



Thursday, June 22, 2000

Scholarships lauded for producing diverse graduates

Oakland alumna Lisa Marie Westfall, of Sterling Heights, said a program of Oakland's Office of Equity was the best thing that could have happened to her. As a self-supporting student since she was 18, the OU Trustee Academic Success Scholarship Program (OUTASS) paid much of her tuition. The program also prepared her for success in an increasingly diverse society – and it helped her in many other ways:

"The people running the program would do anything for me," Westfall said, "from helping me develop test-taking skills and stress-coping strategies to helping me learn how to manage my time." And that was important to Westfall, because she was holding down two jobs.

Westfall valued one of the program's major goals -- readying students for life in a diverse society. Before entering OUTASS, Westfall, a Hispanic woman, said she didn't know much about other cultures. But she said the program really opened her eyes. "They really do prepare you for the differences among people," she said.

Westfall majored in Spanish and graduated in 1999 with a bachelor's degree from Oakland's College of Arts and Sciences. She is now an instructor in English as a second language. After serving the Office of Equity as a student advising intern, she decided to pursue a master's degree in counseling. She plans to work as high school Spanish teacher and counselor after she earns her master's.

Westfall and 15 others for the 1999-2000 year make up OUTASS' largest graduating class. OUTASS is becoming a national model for retaining and graduating a diverse group of high-achieving university students.

"To prepare graduates to function effectively in a global economy and society, students must develop cross-cultural understanding and communication skills as an integral part of their education," said Glenn McIntosh, director, Advising Resource Center and Office of Equity.

OUTASS departs from the traditional approach of keeping minority students tied academically and socially to their racial or ethnic peer group. Students of all backgrounds are admitted to the program according to academic performance and financial need. Scholarships are awarded for one year; they are renewable for three additional years, and are limited to \$3,000 per year per student.

The program works so well, McIntosh said, because it provides financial assistance, psychological, academic and social support, and career exploration. This frequent interaction promotes strong ties between the student and the university community, connecting them with helpful resources. Students meet biweekly with their counselor during their first year and throughout their academic career. They also meet weekly with a peer mentor, an upperclassman who provides support for making the transition to university life.

Another important part of the program is the 10-week leadership development seminar, an academic and personal skill-building course that promotes student involvement. The seminar particularly helps reduce minorities' feelings of alienation.

OUTASS started in 1994 and has 33 graduates. So far, it has been effective: The proportion of OUTASS students who serve in campus leadership positions has increased annually. And the average grade-point average of 3.07 is higher for participants than that of 2.98 for all part-time and full-time OU undergraduates in the winter 2000 term.

In 1999, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators recognized OUTASS as a noteworthy program. Earlier this year, McIntosh and Gloria Sosa, assistant director, Office of Equity, made a presentation on the program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The 1999-2000 OUTASS graduating class:

- Brian Boniface, Rochester Hills
- Demetria Boyles, Pontiac
- Kristopher Carpenter, Pontiac
- Michelle Guy, Farmington Hills

- Ronald Howell, Oak Park
- LaTisha Ivy, Kentwood
- Frederico Jiminez, Eastpointe
- Ronald Mashni, Plymouth
- Dedra McGlory, Detroit
- John Pena, Farmington Hills
- Jennifer Rockwell, Grand Blanc
- Shaunda Scruggs, Nashville, Tennessee
- Sarah Sherman, Livonia
- Michael Thom, Monroe
- Laurence Virden, Detroit
- Lisa Marie Westfall, Sterling Heights

Oakland University is a comprehensive state-supported institution of higher education located in suburban Oakland County, Michigan. OU offers undergraduate programs in 109 areas and graduate programs in 63 areas. Dedicated to preparing learners for the 21st-century workplace and society, the university is organized in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Schools of Business Administration, Education and Human Services, Engineering and Computer Science, Health Science, Nursing, and the Honors College.

SUMMARY

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