

Tuesday, May 5, 2015

Graduates thank donors, pay it forward with Senior Class Gift

It's not often that students pause and ponder how philanthropy affects their campus lives, although the reality is that the microscope they use in chemistry class could have arrived thanks to a generous gift.

Last December before graduating, OU students thought— and wrote — about philanthropy and its impact on them during college. They sent nearly 900 letters to donors with two words in common: “Thank you.”

Adrienne Penney, Oakland's assistant director of Annual Giving, says students were given the opportunity to write their thanks during commencement fairs in the Oakland Center. After talking with students for only a few moments, Penney says most were happy to take some time to write a letter.

Seniors chose to thank those who helped provide OU with campus technology, career services, tutoring, computer labs and more. “The letters create a double impact,” Penney says, because, “We're educating future donors and alumni, and we're also able to reach out and thank these donors in a very unique way.”

For Director of Annual Giving Kelly Brault, the letters that stood out were from first-generation college students and students raising a child.

“I think that's representative of OU's general population,” shares Brault. “Most of our students are balancing multiple priorities; they're often working a full-time job and going to school. The notes where students really get to the heart of their situation ... are the ones that kind of hit me.”

The Student Philanthropy Committee, which set up tables for writing the letters, was formed in 2013 to educate students on the importance of philanthropy at OU. Committee chair Halla Hilborn says the group aims to show students that philanthropy is not only for the wealthy — that everyone can make a difference.



Graduates wrote nearly 900 thank you letters during their senior year, which were sent to individuals who donated to Oakland University.

“Philanthropy is responsible for many of the benches around campus, not

to mention the clock tower, Elliott Hall and countless other campus gifts,” Hilborn says. “These generous gifts have benefited every student at Oakland. The Student Philanthropy Committee is dedicated to making sure that students understand the generosity of donors.”

— by John Turk



THE START OF A NEW TRADITION:

More than 50 spring 2015 graduating seniors were among the very first to ascend the winding staircase of the Elliott Tower.

A brand new tradition at Oakland University, 59 of OU’s 2015 seniors gave back \$20.15 or more as part of the **Senior Class Gift**. The funds, which totaled \$2,765.30 after being matched by President George W. Hynd, will help a class of 2016 senior pay for their last semester.