



FORUM

What's Good for the University?

Jane Donahue Eberwein

Looking over fall 2001 contributions to this Forum, I agree with most of my colleagues' suggestions but am struck by different ways in which they comment on time. David Maines feels the pressure of "an entrenched status quo," while Kevin Murphy complains that we have "wandered aimlessly for the last seven years." Ronald Horwitz characterizes himself as "a mere 'kid'" on the basis of his "only 22 years at Oakland," knowing full well that we still have Professors Burke and Tombouljian among us with 42 years of service. Myself, I'm in the middle with 32 years. I arrived when Oakland celebrated its tenth anniversary and was in the last faculty orientation group to hear Woody Varner relate "the Oakland story." Now I'm the one narrating an ironically inflected version of that story for new faculty orientations. Having felt like an acorn in a forest of Charter and Old Oaks, I hope I won't be classified as deadwood for suggesting that one thing that would be good for Oakland is decidedly more systematic access to its historical memory.

We are preserving that history through the Tomboulians' Oakland Chronicles and memorial articles in this *Journal*. On ceremonial events such as presidential investitures and ten-year celebrations, we recall Woody's story. It has subsequent chapters, though, that we aren't really documenting. The history we expected from George Matthews never got written. In

any case, what our Charter Oaks and Old Oaks conveyed to us are two contending foundation myths: that Oakland was intended as a liberal arts honors college of about 1,000 students; that it was meant from the start to become a comprehensive public university enrolling 25,000. Like all myths, these convey symbolic truths, and we confront tensions inherent in the competing Oakland stories every time we project our future. The Strategic Plan is so all-inclusive that we can pick and choose points of emphasis to justify virtually any goal. The recent task force on enrollment management recommended that O.U. grow modestly while positioning itself to become the honors college for the state of Michigan. Task Force I on General Education presented us with learning outcomes suited to the liberal arts honors college version of the myth, while Task Force II is charged with implementing it in a comprehensive university heading toward 20,000 students. Our sail logo still speaks more truly to our culture of generalized aspiration than the golden grizzly, even though the section of the *Divina Commedia* where Dante found Ulysses expounding our motto wasn't Paradise. What concerns me now isn't the story of our foundation but the fact of our over-reliance on oral tradition and memory after almost half a century.

How well do we maintain records that might afford us useful perspective on our 42 years and help us to move toward Oakland 2010 and beyond? I'm told that the Varner papers are well organized in the Kresge Library archives but that masses of other material remain only partially documented and unavailable for research. Nobody seems to know what sorts of files belong in the archives or in what form they should be delivered. My fear is that many documents have simply disappeared as offices move, people leave, and space is needed for new paperwork. Boxes accumulate at a time when searchers expect data in computer-accessible formats.

The goal in accumulating and organizing information, of course, is to answer questions that arise as people go about current work and to prepare for questions we cannot yet guess. When I was Senate secretary, I often got queries from

committees about decisions from previous decades that necessitated searches of minutes. The Senate Compendium (a rather oddly arranged book recording motions enacted) generally helped me find evidence in cases where the Senate had approved a measure but didn't document proposals that were rejected; yet those were often the ones that interested subsequent committees as they speculated on why a proposal had failed and whether it made sense to float an idea again. I wonder how many schools have accessible records of Assembly deliberations. In the College, a person wanting to dig out information would need enough historical intuition to guess roughly when an issue arose and then thumb through agendas and minutes. As time goes on, fewer of us will have memories adequately stocked to find our way. Even more serious problems exist for committees, especially those that have a new chair every year. At the moment, I have two cartons of UCUI records in my office, but they go back only a few years.

Before Oakland celebrates its golden anniversary, then, we need to make progress with systematic cataloguing of documents (legislative records, committee and task force reports, university publications, and materials relating to student life). Some efforts are already being made to write down policies and practices that university stalwarts, now retired, used to know and to put Senate records in accessible form. Cartons of files that descend on the library archives testify to this community's good intentions, though we need clearer directives as to what belongs there and in what form it should be delivered. It's time for a full-time archivist.

We don't maintain O. U. records simply for ourselves. We have no way of guessing what questions will attract researchers. At Mt. Holyoke College, biographers descend on the library to learn what college was like for the school's most famous dropout, Emily Dickinson. In the long run, it is people rather than plans who bring recognition to a university. Will we be ready when accomplishments of our students and faculty draw scholars to Oakland's archives?

Barbara Mabee

In my almost fourteen years within the Oakland University, the university has gone through various periods of searching for self-definition and new visions, and mapping blueprints for achieving excellence. The current challenges that we are facing in the restructuring of our general education program have presented us with many basic questions about quality education and a distinctive undergraduate program. With the concomitant recommendation for a distinctive undergraduate experience, set forth in the report by the Washington Advisory Group in their response to Oakland's Vision 2010, we all need to join in the process of a monumental task.

General education is under a magnifying glass at the moment and it should be not only because of another focus visit by North Central Accreditation but also because it is at the core of any university program. I believe that first of all we must make sure that we do not water down anything that we have already achieved in the area of diversity. For years we have worked very hard to designate specific courses that focus on diversity and meet students' diversity requirements. After September 11, we must develop greater understanding of differences in faith, race, and culture and eradicate ethnocentric thinking and marginalization of "other voices" that are not part of the mainstream culture. On March 16, Oakland University, hosted the Diverse Voices Conference IV under the leadership of Chaundra Scott, Professor of Human Resource Development at Oakland University and Founder and President of the Diverse Voices Conference. I have never attended any event at Oakland that affected me more deeply than this one. Representative pre-selected participants from Oakland University, Marygrove College, Davenport University, and the University of Detroit Mercy espoused their ideas on the conference theme "*The Power of Diversity Today*." They did a magnificent job in laying out their ideas of diversity in a global word and stressed the importance on focusing on the celebration of our common humanity, particularly in times of war. The powerful rendition of the song "I believe I Can Fly" and

the real and symbolic enactment of a mutual declaration of apologies and forgiveness audience on behalf of their people between the Jewish keynote speaker Marianne Williamson from Church of Today and a Palestinian in the audience, underscored forcefully the importance of personal and collective coming to terms with diversity issues.

Promoting unity, equality, and understanding is especially important to me as a German professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, since the history of Nazism and its laws of discrimination forever burden Germans. Significantly, the Washington Advisory Group Report refers to OU's pledge to its students that it will prepare them for productive careers and lives in a rapidly changing globalized society. It also suggests that OU's four-year program might include for year one a "focus on ethics, values, and traditions" . . . and the "whole community would "then engage in debate on some common theme, which might involve topics such as justice, responsibility, citizenship, or many other topics" (7-8). It seems to me that after the terrorists' attacks on the United States, we need to expand our curriculum in international studies and include many different parts of the world, broaden foreign language programs (Arabic will be offered again this fall), intensify direct international exchange programs for students and faculty, and encourage students to think globally and critically and to examine their own cultural traditions. We need more international initiatives and a Center for International Studies, a Center for Foreign Languages and Cultures, and a Faculty House, where discussions about visions for Oakland's participation in a global world could flourish.

A major concern of faculty and students alike is the number of faculty to keep up with the number of students if the university continues to grow at a rapid pace. The faculty cannot teach ever-larger classes as we are moving toward an enrollment of 20,000 students. The quality of instruction would be lacking miserably, particularly in skills-based courses. Oakland has a strong faculty that is committed to excellence. We

must grow not only in the number of students but in faculty positions and course offerings. Of course, as chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, I strongly believe that a university undergraduate program with distinction must include a foreign language requirement. The celebration of cultural diversity and globalization must be wed to the study of foreign languages and international cultures. Cultural isolationism is no longer adequate.

Virinder K. Moudgil

As the new interim vice-president for academic affairs and provost, I appreciate the opportunity of sharing with the readers of the *Oakland Journal* a few observations on key themes which will characterize my thinking about Oakland University in the next few years.

Team Work. Having participated in athletics throughout my school and college careers, I am drawn to sports metaphors. I have great respect for teams and athletes that establish and maintain a consistent winning record. Analyzing the composition of winning teams reveals the presence of some accomplished players, certainly. But these players are not necessarily individually better than the players of teams they perpetually beat. The chemistry between the players and their commitment to the common goal (of winning) produce their best, day in and day out. The Chicago Bulls, even with Michael Jordan, arguably the greatest player in recent NBA history, one-time could not overcome the Isiah Thomas/Bill Laimbeer-led Detroit Pistons. The leadership of the Pistons recognized that in order for them to win, everyone had to pull his weight. And win they did, as did the Bulls years later when they recognized the value of teamwork.

Academic institutions occasionally foster the perception that faculty and administration are natural adversaries. What a loss to the community if this perception is allowed to grow and persist! Many administrators are former faculty and should have faculty interests at heart. The creative efforts of faculty

and students can be amplified with administrative assistance, be it financial or procedural. Administrators and faculty must work together for one common overriding purpose—the students. Ideally, administrative leadership must work together with the faculty and students as a team, developing ideas and feasible projects of mutual interest and concern. Without bilateral support, both groups are in danger of achieving far less than their potential. Teamwork is a natural option; it maximizes output. Many of us are very proud of the recognition that we have jobs we like. In addition to personal growth and intrinsic intellectual needs, our overall goal is to seek or create new knowledge and share this newly acquired wisdom with our colleagues and students.

With the wealth of talent amongst us and the quality of students we admit and graduate, the administration, the faculty and the staff have to join forces to unravel and enjoy the products of their input and efforts. Whether it is faculty-student research or scholarship, efforts in the creative and performing arts, or achievements of our students in athletics, student service or leadership—we succeed when we work as a team.

Harmony. As an ardent fan of music, I have always enjoyed the sound of good music. I used to marvel at the talents of the young masters of music at West Junior High or Rochester High School who would give just breathtaking performances. Closer to home, Oakland's athletic teams have produced similar stellar results earning national honors. One thing unites these groups—each player is different and plays a different note/role but the group works/sounds in unison. A winning team presents a harmonious front, and we should strive for this goal. In a fair and just academy, we must have dialogue between the constituencies to build a plan that allows the institution to express itself in harmony.

A Just Academy and Academic Excellence. We all like the sound and meaning of the phrase “academic excellence.” Is

excellence an alien term applicable to administration actions, faculty activities or student achievements? And who really is responsible for this so-called excellence? I believe we all are. Who sets the agenda for excellence—the president, the provost, the deans, the faculty or the students? I believe we all do. From the time we admit a new student or welcome a new faculty member to our roster, we make a statement. How we (faculty and administration) construct a budget, spend our allocations, use gifts and donations, or set our priorities and goals, how we do all these things, reflects our academic values. Excellence is intrinsic. We are beneficiaries of the public trust and we must all have accountability and a sense of fairness. I have always admired colleagues, within the faculty, administration and staff who present high but realistic self-expectations and are willing to be flexible to move the institution forward.

Resources and Needs. Not all the problems we face at work or home can be solved with money alone. Yet, the dollar calms many nerves. Limited resources must be prioritized but no one wishes to “bell the cat,” and be the recipient of a smaller share. So, how do we strike a balance in providing our students with what we believe is an excellent education and maintain a flexible enrollment dynamic? Raise extra money. Total reliance on state support and tuition revenue is at best a risky and a very dangerous proposition for sustaining academic programs in a healthy and a progressive university. Institutions must forge partnerships with local, state and federal, public and private agencies to advance the causes that academe cherishes. Successful programs, which could become self-sustaining, serve the entire community by making available resources to strategically important ventures with low probability of external funding. But try we must.

Territorial Interests and Commitment toward the Institution. In a comprehensive university, inter- and intra-division diversity in academic and extracurricular programs presents competing interests for resource allocation. The stronger, more

successful programs deserve and demand a greater share of the pie often at the expense of necessary, fundamentally sound yet numerically weak programs. Tough choices must be made between what is critically needed for good education versus that which is popular and profitable. A healthy body needs optimally active units; a weak heart could severely compromise the functioning of a fertile brain or clean lungs. Often, I have found colleagues willing to make personal sacrifices in the interest of sustaining a healthy institution. Oakland University is stronger when the latter attitude prevails.

Environment and Campus Life. Unquestionably, the academy is interested in the quality of education, which is also influenced by the environment and campus life. Tree-lined pathways, trails leading to wilderness, sprawling lawns and sprinkles of water in the stream—all are conducive to healthy thinking. In the earliest universities and learning centers, nature played an enormous role in providing soothing balm to a troubled mind. Oakland University’s campus is endowed with natural beauty that is on par with the very best academic institutions. Resources would be well spent in maintaining this natural treasure to uplift and nurture exuberant spirits and creative minds. Environmental health is closely wedded to human welfare. And speaking of health, athletics bring the team spirit and competitive survival instincts to life. These are, if not direct, certainly indirect measures of the health of the academic enterprise—we must protect and foster these adjuncts to maintain our academic edge amongst sister institutions.

Problems confronting Oakland are common to dynamic institutions in the process of establishing distinct identities. We are a privileged public institution that continues to be attractive to students in increasing numbers. Most of us would rather be in a position to pick and choose, than to be desperate to fill classrooms with students attracted by nonacademic perks. The phenomenal growth in enrollment that we have experienced must be attributed to the academic reputation of the institution, the serenity of this beautiful campus, and the

safety and comfort of our work environment, but also distinctively, the quality of our faculty. All efforts must be made to preserve what draws students to our campus. In addition, a dialog must begin to explore ways and formulate strategies that position the institution to enhance the quality of education and student experiences. Oakland University cannot and should not become inaccessible; but working with the community in and around us—we can be inclusive and identified with excellence. America's success and dominance in the community of nations is easily attributed not only to its intrinsic strength, but also to the richness of cultural and social diversity in all spheres of life: education, science and engineering, literature and arts, health and medicine, business and sports. The odds of our alumni and faculty making a mark on society are greater with a more diverse and a larger pool of brain wealth than with a restricted narrowly focused population. The challenge remains as to how to strike this balance. Let us take a step forward and reach out for achieving these goals.

Sharon L. Howell

However messy and painful, the recent controversy over the firing of the provost reflects the strength of Oakland. For the first time in nearly a decade the community as a whole was forced to consciously confront central questions of our purpose and identity as an institution. While the controversy itself is far from settled, key issues have crystallized in the process.

First, the tension between the academic mission of a university and a politically appointed, corporate-leaning board has been identified. This tension, inherent in our structure, has become increasingly troublesome as the board of trustees invokes business standards as a means of establishing institutional policies and practices. While these standards might work well for an auto manufacturer, they offer little to the two most important responsibilities of a university: the furthering of civil society and the protection of free inquiry. In fact both of these areas are undermined by the very corporate models seeking to dominate universities.

Civil society depends on welcoming conflict, on the practice of broad-based decision making and on the principle that information and knowledge are critical to democracy. The recent history of the board of trustees demonstrates little understanding of these dynamics. Information is hoarded. Secret meetings have turned public board meetings into empty performances, with all serious discussion and decision-making happening elsewhere. Decisions are made without a process for the exploration of consequences. Thus the board, rather than modeling and encouraging democratic practices, has set itself apart from the essential character of the institution.

Freedom of thought is perhaps the least understood value in the academy. Quite simply, it means universities should always be home to the unpopular, the unconventional, the new and the troublesome. Argument, tension, debunking, defending and disavowing are the elements of intellectual life and growth. Over the last twenty years, corporations have become increasingly antagonistic to wide ranging, controversial inquiry. One of the most threatening trends to freedom of thought and speech over the last period has been the consolidation of the corporations responsible for the protection and dissemination of ideas. The disappearance of independent newspapers, publishing houses, bookstores and media outlets, all in an effort to achieve corporate efficiency, means that universities must be especially conscious of their role in the fostering and protection of intellectual inquiry.

As a public university, our responsibility is to foster the abilities of students to become effective citizens in an increasingly complex world. This obligation transcends a set of ideas or body of knowledge and requires the creation of policies and practices throughout the university that embody democratic values. We cannot create structures and institutional practices antithetical to democracy and expect to produce students capable of becoming citizens able to participate in the creation of common life.

These tensions are not unique to Oakland. What is unique is the opportunity for us to discuss them as a commu-

nity and to begin to decide how they will define the kind of university we are striving to become. In the process, we can not only clarify our own sense of purpose, but we can contribute to the larger debate raging throughout the nation about the role of higher education. We can begin to make decisions that distinguish us as a learning community, committed to advancing the principles and practices of civil society, rooted in the deepest tradition of intellectual freedom.

Since the end of World War II, American universities have evolved through a series of crises. At every juncture, we have somehow managed to reinvent ourselves as more democratic, more inclusive, more open to new and sometimes quirky ideas. As we take a hard look at the kind of place we want to be in 2010 and beyond, I hope we have the wisdom and the will to continue in that tradition.

Barry S. Winkler

Among my colleagues at the lunch table in the Oakland Center, I am known for having an optimistic outlook about this university, though some of them would argue that this outlook is due to my naiveté. Of course, I disagree with their view. It is necessary to point out at the outset that this essay reflects the perspective of someone who has had only one career-related job in life, who, unlike 98% of the faculty, was hired to do full-time research, and who was recruited in 1971 under the banner of "Harvard of the Midwest."

Oakland, like most other Division 2 Universities (notwithstanding a recent upgrade in our classification), has a tough time. We are like the middle child in a family of three children. Think about it. Division 3 (the youngest child) schools are typically small, liberal arts oriented, private, able to attract terrific students, and they have a long history of offering quality undergraduate education. They boast, with good reason, of the disproportionately high numbers of students from their institutions that go on to graduate schools for Ph.D.s at Division 1 institutions. Division 3 schools are content with their place in the hierarchy and typically do not want to

move up in class. Thus, they seldom concern themselves with institutions in the other Divisions. Division 1 (the oldest child) schools are the kings/queens of the higher education enterprise. While these universities value the role of the Division 3 institutions, partly because they know that Division 3 schools serve as good feeder programs for their ever-increasing graduate programs, the Division 1 schools have little to no respect for the Division 2's. So, here we sit, seemingly ignored by both Division 1 and Division 3 universities. Our own State is a wonderful example of this split: we have the Big Three, lots of Middling universities (and I include here all the other State supported institutions, most of whom are in Division 2), and then a network of denominational private institutions who serve a very select population. Is anyone surprised why faculty and administrators at Division 2 universities develop an inferiority complex? Of course, this does not apply to me (read on!).

The majority of faculty at Oakland University received their undergraduate and graduate degrees from highly ranked Division 1 universities, or, in my case, from a physiology department in a large medical school. Thus, when we arrived on this campus, either immediately after graduate school or after a post-doctoral fellowship, our pedigree led us to believe that the academic and scholarly principles and ideals that we experienced and learned while students in quality Division 1 programs would flourish on this campus. After all, if we came from top programs, and if a university's reputation is dependent mainly on the quality of its faculty, then it seems natural that Oakland University should be a Division 1 institution (and I don't mean just in athletics). To what extent has this been the case for me?

Let's start with research/scholarship. In this area, I consider myself to be both lucky and spoiled, because I am in the Eye Research Institute (ERI). The ERI was founded in 1968 by V. Everett Kinsey. He had a simple approach. He hired good people, provided start-up funds (quite modest, I hasten to add, in comparison to what science-types get today) and, most

importantly, he left us alone to do research without any assigned, formal teaching duties. For this privilege of being treated like faculty at a Division 1 medical school (see below), faculty in the ERI are asked to raise 50% of their academic year salary, and pay all research-related bills. The university, in turn, has honored this commitment, and now 30+ years later, I think it is reasonable to conclude that the ERI has been and continues to be at the forefront of the research enterprise on this campus. Yet, after all this time the ERI remains the only theme-based research institute on this campus. And this, to me, is unfortunate, especially for a university with so many Division 1-quality faculty. It seems to me that because of significant numbers of faculty reaching retirement age in the next 5–10 years, this is a propitious time to consider developing additional theme-based research institutes, perhaps bringing together faculty from one department or perhaps bringing together faculty from closely related departments, with a common research theme being the guiding principle. Of course, in addition to start-up support from the university, these faculty would be expected to seek external funding for their activities, which would include, like the ERI model, reduced teaching responsibilities, though faculty would be expected to mentor students in their research and to give seminars and tutorials. I believe that the development of additional theme-based research institutes across the university would, in time, yield significant benefits. Moreover, these institutes would open additional avenues for collaborative efforts in research and teaching across disciplines and even across Schools/Colleges.

Part of being successful in research is to know your competition. There is no way that I could have sustained NIH funding over these many years, if I were teaching a full load, like many of you do. Frankly, I am in awe of the remarkable productivity of many of my colleagues who do teach a full load each semester. But, the simple truth is that I, and others like me in the biomedical sciences at Oakland, compete for federal dollars principally against faculty that work at medical

schools. Faculty at medical schools have limited teaching responsibilities, they have graduate students, medical students and postdoctoral students, and they have access to the latest expensive technology. Typically, my laboratory consists of one technician, several undergraduate students, a postdoctoral fellow, and decent equipment. But, the critical factor for me is that I have had the time to be in the laboratory throughout the entire year. I would hope that ample time is provided to the new, talented junior faculty that have been hired recently to ensure that their research/scholarly careers are built on a solid foundation. Without a solid foundation at the start of one's career, it is considerably more difficult to sustain a productive research career. In the ERI, a productive research career is clearly dependent on getting one's grant(s) renewed and renewed! The administration, departments and colleagues must do more to maximize research opportunities for junior faculty, i.e., protect their time for research, provide start-up funds, and encourage them along the way.

With respect to my interactions with students, I feel, paradoxically, that I work at a university with the characteristics typically associated with outstanding Division 3 institutions. Why? Because in all my years, I have had the luxury of voluntarily teaching an upper level, elective course in the biology department, typically to fewer than 20 students. My neurobiology course always attracted students who were interested in the subject material (the brain)- how lucky for me. Most recently, I have had the good fortune to teach in the Honors College, and students in the Honors College are wonderful. Frankly, I would have a hard time in a classroom with uncaring, dispassionate students. And, saving the best for last, I have had a steady stream of bright, talented, and just plain nice undergraduates in my research laboratory. There is no better way for an undergraduate to become acquainted with and to understand the do's and don'ts of a discipline than by working one-on-one with a professor. It's a win-win situation. I know that many of you experience the same excitement with your research students.

Perhaps now the reader has a better understanding of my optimism regarding Oakland University. Since my first days on this campus, I have been an active participant in quality activities, I have taught and mentored many talented students, and I have benefited greatly from these interactions. For me, therefore, Oakland has been more like the “Harvard of the Midwest” than a local Division 2 institution.