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The OU experience and persistence leads to success for GMAC VP

An Ivy League education isn't necessary to land powerful positions and lucrative careers. Just ask Toni Simonetti (CAS '79, MBA '90), vice president of global communications and chief communications officer for GMAC Financial Services. She earned her degrees from Oakland University.

"I appreciate and respect the Ivy League schools. They are great institutions," Simonetti says. "At the end of the day, however, individuals are responsible for their own learning process. I acquired a great skill set from Oakland University and I enjoyed my time there. It worked for me."

Born and raised in Michigan, Simonetti enrolled at OU as an undecided major. After taking journalism and French courses her first semester, she had her major and minor mapped out.

French was Simonetti's first love. She thoroughly enjoyed her instructors and the program. Concerned that a major in French wouldn't present many career opportunities, journalism won out.

"I was more of a liberal arts person than a math and science person. J-school and a minor French resonated with me," Simonetti says.

By day, Simonetti car pooled to campus with girlfriends from high school. By night, she worked at a restaurant. She also found time to work for the student newspaper, *The Oakland Sail*, and to intern at a local CBS television affiliate, WJBK.

With degree in hand, she found herself employed as a full-fledged reporter—and later editor—for a group of weekly newspapers in Macomb County, Mich. After five years in the media business, she was ready for a change.

"GM (General Motors) was the biggest ticket in town," Simonetti says. "Somehow I got it in my head that I was going to work there, and I sent resume after resume to their corporate communications department. I think I still have a drawer full of rejection letters." She didn't give up and her persistence paid off. One day she received a call for an interview and was subsequently hired.

"I wouldn't trade my Oakland University education for anything," Simonetti says. "The broad range of classes and experiences added to my perspective and gave me insight to the world around me."

At the beginning of her GM career, Simonetti returned to OU for a master's degree. "The MBA was a great complement to my undergraduate background and provided additional credentials to pursue my professional aspirations in a business environment," she says.

Having received her undergraduate degree from OU, she was comfortable and confident in obtaining a solid education from OU's accredited business school.

Like Simonetti, most of the MBA students were working full time during the day and attending classes at night. "This brought great richness to the class discussions, giving us real-life situations to assess. It sparked my interest and ambition."

Simonetti steadily climbed the ranks of GM, ultimately landing her current position with GMAC. She relocated to GM's New York office in early 1993. She spent two years, from 1998-99, with the defense company, Raytheon, based in Lexington, Mass., then returned to GM.

It's an esteemed career, to say the least. And just think—OU is part of that impressive resume.

SUMMARY

An Ivy League education isn't necessary to land powerful positions and lucrative careers. Just ask Toni Simonetti (CAS '79, MBA '90), vice president of global communications and chief communications officer for GMAC Financial Services. She earned her degrees from Oakland University. "I appreciate and respect the Ivy League schools. They are great institutions," Simonetti says. "At the end of the day, however, individuals are responsible for their own learning process. I acquired a great skill set from Oakland University and I enjoyed my time there. It worked for me."

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