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President Russi updates state of OU

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

In his **2003 University Update**, Oakland University President Gary Russi elaborated on many topics and their relation to the university strategic plan and 2010 vision. Among the topics were new heights of instructional innovation, academic degree programs and offerings, student services, and accomplishments by students and faculty. Russi also detailed Oakland's financial state with regard to state appropriations and emphasized the importance of increasing gift income and grant funding as well as monitoring expenditures.

"We have much to be proud of, but also much to aspire to, and in the face of mounting fiscal challenges," Russi said. "Our university is healthy and vibrant, yet we must be vigilant as economic forces are poised to test our resolve once again...Key to Oakland's success in this budget environment will be our ability to secure outside resources to supplement our funding through grants and contracts, private philanthropy, enrollment growth and, even today, state appropriations."

Russi noted that although Oakland's growth in state appropriations has lagged behind other Michigan institutions, the university has made progress over the last five years and its relative position has improved through fiscal year 2003. Weeks of discussions by state legislators and the efforts of OU's lobbying team resulted in a reduction in the appropriations cut from 6.7 to 2.9 percent, thus restoring \$1.9 million back to OU's base budget.

"We made a commitment to give back 100 percent to students – first by rolling back our tuition increase to save students nearly \$1 million a year and second by returning \$850,000 to faculty lines," Russi said. "With this boost, we have been able to give a growing student body the class sections they need this fall by adding primarily part-time faculty. And, with that \$850,000 restored to base, we will move to fill those positions in fiscal year 2005 with full-time faculty."

As part of the \$1.9 million, OU also added \$50,000 to fund new research and instructional initiatives and another \$100,000 to support graduate assistants.

"I think these actions show that even in the face of difficult financial challenges, Oakland continues to focus its efforts to offer a unique and distinctive undergraduate education, one that is complemented by the strength of our graduate programs and research accomplishments," Russi said.

He also cautioned that the university's difficult budget situation is not over. Further cuts may be necessary in the 2003-04 state budget, which may affect OU over the next few years.

"Campus leadership, including our Board of Trustees, has been preparing for the next round of cuts," Russi said. "As part of this effort, I am asking all employees to carefully watch expenditures and to continue to come up with creative ways to save."

He cited several current cost containment measures including aggressive energy conservation, careful management of health care benefit costs, rebidding contracts and maintaining the hiring freeze. Oakland also has built up a \$1.5-million rainy day fund for emergencies. The university also will expand initiatives in the academic community to address program review and announce a new employee suggestion program.

Russi also examined enrollment figures and their relation to the budget situation.

"We have been helped significantly by an increase in our enrollment," he said. "Without steadily increasing numbers of students, our operational cuts would have been far deeper – likely threatening our ability to keep the quality of our educational programming consistently high...Our recruiting efforts are key. We need to remember that all of us – from administrators to faculty to police officers – are vital opinion leaders. So, it is important that we all wear our black-and-gold hats in the community and with family and friends. We can all make a difference."

Other topics Russi addressed include:

Gift Income / Grant Funding

The key toward realizing OU's 2010 objectives is the ability to increase gift income and grant funding. OU's capital campaign,

now in the silent phase, will raise monies to support scholarships, faculty endowments, curricular enhancements and endowments to support student and faculty research. Since July 2002, the university has raised \$15 million. Among the major gifts Russi cited were a \$2 million bequest from alumnus Barry Klein, a \$1 million gift from alumnus and trustee Dennis Pawley. OU employees also can give back to OU through the All-University Fund Drive.

Grants, Contracts, Sponsored Research

Oakland received a record \$12 million in grants and funding for research efforts across multiple disciplines during the 2002-03 academic year. Among those were a \$2 million grant to biological sciences and chemistry from the National Institutes of Health; a \$1 million, five-year grant to Oakland's Eye Research Institute from the National Eye Institute; and \$3.8 million in grants to the newly established Fastening and Joining Research Institute in the School of Engineering and Computer Science.

Ongoing Partnerships

Ongoing partnerships with business, government, health care and educational organizations in the region and world help OU's programs grow and increase the university's profile among important constituencies. Partnerships Russi cited were those with Cooley Law School; the Michigan Economic Development Corporation; the communities of Rochester Hills, Troy and Southfield; Oakland County; Automation Alley; and Lawrence Tech.

General Education

Oakland is working to strengthen its general education program as recommended by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Last spring, the University Senate approved a new framework for general education at OU. A general education task force will be submitting a program plan to the University Senate this semester.

Curricular Development

New programs introduced this fall include a Master of Arts degree in liberal studies, Master of Science in adult/gerontological nurse practitioner, Master of Science in nursing education and a Bachelor of Arts degree in studio art.

Student Achievement

Through the University Student Research Scholar program, 35 students received \$1,000 to \$1,500 each to pursue research projects. Undergraduate researchers from Oakland shared their scholarship with other students and faculty at the 11th annual Meeting of Minds symposium. And in two years, an average of 152 student-athletes have been recognized through The Golden Grizzlies Excellence in Academics honor.

Student Life

Among the new initiatives Russi cited are the Freshman Outlook and Parent Outlook programs; International Education Office, and The Honors College residential program as well as the wellness hall, community outreach hall and international culture hall for students residing on campus. The Oakland University's Trustees Academic Success Scholarship program continues to be one of the most successful recruitment and student retention programs in the country, and minority student enrollment this fall for new freshmen increased by 5 percent over last year. OU also added bricks and mortar to the student life area by completing a 30,000-square-foot expansion of the Oakland Center.

Community Outreach

The Board of Trustees approved a proposal submitted by the Committee to Save Meadow Brook Theatre to operate the theatre through an independent 501c3 corporation. Later this month, OU will look at the operation of Meadow Brook Hall, searching for the right combination of operational services and historic preservation that will keep that operation viable for many years to come.

Special Recognition

Russi gave special recognition to Distinguished Professor of Chemistry Paul Tomboulia; Associate Professor of Teacher Development and Educational Studies Mary Stein, who is the 2003 Teaching Excellence Award winner; Professor of Engineering Robert N. K. Loh, the 2003 Research Excellence Award winner; Assistant Professor of Chemistry John Seeley, the New Investigator Award winner; and Special Lecturer of Music, Theatre and Dance Phyllis Wolfe White, recipient of the Excellence in Teaching Award. Russi also introduced new School of Nursing Dean Linda Thompson.

The 2003 University Update may be read in its entirety on the [Office of the President](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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