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OUSC president advocates student awareness

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

In addition to pursuing a communications major and public relations minor, Oakland University senior Jonathan Parks also serves as Student Congress president. OU Web Writer Jeff Samoray met with Parks to learn more about him and discuss the goals of his administration.

Q: Are you a commuter student or do you live on campus?

A: I live in the University Student Apartments. It's very convenient for me, and I feel closer to the students by living on campus. I previously lived in Fitzgerald House, Hamlin and Vandenberg Hall. There's more of a communal atmosphere in the residence halls, but there are plenty of benefits to living in the apartments. They're peaceful, more private and there are no fire drills!

Q: Are you involved in other campus activities in addition to your duties as OUSC president?

A: I was on the executive board of the Association of Black Students but had to step down from that role when I took this office. I'm still a member of ABS and do my best to go out and support all student organizations, particularly when they hold events on campus.

Q: How did you become interested in student government?

A: Before I became an ABS member, I hosted its annual Fashion Show when I was a sophomore. During that event, Derek Dickow (then Student Congress president) approached me and introduced himself. I didn't know him at the time, but he had heard good things about me. He explained that the campus would need a good leader after his term was over and encouraged me to get involved. He was the first one who explained to me how OUSC works. He took me around campus and introduced me to different administrators. We discussed OUSC in his office, and he said, "Two years from now you'll be in this seat." And here I am today.

Q: And what led you to become involved with ABS?

A: (OU senior education major) Lenny Compton got me involved with ABS going into my junior year. I thought of myself as just an average student, but some thought otherwise. At that time, Lenny told me he thought I could achieve more than even I thought possible. I was used to waking up, going to class, and going to the Rec Center to play some basketball – just your average college life. But when Lenny and Derek started throwing this leadership stuff at me, I was very flattered.

Q: After becoming involved in student government and getting a feel for its responsibilities, what led you to run for OUSC president?

A: I like a good challenge. I have a competitive background that comes from playing sports. I wanted to achieve some personal growth, and I believe this experience will sharpen my skills for the field I've chosen to go into (public relations). I also saw room for improvement in campus life. When I was growing up, I was taught not to sit and complain if there's a problem but instead to do something about it.

Q: Your time must be quite limited due to your various responsibilities. What is your daily routine like, and how do you balance your time between classes and other activities?

A: Time management is definitely another skill I've picked up since taking office. I never took a night class until this semester, and though it's tough to sit there for three-plus hours, it helps make my schedule more manageable. In the morning, I'm in the (OUSC) office from about 8 or 9 to about 1 o'clock. Between those hours, I have a chance to meet with university administrators. In the afternoon, I'm usually in class or open to attend campus events. I have (an electronic planner) that I use to keep track of everything. Right now, I'm pretty much booked up through the end of January. My personal time is pretty much restricted to the weekend. The upcoming Christmas break will be great.

Q: How would you describe the first half of your term?

A: It's been a great experience. I've fought hard for issues I've believed in and stood by my words. I love my executive board. Without them, half of our accomplishments could never have been achieved. There have been good and bad times, but the executive board has been strong and very supportive.

Q: You mentioned that you've fought hard for certain issues. Can you describe one of those instances and explain how the issue was resolved?

A: I often work hard to establish a certain level of understanding among the students. For example, the Student Allocation Funding Board (SAFB) provides funds to assist student organizations with holding events. But what a lot of students don't understand is that this money is meant to assist organizations, not provide 100 percent of the funding. Over the past year or so, a lot of organizations expected to obtain funding from the SAFB without raising any funds on their own. The end result is that the SAFB had a \$5,000 deficit and borrowed money from Student Congress to make up that shortfall. At the same time, there were 30 or 40 other student organizations that never even received SAFB funding. I thought it was in the best interest of the students to clean this up and make everyone more accountable.

When an organization submits a request for funding today, we ask them to provide more details and documentation about the proposed event, how it will benefit the OU community and how much money the organization has raised on its own. By following this procedure, we don't have to question where the funds are going. We have to hold ourselves to a higher standard and want each student organization to operate as a business. We want organizations that are passionate about their events to do some of their own fund raising, because we have 135 organizations asking for a piece of the same pie.

Q: What other issues are the students bringing to your attention?

A: We had a meeting last Thursday about the parking situation at Anibal House and Fitzgerald House. The lot for those buildings has 250 spaces but just 40 for overnight parking. Greg Kampe, chair of the OU parking committee, came to talk to OUSC and we also had a meeting with residence hall students. OU Police Lieutenant Mel Gilroy also came to give us the facts. Instead of just 40 spaces, we'd like to see 140 or at least 100 overnight spaces.

Tuition is always an issue students want to discuss. We know that it's not going to change this academic year, but we want to get this information to the students and help them understand the budget situation.

Other issues that have been raised are the furniture in the Oakland Center, the availability of the (Oakland Center) Fireside Lounge for programming, the fishbowl construction at South Foundation Hall, and policing of the residence halls. Some female students have approached me on the emergency blue light phones on campus, and we've made sure they all work properly.

I find that the majority of the time students don't have enough information on the issues, and we try to inform them about what is actually happening. Whenever a student comes to me with an issue, I always ask if their statement is a personal belief or the belief of a group of students.

Q: What are some of OUSC's goals from this point to the end of the academic year?

A: We'd like to see a resolution to the parking problem before next semester. We'd also like to see more weekend programming on campus. Some students have inquired about having a hot breakfast served in the OC. We'd also like to try to find out what the tuition situation is going to be like for the next academic year.

Q: What are your plans after graduation? Would you like to continue to be involved in politics?

A: I won't graduate until the end of next year (2004-05), and I haven't decided yet if I will run for a second term. I'm not planning on running for any other political office after I graduate, but it seems like politics is related to everything these days. Hopefully, I'll be able to get a public relations job with a prestigious firm or sports team. I've already talked with the Detroit Pistons about the possibility of doing an internship. I want to have a taste of the PR field before getting further into it. Graduate school is also part of my future plans. I'd like to get a master of communications degree.

Visit the ***Oakland University Student Congress*** Web site for more information on its executive board, legislature, committees and activities. Jonathan Parks may be contacted at (248) 370-4292 or jdparks@oakland.edu.

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