



Monday, November 5, 2001

## New office streamlines financial aid, billing

By **Jennifer Charney**, OU Staff Writer

Oakland University's new Office of Student Financial Services opens Monday, Nov. 5, and will provide students with faster service in financial aid and billing matters.

The remodeled office, at 120 North Foundation Hall, houses the offices of Financial Aid, Financial Aid Accounting, Student Accounts and the cashier.

The move was made in an effort to provide one-stop service to students, said Phillip Asbury, the new director of the Office of Financial Aid, who joined OU in August.

Before the move to the new site, students often had to visit more than one office about financial aid and billing matters. They would have to visit the Financial Aid Office to ask a question about their award, then move on to Student Accounts to address billing matters.

Now, students need only visit 120 North Foundation Hall. There, they'll find a reception area and customer service representatives who are trained in financial aid and billing procedures. The representatives can answer general financial aid questions about how to apply and when the application will be processed. For more specific billing or financial aid questions, the representatives will direct those questions to specialists in the office.

The new office is meant to be more welcoming to students than the former office, where students had to talk to representatives through small windows in a brick wall. The new office features five stations where students can sit down with a representative.

"The ultimate goal in Financial Aid is to make it as painless as possible for students," Asbury said. "It can be a very stressful procedure for students."

Asbury and other Oakland staff are working to simplify the financial aid process further by using computer technology. The goal is to allow students to make one stop or no stop at the office to address their financial aid matters.

"We're hoping to do everything we can to prevent students from having to come in to get service," Asbury said. "Students who come in ought to come in with questions relating to information they've already received, not questions on how to get the information. Those are my immediate goals."

Plans call for providing financial aid letters tailored to individual students instead of groups of students. Such letters will describe each student's specific situation and the steps they need to take next to get their financial aid.

About 50 percent of OU students receive financial aid.

The financial aid process starts when students complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Then the U.S. government sends the Office of Financial Aid an electronic file with information from the FAFSA.

"We pull that information from the application and start addressing their needs," Asbury said. "From there, sprouts a financial aid award letter that goes to the student."

"The vast majority of the financial aid we offer is based on need. It's controlled outside of our office," he said. "We try to help them through the government's process."

Financial Aid office hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Wednesday, 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

For more information on financial aid, visit the **Office of Financial Aid** Web site.

### SUMMARY

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