

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS

GOLDEN GRIZZLIES COMMUNITY LETTER

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Dear Golden Grizzlies,

Later this week, I will speak at a local history conference and, in honor of Women's History Month, I plan to share a few words about our visionary founder, Matilda Dodge Wilson. I have always admired how Matilda lived her belief that "To attempt great things is to expect great things." Among her many accomplishments, she served as Michigan's first woman lieutenant governor and ultimately made the transformative gift that helped create Oakland University.

Matilda envisioned a university of regional and national significance whose opportunities were – in her words – "almost without bounds." Ever since, each generation of our community has carried that vision forward, working together to build an Oakland that transforms lives and strengthens communities.

Carrying Matilda's vision forward

Over the past month, I have seen so many reminders of Matilda's legacy in action. I am thinking of Yejie Lee, a member of OU's Career and Life Design Center who was recently recognized as one of **Detroit's top 15 career coaches** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/focxqh/rhbtphmd/r5haueb>). She does such important work empowering OU students to pursue their careers with clarity and purpose.



I am equally proud of faculty members Sergey Golovashchenko, James Hansen and Jennifer Vonk, who last month achieved the rank of **Distinguished Professor** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/focxqh/rhbtphmd/7xiaueb>), Oakland's highest faculty honor. Together, they exemplify the university's deep commitment to excellence in teaching, scholarship, creative activity and service.

We are also fortunate to have such accomplished leaders across the university. Provost Amy Thompson, for example, was recently named a **distinguished fellow** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/focxqh/rhbtphmd/nqjaueb>) by the Society for Public Health Education in recognition of her exemplary scholarship and community service. Meanwhile, Steve Waterfield received the **2025-26 Division I-AAA Athletic Director of the Year Award** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/focxqh/rhbtphmd/3ikaueb>) for his exceptional leadership and commitment to student-athlete success.

Our students and alums give us even more reasons to celebrate as they pursue lives of purpose, service

and success. In recent weeks, student Christian Cummings launched an **organization to bring live music** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/focxqh/rhbtphmd/jblaueb>) to senior living communities alongside a team of fellow student leaders. OU students also once again excelled at the **North American Model UN conference** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/focxqh/rhbtphmd/z3laueb>), while OU alum Dana Parke **received national recognition** (<https://t.e2ma.net/click/focxqh/rhbtphmd/fwmaueb>) for early-career excellence in political science.



In closing

Taken together, these achievements reflect what makes Oakland so special. Quite simply, it is our people – past and present – who have made Oakland the vibrant university it is today. I believe Matilda would be proud of our collective accomplishments. And I look forward to building on this momentum as we attempt great things for our students and communities.

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