

Presidential Remarks

STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY

October 21, 2021

Thank you for sharing your time with us – here and virtually – at our annual State of the University Address.

Please join me in recognizing the very talented OU Chorale led by Professor Michael Mitchell for that inspiring performance.

My deepest appreciation to each of you in the Oakland University community who have played a role in our comprehensive response to the pandemic, and for making our campus safe and healthy.

As of Monday, more than 94-percent of our faculty and staff and more than 92 percent of our on-campus students have been vaccinated, and a few have received exemptions. That impressive achievement has been made possible through your commitment to doing your part and reflects just some of what we can accomplish when we work together.

We are so appreciative of all of your incredible work over the past year. So, in lieu of our annual holiday gathering, you will have an extra paid day off on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, or, if you and your supervisor prefer, another day before the end of the calendar year.

Furthermore, in the past week, non-bargained-for employees received a 1-percent pay increase and a \$500 bonus. The additional pay is a modest, yet responsible increase. And, I'll show you in a few minutes how the revenue shortfall restrains us from doing even more.

Now, I would like to acknowledge our special guests who are here with us:

- Thank you to the leadership representatives from our 18 volunteer boards.
 - Thank you for supporting Oakland, and thank you to all the alumni who have provided us with their generous support over the past year.
- Thank you to the OU Board of Trustees, including Brian Calley and our board chair, Bobby Schostak who are here with us today. We appreciate your leadership, and all that you do to support our faculty, staff and students. Please stand to be recognized.
- Thank you to the OU leadership team, including our cabinet, strategy council, deans and department chairs.
- Your leadership over the past year has been instrumental in navigating the university through difficult times.

- Your dedication and passion for OU is greatly appreciated. Over the past year, you worked tirelessly to keep our university community performing at the highest level.
- Thank you to the outstanding team at Graham Health Center for working around-the clock for nearly two years. We are deeply grateful for your dedication and selflessness to keeping all of us healthy.
- Thank you to the OUPD team for your sense of duty. We honor you for protecting us.
- The commitment, professionalism and success of the OUPD is a major reason OU is the safest university in Michigan and ranks third in the nation.
- Thank you, faculty, staff and students...
- OU faculty, please know this:
- You ARE the backbone of our great
- We appreciate all that you contribute....
 - The education you provide our students...
 - Your research and scholarly work...
- And, the contributions you make in the community...
- A special thanks to the OU staff for your remarkable dedication during this past year.
 - Simply put: Your effort kept the doors
 - You showed us the meaning of selflessness and
 - You You performed. And, you helped us make it through one of the most difficult years in Oakland's history.
- Thank you to our students for choosing to attend Oakland
 - YOU are the reason we exist.
 - All of us staff, faculty and leadership team ... are here to make sure you succeed because...
 - Your success is our success.
- Together.....All of us.....We are....OU

Welcome to the State of the University Address, an annual assessment of where we've been in the past year, and where we are headed.

Looking back, I think we would all agree that this has been an unpredictable and especially stressful year.

We've been dealing with a once in a lifetime pandemic.

Some members in the OU community have contracted the virus. Some of us have had a family member or friend struggle or die from COVID.

Our condolences to those of you who have lost a loved one or have suffered.

Amid the uncertainty, stress and anxiety, we all have felt the strains of isolation, the uneasiness of unresolved differences, and a tremendous longing for normalcy.

While the road hasn't always been smooth.... it's time for the healing to begin.

Despite what often feels like a wave of pessimism amid a pandemic that can't end soon enough, we must remain hopeful and optimistic about the future – the future of our country, the future of our families, and the future of Oakland University.

Throughout the pandemic, there have been inspiring signs of resiliency, selflessness, altruism, and an enduring pride – OU PRIDE.

The pride we have in our community should give all of us confidence that the future of Oakland University is ours to shape.

It will take hard work.

A renewed sense of focus that requires listening to and respecting each other.

As we gather today, I hope you can feel the connectedness that is the foundation of a strong community... A connectedness that is bred from our concern and love for our university.

We must extend that care and love to each other. I know we can... and I know we will.

I am so hopeful about our future. And, I am committed deeply to doing all we can to move ahead together – faculty, staff and students – as one unified community... as one unified Oakland University.

Since January of 2020, protecting the health of the Oakland University community from Covid-19 has been our highest priority.

A major part of protecting our students has been the distribution of three phases of CARES/HEERF funding, which includes \$76M. The final phase of the remaining \$17.4M is being awarded to new and current students this fall.

Overall, the CARES and HEERF funds were used for student grants, lost revenues housing refunds to students, campus safety and operations, equipment and software to support distance learning, and additional class sections and faculty training.

In addition, we established the OU Covid-19 Relief Fund. We raised more than \$225,000 in philanthropic funds that were disbursed to students who were disadvantaged by the pandemic.

From an operations perspective, we created Grizzlies Protect Grizzlies, a blueprint for maintaining a healthy campus. That blueprint was followed by “Grizzlies Together – Again,” a comprehensive plan for the return to campus.

I’d like to especially thank our students who are part of the Grizzlies Health Squad. These students serve as role models and ambassadors, making sure other students are educated on vaccination and safety measures.

All indications are that we are moving in the direction of normalcy. And with the future in mind, let’s move on to answer the question: What is the state of the university?

How do we assess the past year amid a pandemic, a year when classes were taught remotely and in a hybrid method, hallmark events were not held in person, and many of the activities and face-to-face gatherings that build a sense of team and common purpose were held virtually?

In addressing the question -- “What is the state of the university?” – we are led to the following four observations.

One: We are in a period of fundamental institutional transition.

Two: We need to develop shared priorities and communicate them more effectively and transparently.

Three: We must keep in mind that many universities like Oakland are confronting serious financial challenges, and we must work together to address these challenges.

Four: As a community, we must strive to be a model of civility.

Let’s briefly discuss each of these observations.

First: Let’s take a moment to acknowledge that our university is in a period of institutional transition. And, we must do all we can to support the morale of everyone in the OU community.

As I said, the past year and the return to campus has not been easy for some of us, but extremely challenging for others. We are all adjusting in our personal and professional lives. There have been profound social and cultural changes caused by the pandemic and so many other forces.

We must acknowledge that “pandemic exhaustion” is real. The stress is real. And we need to heal ourselves and help each other heal.

The emotional impact of the pandemic continues to play out in a variety of ways, including leading to feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression. Young adults have struggled emotionally more than any other age group, according to a poll by the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital.

We need to take the time to reach out to friends and colleagues and ask: "How are you doing?"

Oakland provides many advising services to support students, faculty and staff. Here are several....Oakland University Counseling Center. Employee Assistance Program. Graham Health Center. And, the University Recreation and Well-Being center.

Please do not hesitate to seek counseling or take advantage of these resources, and encourage others to get the assistance they need.

Let's make a special point of caring for one other.

Our second observation is that we need to develop shared priorities and communicate them more effectively and transparently.

This is a lesson learned from one of the most challenging aspects of the past year: the contract negotiations between the administration and the AAUP, which showed us we must communicate better.

Unfortunately, many people experienced hurt, disappointment, and anger during this period.

Many lessons were learned over the past year.

Let's keep in mind that we are a learning organization. And that means that we must continually analyze what we did well and we must apply the lessons of the past year to become a better university.

To more clearly communicate our priorities and strengthen our partnerships, I am proposing, "OU Focus: The Priority Agenda" as a key component of "Reimagining OU."

I have appointed Dean Louay Chamra to join Dean Graeme Harper in reconstituting the "Reimagining OU" effort in January.

"OU Focus: The Priority Agenda" will include a group of faculty, staff and students who will serve as "partners at the table" in continuing to evaluate and shape the university's priorities.

The Oakland University of the future must be a dynamic learning organization that is responsive, engaged and committed to continual improvement and innovation as the University of Choice.

It will take all of us – faculty, staff and students – working together to accomplish our goals at the highest levels.

In addressing the question, “What is the state of the university?” the third observation requires us to step back for perspective, and to work together to address our financial realities and challenges.

It’s important to keep in mind that many fundamental challenges in higher education are not unique to Oakland, but our response to the challenges requires a uniquely Oakland University solution.

We also must understand the financial realities Oakland faces so that we can be outstanding stewards of those resources when we prioritize decisions toward achieving our goals.

During the peak of the pandemic, we sought equitable and fiscally responsible solutions.

While many other universities cut jobs and reduced the workforce to manage their budget challenges, we placed the highest value on our people and made an intentional decision that preserving jobs was a top priority.

We implemented progressive salary cuts of 2 to 20 percent imposed on those in the OU leadership and on non-union employees making above \$100,000. Those making less than \$100,000 annually were protected, and did not receive any salary reduction.

In addition, we imposed a spending freeze on new hires, university sponsored travel, and new construction projects.

In consideration of the economic challenges caused by the pandemic facing many families, we did not increase tuition.

In fiscal year 2021, we raised tuition by 4.2%, and restored salaries to pre-pandemic levels.

Now, let me now talk about our sources of revenue and expenditures. First, our budget includes revenue from tuition, state appropriation, and minimally from other sources.

Approximately 80% of our revenue is from tuition. And, as you can see financial aid is considered contra-revenue. We disburse financial aid to students in an amount that is comparable to what we receive from our state appropriation.

As you can see here, expenditures include compensation, debt, utilities, insurance, and other expenses. Approximately 80% of our expenses go to compensation, which is about the same amount as what we receive in tuition revenue.

Again, remember that tuition accounts for approximately 80% of our revenue. So, when enrollment falls and credit hours are down as they are this year by 8.1%, this translates into a shortfall of \$8.6M.

Furthermore, for winter, there’s an expected shortfall of an additional \$7.4M. So, for this fiscal year, we are expecting a total \$16M shortfall of revenue.

We are concerned that this shortfall is not just a short-term issue.

Given the gap between revenue and expenditures, what can we do to address this budget shortfall?

We can increase revenue.

We can attract and retain more students. We can receive a higher state appropriation. We can increase philanthropic giving. And, we can reduce expenditures.

Our Government Affairs office, our board of trustees and I work hard to advocate for more funding from the State.

Today, about 18 percent of our revenue comes from the State of Michigan. Fifty years ago, we received 71 percent from the state.

This chart illustrates the historical funding model for the past five decades. As you can see, Oakland has become more and more tuition dependent over this period.

Frankly, the state's disinvestment in public higher education is negatively impacting revenue at Michigan's public universities.

Still, we are not sitting idly by and accepting the status quo.

Before the pandemic OU led "Strive for 45" — a campaign to increase minimum state funding to \$4,500 per student. We have continued to advocate for raising floor funding to reduce per student disparities.

We believe it is inequitable that Oakland receives the lowest amount of state dollars per fiscal-year equated student (FYES).

In 2009, Oakland was the 14th lowest funded at \$3,585/student and in 2021, we are the lowest funded of all 15 public universities with \$3,079/student.

It is important to emphasize that, in spite of our current budget shortfall, we have had decades of sound fiscal management.

Prudent cost containment initiatives have translated to \$71.4M in budget reductions between 2003–2021. Our rigorous "student focused" no-fee policy makes OU more affordable for students. And because of our prudent fiscal management, Oakland has doubled its scholarship budget since 2012.

We have balanced fiscal responsibility with strategic utilization of resources in order to invest in and support programs, initiatives and physical renovations and new construction.

All of these projects are designed to provide our students, faculty and staff with the resources they need to be nurtured in their education, scholarship and research, and to contribute to our four strategic goals that make us the university of choice.

Here you see a list of new building and renovation projects to support these aims. These projects are financed through bonds, state capital outlay funds, and reserves.

Now, let's take a few moments to talk about just some of the strategic ways we will manage the budget shortfall.

First, it is important that we have more university-wide engagement in understanding our finances. Therefore, I am inviting the OU Senate Budget Review Committee to play a much more active role in understanding the university's finances, working side-by-side with our CFO and our cabinet.

In addition, we are renewing our commitment to the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, which is our comprehensive and tactical approach to the recruitment of high school, transfer, graduate and returning students.... This plan is designed to increase enrollment, and thereby, tuition dollars.

The SEM plan includes the hard work of many faculty and staff.

SEM is a key to improving enrollment, retention and graduation rates, and it must be more widely disseminated and must be executed better across all units of our university.

Some evidence of the success of the SEM plan is that in 2021 OU is the top transfer destination for students coming to us from other universities and community colleges. We earned that top ranking along with Wayne State.

We also are proud that we have articulation agreements with 40 community colleges in Michigan.

We are also strengthening our partnerships with the top 28 feeder high schools, which translates to 51.8% of incoming first-year students coming from those schools.

Furthermore, we are committed to "owning our backyard." We're proud that 50.8% of new transfer students come from Oakland Community College and Macomb Community College... and we are the university of choice in the northern metro region.

In addition, Oakland is a regional and national leader in addressing one of the top issues for students – student debt.

In 2019, we initiated the Golden Grizzlies Graduate program, which has served 318 students who have stopped out, owe debt or are at risk of leaving school.

In addition, we introduced the Frontline Workers Scholarship, a \$2,500 award to Michigan community college students who participate in Michigan's Futures for Frontliners program.

I want to now take a minute to discuss the role of University Advancement in supporting projects and activities of the faculty, and creating scholarships and more engaging experiences for our students. By the way, these restricted funds are not included in our operating budget.

Here's an update on an exceptional year.

"Aspire. Advance. Achieve." has reached 68% of the campaign's \$150M goal.

FY2021 was the second-best fundraising year in OU history with more than \$24 million in gifts and commitments.

Major gifts this year include \$5M from the Klein family to establish the Klein Center for Culture and Globalization within the College of Arts and Sciences.

And during the past four years, annual giving from faculty, staff, and retirees averaged 1,053 donors contributing \$650,000.

A major lesson from the past year can be summed up in the three Cs: Communication. Clarity. Commitment.

We will do all we can to keep the OU community updated on our budget, while being timely and transparent in reporting the latest financial information.

The fourth observation as we consider the state of the university is that as a community, we must strive to be a model of civility.

This past year, we, again, worked toward the ideal of becoming a model of a diverse, equitable and inclusive campus.

On campus, the Center for Multicultural Initiatives held more than 50 diversity training sessions for OU students,

faculty and staff to foster dialogue on social justice, micro-aggressions, privilege, and cultural competency.

More than 100 scholarships were awarded since the inception of "Keeper of the Dream," our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration.

For the past four years, Oakland has been rated as one of the top campuses in Michigan for its LGBTQIA-friendly policies, support and community.

In addition, OU has earned the highest-possible ranking for support of student veterans, and our Career Services Veterans Support Services team is working to help our veterans find jobs.

The OU Center for Civic Engagement has been a prominent convener for civil, rational public discussion. The center has been a leader in fostering dialogue about public health policy, and most recent panels revisited the legacy of 9-11 and explored the political implications of redistricting.

For a moment, look beyond our campus border. Sharp political and cultural divisions are commonplace. Differences are deepening along with cynicism.

Earlier this week, seven major Michigan K-12 education organizations released a joint statement calling for civility in board rooms and classrooms amid the rash of harassment of teachers, school officials and board members since the start of the school year.

We stand alongside those education groups in calling for civility. And, we must stand together here, as one community, united in supporting civil discourse and civil behavior.

We face profound challenges here, throughout higher education and as a nation.

We must be the ambassadors of civility and we must teach our students that it is possible to disagree but, to do so in an agreeable manner.

Let us all be responsible for the form and tone that discourse takes in our community.

Each has a positive role to play. And each of us can make a difference.

In January, Provost Britt Rios-Ellis began her tenure. She brings a range of skills, insight and a vision to lead Academic Affairs.

Britt, thank you for your leadership and commitment to Oakland University.

Provost Rios-Ellis will now present an overview of the state of Academic Affairs, including the areas of student success, research, community engagement and diversity, equity and inclusion.

< STATE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS >

Provost Britt Rios-Ellis

< PROVOST ENDS PRESENTATION/SPEECH >

Thank you, Provost Rios-Ellis....

...and thank you to the Academic Affairs team, our deans, department chairs, and faculty for your dedication and tremendous effort this past year.

In the days ahead, we must move on from asking, “What is the state of the university?”

The question we must confront is: “Do we have what it takes to move Oakland University forward?”

I have a two-part answer: Yes, we do. And, yes, we will.

A few months ago, I lost someone who was especially close to me. And, he was extremely close to me not only because he was my father, but also because he was my advisor and the person from whom I learned the basic tenets of leadership.

As some of you have heard me say, my father, Rabbi Richard Hirsch, was among the first leaders in America to stand alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Not a day goes by when I don’t hear his voice and recall his advice. I can hear him say, “Leaders must have a purpose.”

Leaders.... must havea purpose.

All of us here... in the Oakland University community ... are bound by our common purpose.

And what is that?

Our common purpose is to work together to fulfill the promise of education... That promise is based on the belief that through our collective efforts, education has the transformative power to enlighten minds and open hearts.

I’m a scientist. I’m a physician.

I’m also a partner. A mother. A grandmother. A widow. A colleague. A friend.

I spent more than two decades teaching and doing research as a faculty member at other universities. I spent ten years running two large academic health systems and I worked in the private sector for three years.

I am now working at a place with as much potential and with as many intelligent, dedicated and passionate people as any place I’ve ever worked.

I am so proud to be at Oakland University. And to work alongside each of you.

We stand together at a critical time in our history. A time when we all must think and act as leaders. Your leadership.

Our leadership.

Will shape the future of Oakland University.

Only the limits of our imagination can keep us from accomplishing all that we aspire to become.

Let the healing begin...

Let's move forward together, as one community.

Thank you for all of your hard work and your commitment to Oakland University.