

President Gary Russi's Testimony  
House Appropriations Higher Education Subcommittee  
March 2, 2007

**Oakland University's history**

- Good morning.
- Thank you for the opportunity to address the subcommittee today.
- I would especially like to thank the chair for arranging these hearings.
- Today, I would like to talk to you about how Oakland University is meeting the challenges set forth by the Cherry Commission, keeping an Oakland education affordable and accessible and creating graduates who are ready to meet the demands of the 21st Century workforce.

- But first, for the benefit of the new members of the subcommittee, I'd like to give you a brief history of our university.
- Oakland University was founded in 1957 when the late Alfred and Matilda Wilson, the first female to hold the position of lieutenant governor, donated \$2 million and their 1,500-acre estate to begin a new college in Oakland County, Michigan.
- This year, Oakland University marks its 50th anniversary, celebrating five decades of innovation and opportunity, including achievement in preparing student leaders, advancing research frontiers and engaging with business, educational and community partners for the benefit of our region.

- Through a multitude of partnerships with hospitals, Fortune 500 companies, individuals, cities, government agencies, and educational institutions, Oakland helps the state solve problems and build thriving, sustainable businesses.
- These associations reward our students with internship and co-op opportunities and provide university researchers access to the latest technology tools.
- Our leadership with these partnerships also significantly impacts economic development efforts and commercialization opportunities in our region.
- As an example, the long-serving superintendent of the Troy School District was known to say that no teacher would be hired in Troy without first interviewing an OU graduate.

- And, in a recent speech delivered to our faculty and staff in honor of our 50th anniversary, David Baker Lewis, an OU alumnus and former trustee, said about our university:
  - “Oakland has taken its rightful place among the institutions of higher learning in the state.
  - From an unknown 50 years ago to one of the more prominent universities in the state system today.
  - ...Oakland serves a crucial educational mission in southeast Michigan. Matilda and Alfred can be justly proud of the legacy they left behind.
  - Were they here, I am convinced they would say to all who have had a hand in making Oakland what it is today: ‘Job well done.’”
- Mr. Lewis is today an attorney and founding partner of the Lewis & Munday law firm.

- Today, Oakland University, the 8th largest of the 15 public universities, has 17,737 students and is a nationally-ranked, academic institution offering a personal, high-quality education through flexible class schedules, student services, classroom technologies, labs, internships, co-ops, student research opportunities with corporate partners, and a multitude of undergraduate and graduate degree and certificate programs.
- Recognized as one of the country's top 82 doctoral/research universities by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, we offer students opportunities to work directly on research projects with expert faculty.
- Now that you know where we're coming from, I'd like to shift gears and let you know where we're going.

## **The unique Oakland University experience**

- Oakland University is on the move.
- With record enrollment increases in eight out of the past nine years, students and parents are sending a clear message that Oakland University has gained a reputation as a university of choice in the state.
- And although we proudly point to a high quality, affordable and accessible undergraduate education as a hallmark of our mission, we serve the graduate education needs of more than 4,000 students a year through 90 programs from the master through doctoral levels, strengthening the very fabric of our state and regional economics in the process.
- And we are involved in a vast array of initiatives and activities that provide a unique experience for our students, the community and the entire state of Michigan.

- Take, for example, the Fastening and Joining Research Institute, the only facility of its kind in the world, located on our campus.
- FAJRI pursues fundamental and applied research to develop new technologies for the fastening and joining of metals, composites and polymers.
- The work that comes out of the FAJRI has already made important contributions to the civilian and military sectors of the American economy.
- In 2005, for instance, the FAJRI was called upon to solve a problem with a bolted joint that had shut down the reactor at the Fermi 2 nuclear power plant.
- A FAJRI student and faculty member visited the site, solved the problem and helped get the reactor back up and running.

- Or take, for example, the Pawley Lean Learning Institute, established in 2002 through a gift from Dennis Pawley, OU alum and chair of our Board of Trustees.
- The Lean Learning Institute provides instruction and research that employs the practice of organizational improvement to business, education and public service.
- The concept of “lean” is a foregone conclusion on our campus; in addition to our students, our faculty, administration and many employees have been schooled in the fine points of the lean philosophy; that is, to operate as efficiently as possible to save time and money.
- We practice what we preach: Oakland University is as “lean” as it’s ever been, and we’re going to keep applying this concept to everything we do.
- Or take a look at our School of Nursing.



- Last fall, with the financial backing of a grant provided by the Kellogg Foundation, our School of Nursing became the first university in the state to offer the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree.
- The DNP has been recognized by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing as the highest level of preparation for clinical nursing.
- If you want a DNP, you are going to have to come to Oakland to get it.
- Our School of Nursing is also deeply involved in easing the nursing shortage by partnering with St. John Health System in Detroit.
- Using classroom, lab and lecture space at Conner Creek Village, the SON proactively works in an underserved population to find alternative ways to educate much-needed nurses.

*Nurse Enthusiast - 6 <sup>ccr</sup>*

- Or consider the work that comes out of our School of Business Administration's Applied Technology in Business (ATiB) center, where our students learn to apply information technology proactively helping businesses stay competitive.
- Our students are out in the business community to help companies solve problems through application of technology, and the success stories coming out of the ATiB program are impressive and appreciated in the business community.
- Our partnership with the Longfellow School in Pontiac – one part of our unique formula for helping teachers learn to teach – allows our School of Education and Human Services students to apply practical, hands-on teaching in an environment where mentoring and acting as role models to schoolchildren is vitally important.

- While examples of our unique contributions are nearly endless, I'd like now to take a few moments to tell you how we are making an Oakland University education more accessible and affordable to students throughout Michigan.
- This, as you know, was a key imperative put forth by the Cherry Commission Report, and we have embraced it as a top priority.

### **Accessibility and Affordability**

- To expand access to our degree programs, we have initiated several collaborations with other colleges and universities in Michigan.
- We've forged new partnerships with Cooley Law School, Macomb Community College, Michigan State University, Wayne State University, Northern Michigan University and St. Clair County Community College.

- These partnerships allow us to share valuable resources and avoid programmatic redundancies, while providing greater accessibility and convenience to students.
- They also save our students money by allowing them to gather credits with maximum efficiency, and by getting them out into the workplace sooner.
- One of these partnerships, Macomb 2 Oakland, is especially notable as Michigan's first dual-degree program.
- Macomb 2 Oakland allows students to earn an associate's degree at Macomb Community College and one of 40 bachelor's degrees at OU, all within four years.

- Through coordination of course programming and requirements, students in this program enter Oakland as juniors, after spending their first two years of college closer to their homes and at the lower tuition rate community college affords.
- As always, we accept transfer credits from community colleges throughout the state, but the Macomb 2 Oakland agreement clearly accelerates graduation rates.
- In its first year, this partnership is already a success story.
- Enrollment for Winter 2007 is more than double the fall enrollment.
- Other partnerships are bringing new degree programs to Oakland County so that more local students are able to enroll.

- For example, last August we announced a new partnership with Michigan State University that allows our students to earn bachelor's and master's degrees in social work.
- Research shows that the need for social workers will grow by 30 percent by 2010.
- We are now poised to help meet that need by partnering with MSU, a pioneer in establishing what now is the oldest bachelor's degree program in social work in the country and we will soon build our own accredited bachelor's degree in social work.
- We also have financial initiatives in place to help adult learners return to the classroom.
- Two recent programs geared specifically to non-traditional students are Return to Earn and Return to Learn.

- Return to Earn exists to assist displaced autoworkers as they transition to new careers.
- Return to Learn offers programs for adult learners who have been out of the classroom for two or more years, and seeks to assist them in their quest to complete a degree.
- Application fees are waived for those enrolling in Return to Learn.
- But enrollment is only part of the story.
- Nurturing those students who arrive at OU with a goal, and making sure they leave our campus with a degree, is our primary mission.
- To do this, we must make their experience as invigorating as possible while, at the same time, containing the financial burden of a university education.

- To help boost retention rates, more than 70 members of Oakland University's faculty and staff spent 2005 and 2006 examining the experiences of our first-year students.
- Through a nationwide initiative called Foundations of Excellence, Oakland worked with the Policy Center on the First Year of College to implement this study.
- The outcome is a comprehensive plan to enhance the first-year experience, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that those who begin university degree programs succeed in achieving their goals – in other words, graduate.
- To keep tuition rates as affordable as possible, we have steadfastly been committed to operating the university with utmost efficiency.
- This shows in the numbers.



- As you can see by the first chart in your packet, Oakland receives the second lowest appropriation dollars per FYES from the state.
- This translates to 37 percent of the university's General Fund operating budget.
- The budgets of only two schools, Grand Valley State University and University of Michigan Dearborn, are made up of a lower percentage of state appropriations as compared to tuition. (Refer to chart two.)
- On chart three, however, you'll see that our tuition is sixth-lowest among Michigan's state universities, and on chart four, you can see that we are third-lowest state-wide in tuition increases over a 10-year period.
- Through sustained cost containment efforts, creativity and plain old hard work, we have continued to do our part to fill the financial gap left by state budget cuts.

- And although we—like the majority of other Michigan universities—have raised tuition, we have also increased the amount of financial aid available to our students.
- Last year alone, we provided \$71.4 million in financial aid (grants, loans, scholarships and student employment) to more than 11,000 students.
- We are bolstering accessibility through our partnerships and retention efforts, and keeping an Oakland education affordable through proactive cost containment and expanded access to financial aid.
- Nowhere is our success better highlighted than by this end result: 89 percent of Oakland students are employed within six months of graduation.

## **Research/Applied and commercialization**

- I'd like to talk to you now about an area in which we may seem to be flying under the radar, but in reality, we are becoming a major player...that is applied research.
- There is a perception in some quarters that Michigan State University, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University are really the "big three" among state universities in terms of research.
- In fact, that perception seems to be the impetus for the two separate higher education appropriations bills that came out of the governor's budget recommendations.
- Obviously, those three universities make enormous contributions to the state, the nation and the world in terms of the research they conduct.

- There is no denying that fact.
- However, Oakland University puts a premium on the research our faculty and students are involved in, and we've made some huge strides in this key area in a very short time.
- Our research impacts our state, helping businesses in a variety of ways and having a positive effect on local economies and the lives of Michigan citizens.
- This is our niche; we are committed to it and our successes are growing.
- Last April, we announced the opening of the OU INCubator, a collaboration with Automation Alley, the Great Lakes Interchange, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Oakland County and the City of Rochester Hills.

- OU INC provides business services, counseling, mentoring, pre-seed funding, training and business development to start-up companies.
- With access to a network of Oakland University resources, including faculty researchers, students and on-campus research centers, entrepreneurial businesses are now receiving the support they need to grow and prosper.
- OU INC manages and operates the SmartZone Business incubation program, creating jobs, stimulating the economy, and playing an integral role in technology transfers and commercialization, which leads to a better future for the state of Michigan.
- Faculty from our School of Engineering and Computer Science have made important research and development contributions to the scientific academic community over the past 20 years.

- This, despite the fact that the SECS is severely strapped for space; in fact, comparing national norms to our current space, we truly need almost double the capacity we currently have.
- This is why we applied last year for capital outlay funds to help us construct our Engineering Center.
- Although this request was included in both the FY 2007 executive and legislative budget recommendations, the entire bill was vetoed later that year.
- We envision the center's focus to be on automotive manufacturing, especially as it relates to emerging technologies, commercialization, applied and basic research - all of which will have a major impact on the region, state and nation.

- Affiliated with the Department of Ophthalmology at Beaumont Hospital and funded by the National Institutes of Health, our Eye Research Institute faculty work on preventing blindness and vision loss, and exposing the underlying causes of eye diseases.
- Since 1968, ERI scientists have received more than \$40 million from private and federal health agencies.
- The important work done by our faculty in the Center for Biomedical Research furthers our understanding of the human body and has made significant contributions to the canon of biomedical knowledge that has already helped prevent and treat serious human disease processes.
- Several of our faculty have received national research excellence awards, and several have received large grants to continue their research and help expedite the time it takes to bring their findings to the marketplace.

- I'd like to mention just a few notable accomplishments from our biomedical researchers:
  - Dr. Michael Chopp received a \$6.5 million award from the National Institutes of Health to develop cellular and drug therapies to “remodel brains,” the first-ever such award granted by the NIH;
  - Assistant Professor Ken Mitton, who works in our Eye Research Institute, recently received a \$1.1 million grant to study the role retinal genes play in the development of eye disease;
  - Professor Yang Xia received more than \$2 million from the NIH to study articular cartilage degradation; and,
  - Chemistry Professor Linda Schweitzer received a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to study sediment contamination levels in the Clinton River.



## **Summary**

- In summation, Oakland University is not just a place on the move.
- Our commitment to bettering lives and improving the economy of this state, coupled with a philosophy of can-do creativity and a roll-up-the-sleeves work ethic, is working.
- We have the wherewithal and desire to grow. We have the capacity to deliver more highly effective graduates and to contribute directly to the economic growth in the region and state.
- And, with your help and support, we look forward to continuing to have a positive affect on businesses, communities and residents throughout Michigan.
- This concludes my remarks.

- Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to tell you about our great university.
- At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.