

Tuesday, July 7, 2015

Oakland University invests in student success

Since its beginning, Oakland University has been committed to providing a student-centered academic experience that is focused on transforming lives. OU prepares students to lead and serve the local and global communities. It is an institutional priority to keep higher education within the financial reach of as many students as possible.

Oakland remains a first-choice destination for many students. Enrollment growth has been the highest in the state over the past 5-year and 10-year periods. The first priority is always to preserve and enhance the core academic assets of the university; however, the costs of operating continue to rise. The state's higher education funding formula has handicapped Oakland's ability to reinvest in infrastructure and offer programs and services that will benefit students and ensure their success.

Oakland has consistently adjusted to this funding formula by way of continuing growth. Reliance on student growth is no longer a viable approach as Oakland's state support is now the lowest per student in the state.

After fully complying with the State's tuition restraint for four years, at a meeting today of the university's Board of Trustees, the Board voted to increase base tuition for the 2015-2016 school year by 8.48 percent. Oakland University's tuition structure is all-inclusive, with no additional fees added.

OU Board of Trustees Chairman Mark E. Schluskel said, "The tuition increase approved at our Board meeting today will generate additional resources which Oakland University needs to continue offering one of the state's best-valued and highly regarded educational experiences."

"Based on our new strategic plan, we need to invest in services that will support a vibrant learning environment for our nearly 21,000 students," said George W. Hynd, OU president. "We have seen what works to achieve better retention rates and we are generating revenue to fund those programs and initiatives with the intention of increasing our graduation rates."

Hynd continued, "Our mission has never been more important. While we can't predict what the jobs of the future will be, we do know virtually all of them will require a degree beyond high school. That means if we are to successfully grow Metro Detroit's economy, we need to provide access to quality programs and help students complete their degrees."

Oakland has also taken significant steps towards cost containment through permanent and one-time budget reductions over the past 10 years, totaling more than \$48 million in savings. This has been achieved in part by renegotiating vendor contracts, refinancing debt, implementing energy savings initiatives, reducing the cost of employee benefits, and introducing lean academic and administrative practices.

In addition, the Board approved differential tuition rates for the School of Health Sciences, School of Business Administration, School of Nursing and School of Engineering and Computer Science. Differential tuition charges a higher rate for programs that are more expensive to deliver, have shown high demand over several years and have high job placement rates for students. Many Michigan universities are now using a differential tuition model to address the rising costs of program delivery. In comparing market pricing of high-cost programs in Health Sciences, Business, Nursing, and Engineering, OU tuition has been priced in the lower tier compared to Michigan peers. Oakland's plan is to keep tuition rates closer to the midrange in pricing.

"Our goal is to improve our student-to-faculty ratio and staff-to-student ratio which will provide enhanced academic services to Oakland students, leading to improved student success," according to James P. Lentini, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost. "The differential tuition initiative will allow the university to direct resources to students with the intention of improving student experiences."

Revenue from the tuition increase will enhance academic quality and directly benefit students by:

- Increasing OU financial aid scholarships by 11.7 percent, or \$4.2 million
- Assisting seniors toward graduation, an additional \$1.1 million will be awarded in FY2016
- Hiring additional faculty
- Hiring additional advisers
- Supporting faculty and student research
- Enhancing career services
- Supporting internship opportunities
- Supporting additional labs and specialized teaching spaces
- Acquiring high-tech and state-of-the-art equipment

Well over \$62 million is being awarded to Oakland University students in institutional and federal grants and scholarships, reducing the net cost of their attendance at OU, on average, by 32 percent. In addition, to assist seniors toward graduation in the Schools of Health Sciences, Business, Nursing, and Engineering and Computer Science, an additional \$1.1 million will be awarded in FY2016. Oakland University remains committed to producing scholars and professionals who are able to contribute to the economic growth and development of Michigan and beyond. The university strives to offer a broad curriculum in a comfortable setting, delivered by faculty who are leaders in their respective disciplines.

To better serve students, Oakland has expanded its facilities to meet growing demand and is committed to doing so in the future.

In addition to excellent academics and career placement upon graduation, Oakland is proud of a top-notch NCAA Division I athletics program, exciting campus life with 275 student organizations, numerous study abroad opportunities. It is also home to several cultural attractions, including Meadow Brook Hall, Meadow Brook Theatre, Meadow Brook Music Festival, the OU Art Gallery, Varner Recital Hall and sits on a 1,443 acre campus in a suburban setting spanning the cities of Rochester Hills and Auburn Hills.

###