

# Oakland University partners on regional debt forgiveness program

OU's Golden Grizzlies Graduate program to collaborate with Wayne State University and Henry Ford College, with support from Detroit Regional Chamber, on debt forgiveness and degree completion



Pictured left to right: Henry Ford College President Russell A. Kavalhuna, Oakland University President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, Wayne State University President M. Roy Wilson, Detroit Regional Chamber President and CEO Sandy K. Baruah, and Brandy Johnson, advisor, Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development, Executive Policy Office for Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. The group announcement about a new collaboration to help students with minor debt reach degrees took place during Driving Change: Local Solutions to the National Attainment Challenge hosted at the Lumina Foundation's National Convening 2019. Photo courtesy of the Detroit

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Oakland University, Wayne State University and Henry Ford College, with support from the Detroit Regional Chamber, are collaborating on a new debt forgiveness program designed to help students return to or stay in school, and fulfill their goal of completing their degree.



"Yesterday was the start of a great new opportunity to collaborate with other institutions of higher education on a program that will help alleviate student debt and help more students graduate," said Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, Oakland University President. "Our goal, along with that of Detroit Drives Degrees (DDD), is to implement strategies that increase postsecondary degree attainment from the current level of 43 percent to 60 percent in southeast Michigan by 2030. As co-chair of DDD, I point out that collaboration is our strength, and education is the key."

*OU President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz announced Oakland University's Golden Grizzlies Graduate program as part of the new regional collaboration to help students return to school, alleviate some of their debt and get back on track to graduate.*

Oakland University's contribution to the collaboration, the Golden Grizzlies Graduate program, launches in July.

"The Golden Grizzlies Graduate program is going to be a catalyst to help many more students reach the finish line and obtain the degree they have been seeking, added Dawn Aubry, Oakland University's Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management. "For me, it is the right thing to do and this program will help us fulfill our mission in Enrollment Management of finding ways to help our students achieve their goals."

The Golden Grizzlies Graduate program includes three new micro-grants designed to alleviate the stress of minor financial obligations:

- **OU Reconnector Grant:** available to students with a past due university bill of \$1,500 or less who are active (eligible to register other than holds), in good academic standing, and have had at least a one-year gap in attendance. The grant covers up to \$500 per semester up to a maximum of three semesters (either toward previous balance, if applicable, or toward the next bill) after successful completion of the semester (minimum one OU course with a 2.5 semester GPA).
- **OU Comebacker Grant:** available to students with no prior balance who are active (eligible to register other than holds), in good academic standing, and have had at least a one-year gap in attendance. Grant covers up to \$500 per semester up to a maximum of three semesters (either toward previous balance, if applicable, or toward the next bill) after successful completion of the semester (minimum one OU course with a 2.5 semester GPA).
- **OU Completion Grant:** available to current OU students who are at risk of leaving the university. Students must be active (eligible to register other than holds), in good academic standing, and at junior or senior level. The grant covers up to \$500 per semester, for up to a maximum of three semesters (either toward previous balance, if applicable, or toward the current balance; students must earn a 2.5 semester GPA to continue receiving the grant). Students must have demonstrated financial need as determined by the FAFSA, and must have exhausted their federal and institutional financial need eligibility.

OU credit evaluator staff will evaluate all previously earned credit, as well as any other degree pathways that might expedite graduation. They can also connect students with an academic adviser who will design a customized degree pathway that incorporates as many innovative and low-cost degree completion strategies as possible (including CLEP exams, which are evaluated by OU for college level credit, and courses taken at the community college or other universities).

Individuals can also meet with a financial aid adviser who will assist with any federal financial aid, difficulties completing financial aid applications, and previous student loan default.

Currently, there are 693,000 adults in southeast Michigan with college credit but no degree. Increasing postsecondary degrees and certifications are keys to the region's appeal as a place of diverse and plentiful talent for a range of industries and employers.

Learn more by visiting the [Golden Grizzlies Graduate web page](#).