

Alumni Engagement employee receives Wilhelm Excellence Award

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From interacting with alumni to working on budgets, to updating web pages, Shanna Dawson does a little bit of everything in her role as an office assistant for the Office of Alumni Engagement at Oakland.



Wilhelm Excellence Award recipient Shanna Dawson is pictured with OU President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost James Lentini at this year's Exemplary Employee Awards Celebration.

Colleagues describe her as a “positive and hard-working employee who gets the job done.” Those attributes are among the reasons she 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.

Dawson has worked for Alumni Engagement since January 2009 and is often the first contact alumni have with the university since graduation.

“In some cases, decades have passed since the individual last connected with OU,” said Erin Sudrovech, director of Alumni Engagement. “Shanna provides exemplary service to thousands of alumni who call, email and visit our office throughout the year.”

Along with assisting alumni, Dawson also handles budgeting for the university’s alumni association and Office of Alumni Engagement, helps facilitate association board meetings and assists with association scholarship applications, among other duties.

The job provides a steady stream of fresh challenges and growth opportunities, which Dawson readily embraces.

“Each year, I get to do something different,” she said. “Before I started working here, I never did any website updates, or any budget spreadsheets that were this elaborate. There’s been challenges along the way, but I don’t mind because I love learning.”

Dawson's love of learning has served her well through more than 14 years with Oakland. She started her career working in Graham Health Center as a medical assistant. At first, she handled "back office" responsibilities (administering shots and blood draws, etc.) then moved on to "front office" tasks, such as appointment scheduling. This experience prepared her for her current role in Alumni Engagement.

"I was interested in doing more (front office) work, and it turned out to be a great fit," she said. "I love everyone I work with, I really enjoy working with our alumni, and I feel more connected to the university."

Although she admittedly avoids the spotlight, Dawson feels especially honored to receive the Wilhelm Excellence Award.

"I've always been more of a behind-the-scenes person," she said. "But it's very gratifying to be selected for this award and to be associated with everything that Sharon Wilhelm stood for in her career."

Dawson received the Wilhelm Excellence Award at an employee recognition luncheon on June 5. She was also recognized as OU Employee of the Month for October 2018.