

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS

GOLDEN GRIZZLIES COMMUNITY LETTER

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Dear Golden Grizzlies,

Lately, I have been thinking about my father, who loved to share life lessons through parables. One of my favorites was about the Jordan River, which feeds both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is replenished by the river and then flows back out to it. The Dead Sea, however, only takes with no natural outlets. While flora and fauna thrive in the Sea of Galilee, they cannot in the Dead Sea. My father's message was simple: Be like the Sea of Galilee and give back to the world that gives us so much.

That lesson has been on my mind because I've seen so many wonderful examples of Golden Grizzlies showing up for our communities. It's at the heart of our strategic vision: to be stewards of place. And I'm so inspired by how we are doing that every day, solving real-world problems and strengthening the vitality and prosperity of our region and beyond.

Community changemakers

One powerful example of that spirit was last month's annual **Keeper of the Dream Scholarship Awards** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/fsbvneb>), where we honored the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and recognized students who are helping bring his vision of a beloved community to life. Congratulations to Marcus Johnson, Jayson Miller, Ndeye Marieme Sarr Samb, Mercy Jeffries, Triasure Golden, Qamar Naji and Jaliyah Eaton, who are doing incredible work to break down racial and cultural barriers. I'd also like to thank Omar Brown-El and the team at the Center for Multicultural Initiatives for championing equity and belonging — and our event co-chairs, Trustee Stefen Welch and Kaniqua Welch, for helping rally sponsorship and support.



This month, we kept our momentum going, announcing the **winners of the OU Community Changer Challenge** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/vkcvneb>) — new grants supporting bold projects that engage students and address community needs. The selection committee had a difficult task, evaluating 27 excellent proposals spanning disciplines from chemistry and engineering to education and art history. While I hope all these proposals find funding, the committee selected three standout projects focused on

independent living supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities; portable rapid detection of synthetic opioids to strengthen overdose response; and mental health access for youth and families experiencing housing instability. Congratulations to the principal investigators — professors W. Geoffrey Louie, Zhe Wang and Bill Solomonson — and to their teams and community partners. I'm also grateful to the committee members for the time, rigor and care they invested in this work.

A cultural destination

At Oakland, our public mission takes many forms, including enriching lives through the arts. That is one reason we launched the national **Spirit of Place Public Arts Competition** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/bddvneb>), which will result in a permanent, large-scale artwork installed on campus. As part of the Cultural Ambassadors initiative to elevate OU as a cultural destination, the selected work will reflect Oakland's mission, values and aspirations — and engage the minds and hearts of our campus and communities. I'm confident the competition will build on our cultural strengths, from the creative vitality of the OU Art Gallery to our many **thought-provoking outdoor sculptures** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/r5dvneb>). And I'm grateful to the selection committee for guiding this effort with such care and expertise.



Recently, I was reminded of the transformative power of the arts when I visited **Memorializing the Hibakusha Experience** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/7xevneb>) at the OU Art Gallery. Curated by art history professor Claude Baillargeon, the exhibition is a poignant call to grapple with the human consequences of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki — and to reflect on our shared humanity and responsibility to one another. I encourage our community to visit this important exhibition and contemplate how the past continues to shape our understanding of war and peace.

In closing

As always, there are more examples of OU's commitment to the common good than I can ever cover in one letter. I'm thinking, for example, of the Graham Health Center team that helped OU earn national recognition for **our flu vaccination efforts** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/nqfvneb>) — and of our students who earned accolades at the **American Model United Nations International Conference** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/3igvneb>). Both reflect Golden Grizzlies putting expertise and learning into service for others and for the public good.

But I'll close by encouraging all of you to find one concrete way to give back in the weeks ahead. That may mean **nominating an outstanding faculty or staff member** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/jbhvneb>) for this year's employee recognition awards. It may mean getting involved in **volunteer opportunities** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/z3hvneb>). Or it may mean **supporting OU Giving Day** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/r1quoh/rhbtphmd/fwivneb>), which advances student success, groundbreaking research and community engagement. No matter how you choose to contribute, I hope we can all be like the Sea of

Galilee and pour ourselves into our communities to help them flourish.

Sincerely,

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.

President

Oakland University