

# Presidential Remarks

## REIMAGINING OU Update

**January 20, 2021**

### **Campus begins implementation phase of initial Reimagining OU proposals**

#### **Advances come from extensive collaboration in ongoing university transformation**

Embarking on a campus-wide sustainability plan, building traditions to strengthen the OU brand, and establishing a higher standard for administrative effectiveness are among the breakthrough proposals of [“Reimagining OU: Learning. Leading. Empowering.”](#) (ROU).

The ROU initiative was introduced by Oakland University President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz in October 2019. The undertaking draws on critical feedback, surveys and research from a 30-member team of faculty and staff. The purpose of ROU is to foster a dynamic learning environment that is responsive and accountable to the needs of students, faculty and staff, while addressing fundamental challenges transforming the national higher education landscape.

“Reimagining OU is a rigorous assessment of all facets of the university with the intention of transforming Oakland University into a preeminent 21<sup>st</sup>-century global university,” said OU President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz.

“With the many demanding challenges facing higher education, we must be proactive and innovative to be the ‘University of Choice’ for students, faculty and staff,” she said. “The possibilities depend on our willingness to change, and our capacity to imagine.”

A “champion” has been assigned to implement each of the 12 ROU proposals and the recently drafted university values statement, which was unveiled at last fall’s State of the University Address.

ROU is co-chaired by College of Arts and Sciences Dean Kevin Corcoran and Honors College Dean Graeme Harper, who are architects of the plan that looks at improvements to the university’s culture, administration policies and initiatives intended to strategically position OU for the challenges ahead.

These challenges include:

- Anticipating lower revenue based on decreasing enrollment trends
- Finding cost-effective approaches to efficiently allocate resources
- Preparing for the financial impact from possible lower levels of state funding
- Dealing with rising levels of student debt
- Identifying innovative and alternative ways to increase revenue
- Responding to rising skepticism about the value of a college education

## **Empowering faculty and staff**

“The proposals vary in complexity, scope and impact,” said Dean Corcoran. “Considering the grassroots process and the proposals collectively, we have laid the ground work for faculty and staff to be empowered and to be compelled to contribute to the evolution of Oakland University.”

The ROU team began meetings in January of 2020. Despite the pandemic and the inability to meet face-to-face, the committees met virtually each week, and submitted a comprehensive report to President Pescovitz in early October.

“We are grateful for the commitment and vision of the team,” said Dean Harper. “They not only had to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic, but they established the foundation for an ongoing continuous quality improvement process.

“Their legacy is an open-minded, collaborative approach to create an empowering culture where each of us is accountable for Oakland University’s current culture and future success,” he said.

The ROU team was divided into three committees: Culture and Identity, co-chaired by Jessie Hurst and Amanda Summers; Structures and Processes, co-chaired by Tom LeMarbe and Song Yan; and, The Path Ahead, co-chaired by Steve Waterfield and Claudia Petrescu.

### **The Proposals: Focus on innovation and inspiration**

The newly crafted university values statement and core values offer a preamble and rationale for the changes inherent in the ROU proposals. The values statement states:

“As a community of higher learning, inquiry and discovery, Oakland University values freedom of thought and expression that leads to responsible citizenship, fair-mindedness and a commitment to the ethical treatment of all people and the environment.

OU’s core values include integrity and respect, compassion, inclusivity, collaboration, curiosity, creativity, and stewardship. In the upcoming weeks, the values statement will appear a wide range of university materials and on-campus venues.

*Subsequent to the 10-months of regular meetings, discussion and research, the ROU team submitted their findings to President Pescovitz in an expansive report, including the 12 proposals. The proposals have been further developed, and are currently being implemented by the senior OU leadership team.*

Committees led by Senior Vice President of Student Affairs and Chief Diversity Officer Glenn McIntosh, Senior Associate Provost Michelle Piskulich and VP of University Advancement Michael Westfall are focusing on improving the communication of the university’s priorities along with ways to consider input from key constituents, and fostering traditions that reflect OU’s core values, heritage and aspirations.

The expansive Sustainability Action Plan is championed by Steve Waterfield, Director of Athletics and cabinet member, who participated in the development of a sustainability plan when he was at University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Currently, the blueprint for the sustainability plan includes 14 areas: curriculum, air and climate, buildings, energy, food and dining, grounds, purchasing, research, transportation, waste, recycling, water use/storm water management, diversity and affordability.

The comprehensive plan will reflect input from faculty and staff, and includes several phases with the long-term goal of establishing an OU Sustainability Center.

From an administrative standpoint, the ROU proposals to improve administrative responsiveness and efficiencies include changes to software purchasing, signing authority policy, campus safety, continuous process improvement standards, purchasing department re-organization, and regular reviews of university organizational chart to ensure clear roles and lines of authority.

In reviewing the needs of University Tech Services, the ROU proposal recommended a national search to hire a Chief Information Officer. That search is headed by Chief of Staff Joshua Merchant.

An informational campus survey conducted by a third-party will be scheduled for early 2022. That appraisal will offer an objective and transparent look at the impact of remote working, and reveal concerns, issues and proposed ways to improve the OU post-pandemic work environment.

In addition to McIntosh, Piskulich, Westfall, Waterfield and Merchant, the ROU proposals are being implemented by Vice President, Finance and Administration John Beaghan, General Counsel Vic Zambardi, and Vice President, Human Resources Ron Watson.

The ROU team will reconvene in February with new proposals expected in the fall.

The reimagining process includes a diversity of members and perspectives. It's expected that subsequent proposals will be led by champions from around campus.

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