know her.

"There are hundreds of different things I could say about giving and the impact that individuals can have on the issues they care about," she said.

"It's about civic leadership, engaging the culture of philanthropy, and accepting our responsibility to continuously support education. It is my plea to my peers and fellow alumni to realize the importance of this work and the impact you can make on students today."

Hancock, a 2007 Distinguished Alumni recipient, funded scholarships for each academic college at Ferris State University and Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University. She also played an instrumental role in developing the Maj. Gen. Ben H. Fuller Endowed Scholarship and Big Rapids High School Opportunity Forward Endowed Scholarship, supporting both veteran students and Big Rapids High School graduates enrolled at Ferris, respectively.

She and her husband also established the Cramer Family Endowment in 2006, which provides program support for resource and faculty development.

Emily Hancock went on to varied roles as director of the St. Vincent Institute on Aging and multiple positions with Indiana's Family and Social Services Administration. Now retired, she serves as secretary of the Ferris Foundation Board of Directors.

She urges people to remember what it was like when they were facing challenges, then ask how they can make a difference.

"Any amount you feel moved to give is meaningful and it will make an impact," she said. "Remember why these students are so amazing and so deserving of our support, and the sky will truly be the limit."

To learn more about the work of the Ferris Foundation and incredible donors like Emily Hancock, or to learn how you can make your impact on students and projects at Ferris State, visit ferris.edu/giving.

IT'S TIME!



Make your gift to the Ferris Foundation today and support the incredible, impactful, and empowering work happening at Ferris State University. Start by heading to ferris.edu/giving. You'll find links allowing you to support scholarships, athletics, special campaigns like Pharmacy Forward and other Ferris State University organizations. You can also create an endowment — or support an existing one.



TO GIVE
SCAN THE
QR CODE

Or go to ferris.edu/giving
or call 231-591-2365

WITNESS, UNDERSTAND, HEAL



Standalone Jim Crow Museum of Racist Imagery will bring expanded access, research, and mission

It started in a 500-square-foot room in 1996 and later expanded to 3,500 square feet on the Ferris State University Library's ground floor.

With a planned move in 2026 to a free-standing, 32,431-square-foot space, the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Imagery will be able to reach an even larger audience with its mission: "Witness, understand, heal."

"Our new facility and accompanying programs will expand access to the museum's resources, enhance preservation efforts and amplify the work of our mission: to use objects of intolerance to teach tolerance and promote a more just society moving forward," said Dr. David Pilgrim, the museum's founder and director and Ferris State University's vice president for Diversity, Inclusion and Strategic Initiatives.

The start of the museum's collection — which now numbers about 20,000 artifacts — was the purchase of a pair of salt and pepper shakers by a 12-year-old Pilgrim. When his collection of racist objects grew to about 3,000, he began showing them to students in his Sociology classes. Creating a museum allowed Pilgrim to share important lessons on race and tolerance beyond Ferris' Big Rapids campus.

In addition to civil and human rights scholars and students, police officers, politicians, school leaders and church groups have toured the exhibits, which include disturbing photos of Ku Klux Klan activities as well as racist imagery on everyday objects like dish towels.

Pilgrim says the objects provoke conversations that need to happen. "Wherever we've been, our goal has been to take objects that were meant to be harmful — they were meant as racial propaganda — and to use them as evidence of what occurred in the past and, quite frankly, as evidence of what we shouldn't repeat," he said.

The Ferris Foundation has set a \$22 million goal to build the standalone museum at the entrance of the Big Rapids campus. Ferris State University's Board of Trustees committed \$5 million when approving the project in 2023, and the current state budget includes a \$4 million grant.



The free-standing facility will join the museum's first traveling exhibit as Pilgrim brings his message to new audiences in new ways.

"The Jim Crow Museum is my life's work, but it's more than that. It's an opportunity, I truly believe, for us to make a difference in this nation," he said.

"A better America is possible, and it will be led by the thoughtful people who are not caught in 'happy history' — people that see the wrongs of the past and seek to repair the world."

A state-of-the-art facility will expand the Jim Crow Museum's exhibits, preserve irreplaceable items, and expand accessibility of the collection.

Designers:
Neumann/Smith
Architecture design firm
& Howard+Revis Design

Timetable:
Work to start in
2025
with opening in
2026

Size:
2 levels
with a combined
32,431
square feet

Features:
Dedicated space for
classes, research,
light-sensitive storage,
and digital media
recordings

YOU CAN HELP

To donate to the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Imagery go to jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu

Overcoming Hateful Things



Traveling exhibit teaches tolerance

The disturbing artifacts on display at the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Imagery spark uncomfortable — but necessary — discussions every day.

Now a traveling exhibit is creating space for those conversations in cities throughout the United States.

"Overcoming Hateful Things" features 151 items from the museum's extensive collection of racist and anti-Black artifacts. It made its debut in summer 2023 at the Grand Rapids Public Museum and traveled to Wayne County Community College in Detroit in early 2024.

"Our mission has always been to provide pathways to better lives through higher education," said Dr. Curtis L. Ivery, the college's chancellor. "This exhibit offers an opportunity to see and engage in history in a way that challenges, but also builds new understanding about where we have come from, and where we are going as a community and as a nation."

Professional design firm Howard+Revis collaborated with museum staff to develop content and exhibition elements. The Grand Rapids-based Wege Foundation provided a \$500,000 grant to support the project.

"This really large, well-thought-out, well-defined traveling exhibit will go out in communities, and it will create spaces where people can have the same type of dialogues that we're having in the physical facility in Big Rapids," said David Pilgrim, Ferris State University's vice president for Diversity, Inclusion and Strategic Initiatives and founder and director of the Jim Crow Museum.

RETAKING THE FIELD

Ferris State University's Bulldog Marching Band is returning after a decades-long hiatus!

In making the announcement this past spring, President Bill Pink noted: "There's a lot of things we need to get done between now and fall 2025."

The Ferris Foundation, which is leading fundraising efforts, has set a \$7,500 goal. Donations will go toward student scholarships, recruitment efforts, sheet music, uniforms, and instrument maintenance.

"The marching band will take the Ferris State football experience to a new level," said Dr. Daniel Atwood, director of athletic bands. "College game day will become more vibrant as we provide more pomp and circumstance, and the marching band will bring renewed energy to all of our events."

But Atwood plans to take the Marching Bulldogs beyond the football turf.



"With performances at athletic events and performances in the community, the marching band will become one of the most visible student organizations in the greater Ferris community," he said. "Obviously, the marching band will be seen at events on campus, and it is my goal to make appearances at high schools, professional sports venues, parades and other events across the country."

The scheduled relaunch will be just the latest chapter in the long history of marching bands on the Ferris campus.

Carl R. Kuhlman, head of the Music Department at what was then Ferris Institute, established the college's first marching band in 1929. The 1929 yearbook noted that the band "was able to surprise the student body at the Homecoming Game by marching around the field and forming the letters 'F. I.'"

This was the first time in the history of the school that the band had ever accomplished as much at a football game."

For various reasons, the band was formed sporadically over the next few decades. But it saw a strong revival in 1955 through the efforts of bands director Dacho Dachoff and the dedicated music staff. In 1958, the marching band made its first appearance on national television as part of a Detroit Lions game in Detroit.



By 1966, the marching band of what was now Ferris State College numbered over 100 students for the first time. Continued growth prompted faculty to launch a summer music camp on the campus in 1969.

In January 1973, 144 Marching Bulldogs, under the leadership of director William Root, represented Michigan as one of 45 bands to march in President Richard M. Nixon's second inaugural parade. The band marched two miles along Pennsylvania Avenue in 45-degree weather – but only after Root scrambled to find a music store to rent a forgotten instrument.

Atwood hopes the new marching band will help recruit more arts students to Ferris.

"Students involved in the arts are generally more engaged, creative problem solvers, disciplined, intelligent, kind and empathetic," he said. "Students with these qualities breathe life into our community, elevating the atmosphere in which we live, work, and play every day."

"In all of these ways, the marching band will play an integral role in increasing pride in our campus and surrounding communities."

To donate to the marching band's revival, go to ferris.edu/marchingband.

FULL SPEED AHEAD

Alumnus trains Criminal Justice faculty on use of newly acquired 'skid car'

Ferris State University Law Enforcement Academy students will gain important skills behind the wheel of a 2022 Dodge Charger during tactical driving training.

Glen Okonoski, interim chair of the School of Criminal Justice, said the program plans to use the Charger — a popular four-door muscle car — in all seasons to benefit students.

"The Charger will be an attractive element of our program at regional college fairs, intermediate school districts, and other functions for pre-college students," he said. "We plan to get full value from this latest addition to our vehicle fleet."



Okonoski cited campus collaboration and help from a program alum in obtaining the freshly outfitted "skid car." A skid car unit allows the Charger's tires to be lifted, which calls on academy students to manage the vehicle beyond their reflexive reactions behind the wheel.

He pointed to funding from the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost's office that allowed the school to replace a Crown Victoria that had gone out of service a year earlier.

The apparatus attached to the Charger comes from Skidcar System in Las Vegas, where 1987 Criminal Justice alumnus Karl Conklin is employed. Okonoski said Conklin visited to consult during setup and offered training on skid car sessions.

"We have large parking areas on campus that can be used for tactical driving classes in the summer," Okonoski said. "Also, there are other aspects of road-related responses the Charger will be used for year-round, like doing speed checks and interactive learning."

TWO DAYS OF GIVING



Giving Tuesday and One Day for Dawgs inspired more than \$300,000 in donations to Ferris State University organizations.

Giving Tuesday, an international day of philanthropy, raised a record \$20,000 — which Jennifer Todd, associate vice president for Advancement, called a "humbling" outcome.

"These funds directly impact our students and the projects donors care most about," she said. "The participation, from faculty and staff to our alumni and friends in the community, drives positive change across the university."

The good news continued with One Day for Dawgs, which exceeded its fundraising goal and inspired more than 300 people to make their first donations.

Ferris State University organizations can raise funds for the causes they care most about on this annual day of giving, which fell on April 10 this year. More than 50 groups took part, seeking donations for everything from scholarships to new equipment to a new pair of shoes for Brutus the Bulldog.

One Day for Dawgs gifts this year totaled \$289,503, well over the \$225,000 goal, from 1,254 donors.

The Bulldog Basic Needs Alliance, which provides emergency assistance to students facing food or housing insecurity, has participated in both fundraising efforts for several years.

"Each year, we get more and more excited to connect with passionate supporters, pursue bigger goals to expand our capabilities, and help provide peace of mind to passionate and committed students," said Maggie Walcott, the organization's chair. "Our amazing donors and volunteers make that possible."



GOLD STANDARD

Alumni celebrated Katke Golf Course's 50th anniversary with fundraisers for scholarships

The Katke Golf Course's 50th anniversary was celebrated with events that included an alumni association fundraiser to support Ferris State students.

Golfers recognized the course's past, present, and future at the annual Alumni Golf Outing on May 10. The event raised \$25,000 for scholarships.

"For many of our alumni, Ferris State is a family tradition," said Brandi Behrenwald, executive director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving. "The Alumni Golf Outing helps fund our Legacy Scholarship, which salutes the achievement and leadership potential of students who had a parent, sibling, grandparent, son, or daughter who is a Ferris State graduate."

The Katke course, designed by Robert Beard, serves as the "classroom" for students in the university's PGA Golf Management Program, the first in the nation.

The course offers 21 holes of championship golf and renowned practice facilities. It is also home to the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame and the Ken Janke Sr. Golf Learning Center, featuring indoor simulators for year-round practice and learning.

Students in the PGA Golf Management Program use the learning center to develop their abilities in coaching, instruction, and fitting and club repair, which better prepares them for their careers as PGA golf professionals.

Located on the highest point in Mecosta County, Katke has received multiple awards including the Top 100 Golf Practice Facility in America by Golf Range Magazine and the Mecosta County People's Choice Award for favorite Golf Range and Course.

From beginning to expert, golfers have discovered the right amount of challenge on the Katke greens for 50 years — and many more to come.

'A' GAME

Scholarships, Ferris acceptance reward Mark DeFour for his efforts

When Mark DeFour says life isn't always easy, pay attention. The Ferris State junior has seen his share of things.

By the age of 2, he was without a biological father and mother. His dad passed away in a car collision just months before he was born, and a couple of years later, his mom's parental rights were terminated.

So, when DeFour says you must work hard to get what you want, continue to pay attention.

Today, he is a student in Ferris' renowned golf management program — thanks to two life-changing scholarships — and he has his eye on a career in which he can help grow the game of golf.

His parents met in rehab as both worked to get clean. His dad had succeeded when he was killed. His mom was unable to overcome her addiction, and Mark grew up in tough circumstances, including often being unattended and malnourished.

His mother's sister, his Aunt Lisa, eventually became his guardian.

As Mark reflects on that momentous decision, he marvels at her courage.

"She was in no financial state to take care of me as a single mother with a daughter of her own," he said. "But she took me in anyway. It was about showing care and love to a family member in need."

Lisa married when Mark was 5 to a man named Tom, and Mark said with gratitude that Tom too took him in with open arms.

As a high school student in Berkeley, DeFour

worked to be as involved as he could be while still paying attention to his studies. He played cello for eight years and eventually made it into the top orchestra. He also was on the golf team for four years, winning a sportsmanship award his junior year and MVP as a senior.

"I knew what my story was, and I knew people with similar stories had trouble reaching their goals," he said. "I had a long talk with myself one day about how was I going to become successful in the eyes of the people around me. I knew I had to do everything I could to become better and to work harder than others."

A learning disorder also made the classroom a challenge for DeFour. But he says learning how to deal with it helped him become a harder worker and gave him a better understanding of what it takes to succeed.

"I worked countless hours to improve my knowledge and understanding of the school material," he said. "After pushing myself so hard, I eventually walked away with a high school diploma and an acceptance letter to Ferris State University."

Looking at those two pieces of paper side by side showed me that all my hard work had paid off."

In addition to his Ferris State acceptance letter, he also had two scholarships — the Robert L. and Esther J. Ewigleben Endowed Scholarship and the George Marcus Bowlby Endowed Scholarship for Non-Traditional Students — waiting for him in Big Rapids, something he said has been another lifesaver on his journey.

"These scholarships are beyond critical for me to attend Ferris," he said. "Without these scholarships, I would not be able to attend college because of the cost."

This fall, DeFour is continuing a six-month internship in New Jersey at Somerset Hills Country Club, one of the top courses in the country.

"In five years, I see myself being an assistant golf professional at a place that not only supports me but that I can support them," he said. "In 10 years, I aspire to be a lead assistant at a top facility continuing to grow the game and my passion. And in 25 years, I can see myself being a head golf professional at a place that holds the same values that I do."

And through it all, DeFour continues to simply be grateful, including for the Ferris State community.

"For me, the thing that people don't realize about Ferris is that it's bigger than just the school — it's a family," he said. "I have met my lifelong friends at Ferris, and Ferris has supported me every step of the way without blinking an eye."



STUDENT STORIES

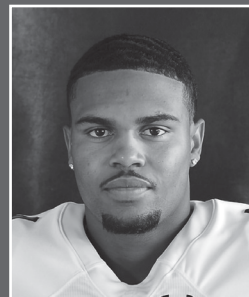


DAVID BARRANCO CALIXTO
Accounting and Finance

Richard E. Veazey Endowed Scholarship

Eva C. and Joseph C. Wurzer Memorial Accountancy Endowed Scholarship

"In seventh grade, I moved to the U.S. to have a better education, and one of my uncles was able to give me a place to live while studying. I've been trying my best to get scholarships that can cover my tuition and not have to bother my uncle with having to pay for me. Being able to receive scholarship support allows me to only work in the summer and focus on studying the rest of the year."



MAJOR DEDMOND
Marketing

Richard S. and Diann Labroff Endowed Scholarship

"I was recruited to be a part of the football team and now can proudly say I am a back-to-back national champion. My parents help with some of my cost for attendance, but ultimately, they are not in a position to pay for it all. I try and achieve success both in the classroom and on the football field as I want my donors to always be able to see the progress I make so they know their donation wasn't in vain."



ABIGAIL JASON
Nursing

Lenora L. Boyer Endowed Scholarship

Frances Friar Memorial Nursing Endowed Scholarship

"I am so grateful to be selected for this scholarship. I have been working since I was 16 to save money for college. I didn't have any prior savings from other family members before coming to college, so it can be difficult and stressful trying to work and attend school at the same time."



BRANDON KOWATCH
HVACR Technology

Hedrick Associates Endowed Scholarship

"I was admittedly nervous about my game plan on how I would pay off tuition costs. With scholarship help, I do not need to worry about that anymore. This scholarship has provided me time to acclimate to the changes in my life. It will allow me to participate in more activities around campus and allow me to fully enjoy my first year at Ferris State."



NICOLE LY
Health Information Management

Mike Shira Memorial Endowed Scholarship

Call Family Endowed Scholarship

"As a first-generation Cambodian American, it was not a cakewalk for me to get to college. There are no legacy scholarships available to me because I am the one who will make the legacy for the generations beyond me. My parents came to America as refugees from the Khmer Rouge, without a single penny in their pockets or knowing a word of English, and it is truly beautiful to watch them watch me succeed."



ABRIELLE MCCONER
Biology

Friar Family Endowed Scholarship

"While I do not consider my family to be in poverty, I definitely could not afford to attend here without help. My freshman year, I tried working over 40 hours while balancing 16 credits, and it did not end well. Scholarships give me the opportunity to actually focus on classes without panicking about how I will be able to afford them."



CATHERINE NOBLE
Dental Hygiene

Mary Ann Hashimi Memorial Endowed Scholarship

Ellen and Douglas Haneline Health Professions Endowed Scholarship

Call Family Endowed Scholarship

"My father had to medically retire in 2019 due to the many injuries he endured during his career, leaving my mother as our main source of income for the family. I have been a hard worker my whole life, and I have been trying to support myself as much as I can. Receiving scholarship support will help me in completing my final year at Ferris and pursue my dreams."



DOMINICK TAYLOR
Marketing

Foulkrod Foundation Endowed Scholarship

"My mother went to Ferris and graduated while raising two kids under 6. I would be the first person in my family besides her to get a college degree. This would be a huge accomplishment, as people who felt they knew me said the best I would do is to work in a factory my whole life. I am here to prove them wrong and my family — who said I could do this — right."



ISABEL TOOLE
Marketing

Jerry and Glad Scoby Endowed Scholarship

Thomas G. Mehl Endowed Scholarship

"I work all summer to pay for my education, so it would be very difficult for me to attend Ferris without this scholarship. I would have to take out student loans to help cover the cost and then have the stress of finding a job and paying back the student loans once I graduate."



MOLLY TOWNS
Welding Engineering Technology

Joel M. Lloyd Memorial Endowed Scholarship

"Support from scholarships means the world to me because it proves that someone believes in me and cares enough about my education to help me financially. This is especially important to me because I am a woman in a male-dominated industry, and sometimes I feel like the odds are already against me. I know it can be hard to put your faith in a student and hope they use your gift wisely, so I am always immensely thankful for all contributions to my education."



POSITIVE IMPACT

Distinguished Alumnus Sylvester Hester works to lift employees and community

A Ferris State University Distinguished Alumnus is expected to be an exceptional leader in his or her chosen industry.

But 2024 award recipient Sylvester Hester has spent much of his 30-plus years in manufacturing and logistics paving the way for future leaders through employee workshops and community outreach.

He started his career as an engineering technician for General Motors Advanced Engineering in 1985, rising to the rank of vice president in 1993. He was named vice chairman and chief operating officer of logistics provider Global Automotive Alliance in 1999 and then became president of GAA's Grupo Antolin Primera. In 2003, he co-founded and became president of Key Logistics.

In 2019, Hester launched LM Manufacturing, a joint venture of automotive supplier LAN Manufacturing Group and mobility technology company Magna Seating North America. In partnership with real estate developer Bedrock, LM Manufacturing opened a 296,000-square-foot plant in southwest Detroit to build seats for the automotive industry.

For Hester, this latest undertaking is an opportunity to improve employment and revenue in an underserved community.

"Instead of going into retirement, when this opportunity became available and the ability to put it in Detroit, it really means something to me," he told the Michigan Chronicle in 2022.

The business employs 400 people in what's regarded as an economically disadvantaged area. LM Manufacturing strives for what Hester terms "an enhanced employee experience." The company's on-site LM Academy provides information on credit, budgeting and savings to workers.

LM Manufacturing also makes community outreach a priority. The plant opens its doors to Detroit public high schoolers with its annual Manufacturing Day. Students can also learn about manufacturing and supply chain management careers through the company's "Expose to Inspire" program.

Hester's belief in the power of mentors and internships come from his own experiences, and he credits much of his success with what he learned from former GAA Chairman William F. Pickard.

"I went from internship to mentorship, sponsorship, a partnership, chairmanship of his company and then to ownership of my own company," he said.

Hester, who met his wife, Pleshette, at Ferris, said the Distinguished Alumni Award gives him a sense of accomplishment.

"As you get older and realize that you have more years behind you than in front of you, you reflect back and want to believe that you've lived a life that has had a positive influence on not only your immediate family but on your community," he said.

"I try to live my life in a way that I make positive contributions supporting my family and that I have a positive impact on the folks that I have influence on in my small part of the world."

ABOUT HESTER

EDUCATION

- Bachelor's degree in Plastics Engineering from Ferris State University, 1987.
- Associate degree in Plastics Engineering Technology from Ferris.
- Associate degree in General Education from Ferris.
- Master's degree in administration from Central Michigan University, 2015.

SERVICE

- Board member, Karmanos Cancer Institute.
- Board member, Detroit Public Television.
- Advisory board member, Ben Carson High School.
- Advisory board member, Grow Michigan II.
- Chair, Michigan Minority Diversity Council's manufacturing and mobility sector.
- Board trustee, Tuskegee University, 2017-21.

RECOGNITION

- Living Legend Award from Rainbow PUSH Coalition, 2022.
- Vanguard Award at Driven Awards presented by Real Times Media and GM, 2023.
- Dealmakers of the Year Award, 2023.
- Michigan Minority Business Hall of Fame, 2024.



INTERNATIONAL INSPIRATION

Graduate brings attention to Ferris State opportunities

Grace Szymchack never dreamed graduating from Ferris State University would make her famous.

But the 25-year-old Traverse City woman became an overnight sensation after Ferris State published a story and adorable photos — showing Szymchack accepting her diploma on December 15, 2023, with her 10-day-old baby tucked inside her graduation gown.

“Annabelle decided to come early on December 6,” Szymchack said. “But I’d worked hard for this degree, and I was determined to walk with the rest of my class, so I just brought her to graduation with me.”

The heartwarming tale struck a chord with folks, prompting hundreds of newspapers, TV stations, websites and social media outlets across the United States to pick up the story and run with it. Szymchack appeared live on “Good Morning America,” then in major outlets like USA Today, CNN, People, NBC News, and others before international outlets picked up the story.

The spotlight was nice, but almost overwhelming at times, she said.

“My family kept using words like ‘inspiring’ to describe why people were so interested in my story,” she said.

“I guess people — especially other moms — liked to see that it’s possible to go to college and even graduate with an itty-bitty.”

— Grace Szymchack

Szymchack attended Ferris State at the Student Success Hub in Traverse City at Northwestern Michigan College. It was a perfect fit for her — especially after she and her husband, Caleb, had their first daughter, Isabelle, in 2022.

The couple originally expected to welcome their second baby girl on December 18 via cesarean section. But Annabelle had other plans, making her debut nearly two weeks early. Not wanting to leave the infant home but

concerned about exposing her to germs in a crowd of 400 graduates and their families, she opted to tuck Annabelle in a baby carrier strapped beneath her graduation gown.

The plan worked perfectly. Annabelle napped through the entire ceremony as her mom earned her bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education, magna cum laude, and her family cheered them on.

For Szymchack, now 25, the ceremony was the culmination of six years of balancing classes, work, marriage and motherhood. She’s now a full-time teacher at Strong Beginnings, a state-funded preschool for 3-year-olds at Munson Healthcare in Traverse City.



Now that the hubbub has died down, the Szymchack family is adjusting to the busy life of two working parents with two children, now two and a half years and 9 months old.

It’s a life Grace Szymchack loves.

“I never imagined I might be an inspiration to others ... but I’m happy if others see my story and see that it’s possible to follow your dreams, whatever they are.”

20 YEARS IN THE MAKING

New bachelor's recipient Massiel Calderon leads the way for family of Bulldogs

For 20 years, Massiel Calderon never took her eyes off the prize: finishing her bachelor's degree.

Calderon was all smiles — as she frequently is — as she shook hands with President Bill Pink at Ferris State University's commencement this spring. Calderon, who earned her Bachelor of Arts in English, sees Pink as a role model for the opportunities that education can create for her.

The Dominican Republic native said she now has her sights on a master's in Educational Leadership and doctorate in Community College Leadership — all at Ferris.



"I'm just getting started right now," she said. "I plan to keep it up until everyone has to call me 'Dr. Calderon.'"

Calderon is a special projects assistant in the Ferris State Hispanic/Latino Cultural Center and a member of Gamma Phi

Omega International Sorority Inc. She has benefited from a great family and friend support system on campus.

This includes her husband, Rafael, now a junior in the Cybersecurity program. Calderon's adopted daughter, Mia Calderon, is also a Ferris State student and an HLCC office assistant.

The Calderons adopted Rafael's brother, Spencer, into a family that includes their daughter, Arriana, and son, Julian. When Rafael's mom became ill with mast cell leukemia, one of Massiel's attempts at pursuing higher education degrees paused. The couple then became foster parents to Rafael's siblings, Spencer and Mia Calderon.

Massiel Calderon earned an associate degree in philosophy from Suffolk County Community College in New York and had just started at Stony Brook University when COVID-19 hit.

"We moved to Michigan right around when the pandemic was ending, and Stony Brook wouldn't allow me to continue to be an online student," she said. "We moved here for about a year. I wasn't sure what I was going to do with my education."

One day, while looking for somewhere to eat, the family found The Rock Café at Ferris State.

"I didn't know this was Ferris State University," she said. "I thought we were just going to a diverse place to eat where everyone could pick whatever they wanted to eat. Then, I realized we were on a university campus, only 20 minutes from where we were now living."

The coincidence was too good an opportunity to pass up.

"I was like, 'I'm going to go here,' she said. "So, in less than two months, I was registered for classes and had my schedule."



But it got even better for Calderon.

"Before I started attending classes, I interviewed with the center and started working as the Promesa Scholars program coordinator," she said. "As I started working here, I got to know the center first, and then more and more, I got to know more people in the Ferris community through that work. I got to know so many departments and began feeling part of this community more."

At commencement, Calderon crossed the stage with a big smile, with her parents, kids — her oldest son Spencer, waving a Dominican Republic flag — in the stands. Her support system is one that she would never trade.

"I'm going to stay at Ferris for the rest of my educational and professional journey," she said. "I am a Bulldog for life. I really am. Bulldogs stay together."





Heather Truong creates a Nike line for Serena Williams

BEST FOOT FORWARD

Breaking Boundaries: Recent Grad Heather Truong's Unconventional Path to Designing for Serena Williams and Nike

"Just Do It All." That could easily be the motto of Heather Truong, who completed a six-month apprenticeship with Nike and embarked on a full-time career with the company, all while taking classes remotely to complete her Ferris degree in Graphic Design at Kendall College of Art and Design.

Truong learned about the apprenticeship while working at the Nike outlet store in Byron Center,

Michigan, and applied in 2021. After making the first cut, she joined 40 of the top applicants at a three-day virtual design showdown, where they were challenged to create four design briefs — Footwear Design, Apparel Design, Graphic Design, and Color Design — focused on creating a mock line of sportswear for tennis great Serena Williams.

Truong went above and beyond that request, creating an overarching theme that united all four of her designs and bringing depth to her work that she credits to her KCAD education.

"Even when these four briefed categories were separated, I wanted to think of ways they could connect with each

other," she said. "It was a conditioned practice from my experience in the Graphic Design program to look for those overarching connections."

Suspecting that every other student would do something tennis-related, she chose a different path. Her direction examined what Williams represents as a human being, focusing on her platform for diversity, her status as a woman athlete, and her sense of empowerment.

"As a woman who's also a minority, I've always looked up to Serena," Truong said. "She's an iconic tennis star, but who are we seeing behind that flashiness, and what does she represent?"

A strong performance in the virtual showdown earned Truong the opportunity for a six-month footwear design

apprenticeship, where she and 10 other emerging designers would grow their skills and create a new line of footwear for the Serena Williams Design Crew Nike Collection.

These were unfamiliar waters for a graphic designer, but Truong has never been one to shy away from stepping outside her comfort zone.

"I had to research footwear design and terminology outside of work hours and strengthen my understanding to keep up with my more experienced peers," she said.

The Serena Williams Design Crew released their collection in February 2023. Truong took the lead for the design of the Air Max 90 Futura, which speaks to the emerging diversity of The United States' future generations and the untapped potential they hold.



photography courtesy of Nike

Above: Serena Williams wearing shoes designed by Truong at her Nike internship

Left: Truong with Serena Williams

Right: Truong and KCAD of Ferris State University President Tara McCrackin wearing the same shoes



Unique stitching details show a human touch with a color palette based on varied skin tones. The shoe is built of diverse shapes and assorted materials, representing how people's differences can work together as a whole.

The shoe also features several hidden details designed to be discovered by the wearer, including a three-layer tab with the messages 'For the Future Royal' and 'Greatness from Within,' the Serena Williams logo merged with a crown on the heel tab, and a neon green insole designed to represent the inner energy of the upcoming generations ready to make the future.

For the Serena Williams Design Crew fall release, Truong lead the design for the Nike Dunk Low Disrupt. The shoe takes the inner energy of upcoming generations concept and makes it overt, with diverse shapes and assorted materials that are unapologetic and confident.

Williams herself provided feedback at the midpoint and end of the process, and the apprentices were able to meet her when the project was done. But the real highlight for Truong came when she saw the tennis great wearing her design

on her Instagram page, and again when the shoes hit the shelves and her friends started buying them for themselves.

Following the apprenticeship, Truong accepted a full-time job as a footwear color designer for Nike's skateboarding line, Nike SB, and their all-conditions line, Nike ACG.

All the while, the demands of a full-time job in Oregon could not deter Truong from completing her degree at KCAD. She accepted her diploma on May 4, 2024, officially bringing her college experience to a close.

"I was taking two classes per semester after getting my job," she said. "Everyone at KCAD was supporting me, and everything worked out remotely."

Since her experience with Nike began, other KCAD students have approached Truong and asked her for advice on their future design journeys.

"You have to learn how to show up for yourself," she said. "You have to figure out how you're adding to the creative process and how you're changing the game. You have to have a fear of being average."



Truong walking visitors through her display during the KCAD 2024 Senior Exhibit

SUPPORT ON THE COURT



photography courtesy of Atlanta Hawks

Alumnus Amarr Blake fulfills NBA dreams through business role with Atlanta Hawks

Amarr Blake dreamed of making it to the NBA. Ferris State University helped that dream become reality with a leadership role off the court.

Blake's Bachelor of Science degree in Business with a minor in Marketing was a perfect match for his executive position with the Atlanta Hawks basketball team.

"When I was young, growing up in Flint, I always dreamed of making it to the NBA. It turned out I got here differently -- on the business side. I am very blessed to have this opportunity."

— Amarr Blake

Blake's journey to the NBA began in the classroom, where the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference All-Academic honoree got the attention of Marketing/Sales instructor Jina Jackson-Rockwell and former faculty member Barbara Barney-McNamara.

"They suggested I enter a student sales competition, and I was successful in qualifying," said Blake, a former Bulldog football player. "I traveled to Atlanta and was among the top 16 presenters. Hiring managers for many NBA teams were there to make connections. That allowed me to get established with the Hawks."

Blake serves a franchise that celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2023-24 and has proven to be a considerable and valuable member of the organization.

He joined the Hawks as a membership associate after graduating from Ferris State in 2022. He became a new membership sales consultant in his first year, and, in May, he became manager for the team's Premium Club sales.

The club is an element of the State Farm Arena experience, a concept Blake has embraced during his two years with the Hawks.

"I really was unaware of membership sales, or the associate's role for new season tickets, before I began," he said. "There are groups who want to entertain clients or are just after a night or afternoon of enjoyment, themselves. So many people come from other parts of the country to Atlanta for their careers, which means we get clusters of fans wanting to see their team or a visiting NBA star at the arena. My job is to identify their 'whys' and help them achieve that with the Hawks."

The State Farm Arena Club offers inclusive food and drink or sports bar options, including a "bar on the court" for all floor seat holders. Blake said his roles with the Hawks have been an exciting — and somewhat surprising — way to begin his career.

Blake was a standout high school quarterback and basketball player who, with his brother Amere, joined the Ferris State football program in 2018.

Blake contributed on the field as a defensive back in 2019 and the 2021 National Championship season, and he also served as the voice of the football team on the Student-Athlete Advisory Council.

Partners in Progress

Gala celebrates the teamwork making internships and scholarships possible



You know it's an important event when Brutus breaks out his tux!

Past and present Bulldogs gathered at the JW Marriott in Grand Rapids for the 2023 Ferris Foundation for Excellence Benefit. A dapper Brutus joined Ferris President Bill Pink and Dr. Kathryn K. Mullins, vice president for University Advancement and Marketing, in firing up the crowd.

"It's time," Pink said in an inspiring message, noting that the Ferris State family can build upon the impactful work of the past — and not slow down.

Guests then learned about Ferris' new partnership with Grand Rapids based BAMF Health, a world leader in molecular imaging and theranostics. Dr. Anthony Chang, founder and CEO, showed off the alumni on his team who are finding new approaches to battling cancer and other diseases.

Pink led a panel discussion with a trio of prominent Ferris alumni: Richard Antonini II, retired partner in accounting firm Plante Moran; Paul T. Doyle, founder and CEO of Inclusive Performance Strategies; and Vivian Pickard, president and CEO of community and nonprofit consultant The Pickard Group. They shared their campus memories as well as advice for current Bulldogs.



This year's benefit raised **\$250,000** for Student Scholarships



To donate:
ferris.edu/giving/give-now



FERRIS STATE DOMINATES AT ALL LEVELS



Ferris State students earn national championship in disc golf, Michigan honors in bass fishing

Ferris State students dominated in sports at all levels – even disc golf and fishing.

Sophomore Benji Zorn earned the 2024 Disc Golf Singles National Championship, with his team finishing fourth in a field of 44 teams from across the country.

Meanwhile, Ferris State Fishing Club members Jordan DeGroot and Erick Hannahs reeled in Anglers of the Year honors after success in events around the state.

Zorn, a sophomore from Grand Rapids majoring in Business Administration, in May endured windy conditions on the course at Winthrop University in South Carolina.

"It was probably the most nervous I've ever been in my life. I was feeling a ton

of pressure," he said. "I wanted to stay focused on doing the best I could for my team, Ferris and myself."

Zorn credited coach Leonard Johnson for his success.

"Leonard sold me on coming to Ferris, and it started when he took me on a campus tour and showed me the course. That was when I really started to buy into Ferris, the disc golf team, and Leonard," he said. "I love this team and its commitment to success. I always want to go out there and do my best for my teammates."

The Ferris State Disc Golf Men's Team was previously crowned national champions in 2015, 2017 and 2019. The Women's Team won its first national title in 2021.

The Fishing Club members earned their honors closer to home, in lakes all across Michigan.

DeGroot, of Coopersville, and Hannahs, of Muskegon, earned the awards for the 2024 season after top 10 finishes in each

event this season. Both are Construction Management majors.

"You experience every kind of emotion during a tournament," Hannahs said. "It is us two and the fish in front of us, where you do what you must to get the bites."

DeGroot said the pair practiced on every lake on the competition circuit.



"He and I fished together so well," he said. "We don't give up, and we encourage each other through each event. We play it like someone would have a bigger bag of fish."



Ferris State University's basketball teams made history, with both the men's and women's teams reaching the Elite Eight round of the NCAA Division II National Tournament.



It was the first time that both teams advanced that far in the tournament at the same time. The dual successes prompted supporters to make the seven-hour drive between the women's tournament in St. Joseph, Missouri, and the men's competition in Evansville, Indiana — then back to Missouri when the women's team moved ahead to the Final Four.

Coach Andy Bronkema said his men's team has closely followed the progress of the women's team and celebrated the overall success of the program.

"I just love the women's team," he said after one of the tournament games. "I've admired them so much for their talent, and of course Kurt (Westendorp) is an amazing coach. It's not just that

the women's basketball team is on this historic run together; it's how we share the spotlight. There is no jealousy. That's pretty sweet. We're going to be pulling for them."

He said the men's team gathered in a hotel lobby to watch the victory that propelled the women's team to the Final Four.

"It's a pretty cool experience for Ferris State," Bronkema said. "Soak it in because it's rare. Championships like this are uncommon. We've got two teams going in to the Elite Eight!"

The men's team fell to the tournament's top seed, sending the attention back to St. Joseph. A bus packed with Ferris State students, fans, the pep band, and, of course, Brutus made the 10-hour trek, arriving in time for a boisterous pep rally at Geneo's Pizza and Pub.

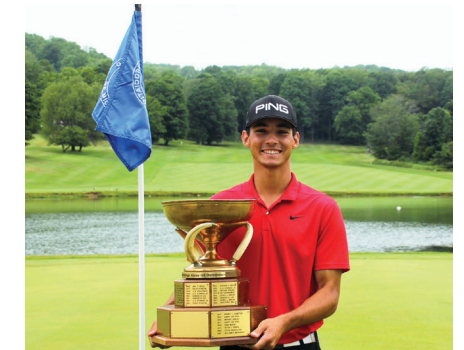
The women's team lost to Texas Women's University in the tournament semifinals, finishing the year ranked No. 3 in the nation in the final Women's Basketball Coaches Association Division II Coaches Poll — the highest in program history.

But the basketball teams were not the only Ferris State teams to earn Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference championship crowns this academic year.



The volleyball team reached the NCAA Division II Midwest Regional Championship match in St. Louis and finished the year with a 27-8 overall

record. It was the 12th consecutive season that the team reached the national tournament.



The men's golf team finished ninth in the nation in the NCAA DII National Championships. Freshman McCoy Biagioli then went on to win the prestigious Michigan Amateur Championship during the summer.

The women's golf team finished seventh place in the NCAA East Regional, making it to the tournament for the third year in a row.



The men's tennis team won the GLIAC regular season championship and the league postseason tournament title. The women's tennis team reached the national tournament.

THANK YOU



As we look to the work still ahead of us, I am proud of how far we have come and determined to take this foundation even further. While the many challenges we face are great, I know Bulldogs persevere. Together, we will accomplish incredible things, across the state and beyond.

Again, thank you for all you do in support of Ferris programs and our students. You are truly continuing the vision of Woodbridge and Helen Ferris by supporting opportunities for all students. Please know that you are valued, and your partnership builds a brighter future for Ferris State.

Jennifer Todd

Jennifer Todd
Associate Vice President for Advancement
Executive Director of The Ferris Foundation

STAY CONNECTED

Want to know what Ferris State University alumni are up to? Be in the know about upcoming events. The Ferris State Alumni Association has you covered.



Scan the QR code to stay in touch!

Or find us on social media.



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The past fiscal year has given the Ferris Foundation much to celebrate, and I am so excited to share some of our incredible stories and achievements with you!

The pages of this annual report are full of transformation — all of it possible because of you. Your donations are crucial to supporting Ferris State University students, from alleviating food and housing insecurity to updating physical spaces and growing scholarship support.

A few examples of that Bulldog generosity deserve special recognition.

We set records during our Giving Tuesday and One Day for Dawgs appeals! The more than \$300,000 raised — much of it from first-time donors — directly impacts campus groups and services that support students.

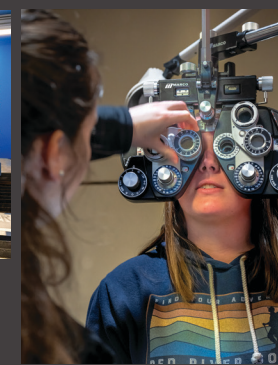
This year also featured the 25th anniversary of the Ferris Foundation for Excellence Benefit. Over 500 guests joined us at the JW Marriott in Grand Rapids to celebrate our past accomplishments and the lives we will change in the future.

Thanks to your partnership and support, the Foundation and University provided more than 5,200 scholarships valued at nearly \$19.9 million in the past fiscal year. Every dollar makes a difference, helping students stay on track to achieve a Ferris State education.

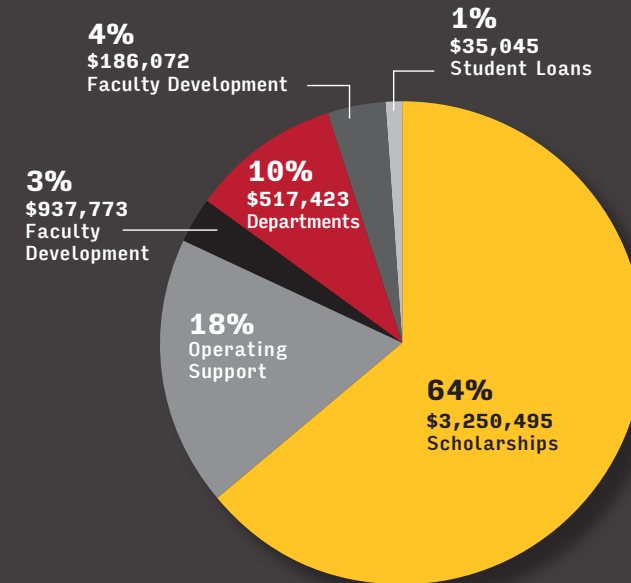
In this report, you will have heard from our students, the challenges they face, and the difference you've made in their lives. I truly feel the energy on campus and see it in the eyes of students — it is a great time to be a Bulldog.

The Ferris Foundation

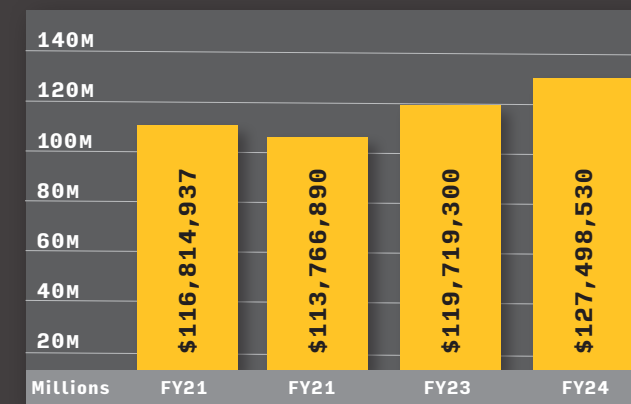
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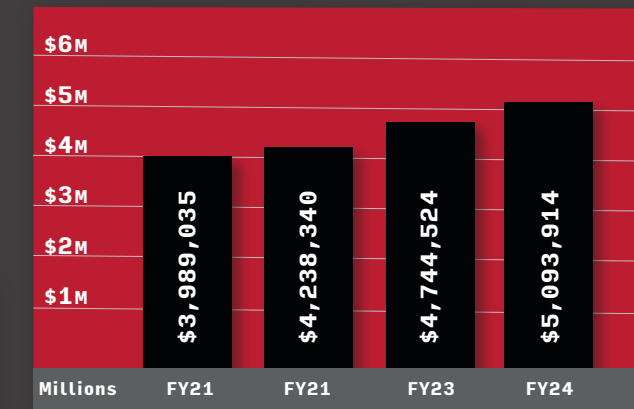
Endowment Distribution Restrictions (FY24)



Fiscal Year End Endowment Balances



Distributions by Fiscal Year



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Students with disabilities requiring assistance or accommodation may contact Disability and Accessibility Resource Center at (231) 591-3057, ECDS@Ferris.edu in Big Rapids (including statewide students) or the Director of Counseling and Disability Services for Kendall College of Art and Design (KCAD) at (616) 451-2787 ext. 1136, MarieYowitz@Ferris.edu in Grand Rapids. Employees and other members of the University community with disabilities requiring assistance or accommodation may contact the Human Resources Department, 420 Oak St., Big Rapids, MI 49307 or call (231) 591-2150, HumanResources@Ferris.edu.

Inquiries and complaints of disability discrimination may be addressed to the Director of Accessibility, 820 Campus Dr., Big Rapids, MI 49307 or by telephone/email at (231) 591-3057, JulieAlexander@Ferris.edu or to the Director of Equal Opportunity, 120 East Cedar St., Big Rapids, MI 49307 or by telephone/email at (231) 591-2152, EqualOpportunity@Ferris.edu.

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Other inquiries or complaints of discrimination may be addressed to the Director of Equal Opportunity, as above.

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