

02-02-2026 - Office of the President

Spirit of Place Public Arts Competition

February 2, 2026

Dear faculty, staff and students,

Whenever I walk our beautiful campus, I am reminded of Oakland's deep commitment to enriching lives through the power of the arts. From thought-provoking outdoor sculptures like Rhythms and Vibrations to the creative vitality of the OU Art Gallery, the arts at Oakland encourage reflection, dialogue and understanding, strengthening our sense of belonging and commitment to the common good. It is a beautiful legacy worth building on — one that helps drive our strategic vision to become a preeminent steward of place and vibrant cultural hub.

Today, through our Cultural Ambassadors initiative, we take an important step in advancing our cultural vision with the launch of the [Spirit of Place Public Arts Competition](#). Guided by a committee co-chaired by Distinguished Professor Andrea Eis and Vice President for Advancement Mike Westfall, this national public art competition — funded by a \$250,000 gift and \$100,000 university match — will result in the installation of a permanent, large-scale artwork that reflects Oakland's mission, values and aspirations.

With input from the campus community, the Committee will help shape and refine the competition's theme, ensuring that the final artwork captures signature elements of the OU experience, such as a commitment to a just world, civil discourse, belonging and community engagement. The Committee is also charged with identifying an ideal campus location for the artwork; developing a national outreach strategy to attract a diverse pool of leading artists; engaging campus stakeholders in the review process; and selecting the winning proposal.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Eis and Vice President Westfall for leading this important endeavor. I also want to thank all our committee members for lending their time, creativity and expertise, including faculty from diverse fields; administrators from finance, communications, community engagement and the arts; and partners from the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Cranbrook Art Museum. You can find the complete list of committee members on our [webpage](#).

Along with our [Community Changemaker Challenge Grants](#), this effort marks another important stride in our journey to become a preeminent steward of place. I look forward to our continued work together to elevate Oakland's position as a cultural destination, where the arts engage both mind and heart — and reflect who we are and aspire to be.

Sincerely,

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.
President