

Pre-College Programs employee wins Wilhelm Excellence Award

When students and others visit Oakland University's Office of Pre-College Programs, Irene Cobb is often the first person they meet. She's known for making them feel welcome, providing a listening ear and being a source of information about campus services.

For her professionalism and care, Cobb is being recognized with the university's Sharon L. Wilhelm Excellence Award. The award is given annually to a university Clerical/Technical employee who exemplifies the positive, "can-do" spirit of Sharon L. Wilhelm who spent her 45-year career delivering exceptional service and support to OU staff, faculty and students.

Cobb has been an OU employee for 19 years – the last three as an administrative assistant for Pre-College Programs. In this role, she handles everything from managing budgets, to scheduling meetings and facilitating programs.

Her favorite part of the job is student engagement. She has particularly enjoyed working with students in [OU's GEAR UP program](#), which is part of a nationwide college readiness initiative that follows students from seventh grade through their first year of college and is focused on helping underrepresented students succeed in post-secondary education

During the 2017-2018 academic year, Oakland had 119 freshmen – the most in its history – who came from GEAR UP programs around the state. Nearly 30 percent of them came from OU's three GEAR UP partner high schools – Pontiac, Oak Park and International Technology Academy, which is located in Pontiac.

"They come to our office frequently," Cobb said. "We help them navigate financial aid and other services. The first year of college can be challenging. A lot of times they're just looking for someone to talk to."

Cobb started her career at Oakland in 1999 in the Office of Student Accounts, which is now Student Financial Services. From there, she went to work at the Learning Resource Center, which became Pre-College Programs, and then worked at The Tutoring Center, before returning to Student Financial Services. She worked there until three years ago, when she took on her current role with Pre-College Programs.

"Irene is a wonderful team member," said Reginald McCloud, director of Pre-College Programs. "Her 19 years at OU have given her knowledge and insight that she is always willing to share, and she does whatever she can to help everyone who crosses her path. She is a fitting example of what the Wilhelm Excellence Award is all about."

Even before becoming an employee, Cobb felt like a member of the OU community. Her mother, Shirley Cobb, worked for OU for more than 30 years, including a number of years as an assistant to the president.

"I remember as a young girl I would come and visit my mother," Cobb said. "I got to know a lot of people on campus just from being here so much."

Cobb said she was pleasantly surprised to learn she had been selected for the Wilhelm Award.

"I didn't even know I had been nominated," she said. "It's wonderful to know that people thought that much of me. I'm truly honored to receive such a high award."



2018 Wilhelm Excellence Award winner Irene Cobb is pictured with OU President Pescovitz, along with Sharon Wilhelm's husband Paul and son Tim.



President Pescovitz presented Cobb with a plaque at OU's employee awards celebration, which was held on June 11.