

Presidential Remarks

ALL ALUMNI BOARD MEETING

March 19, 2021

Welcome.

It's good to be with you...even in this virtual way.

And I, like you, cannot wait for the day when we have lunch together, and meet side-by-side again.

That day is coming.

In the meantime, we all need to continue to take precautions and make sure we get the vaccine.

First, thank you for all that you do for Oakland University.

The Alumni Association, Black Alumni Leadership Council, and Young Alumni Chapter Leadership are an essential part of the backbone of Oakland. We deeply appreciate your commitment, support and leadership.

Oakland's success depends on the strength of our partnership, and your engagement. You are ambassadors, you are advocates for investment.

And together, we are strengthening the OU of today, and building the Oakland of tomorrow.

It's important to realize that your support is critical to our mission and vision.

Our mission gives us purpose.

And our vision provides focus and direction. And what is our direction and ambition?

To be the University of Choice....

A university that is the primary choice of students, faculty, and staff....

A university built on the pillars of student success, research, community engagement, and diversity, equity and inclusion.

You play a central role in helping us achieve our goals. And, in times of need, you are who we turn to.

With your help, we raised \$453,000 for our COVID-19 Relief Fund, which provided crucial support to students in need. Your impact was timely and was a key factor in many students remaining in school and continuing to pursue their degrees.

For the last year, our primary goal has been the safety and health of the OU community.

At a time of great uncertainty, we pulled together, developed a blueprint for managing the threat of the pandemic, and at no time whatsoever did we face an outbreak.

Since January 16, there has been on average of less than 1 case per week. And, at this time, there are no students in quarantine on campus.

The high compliance (and low positivity test rate) from students, faculty and staff in response to the university's mandate of the 4Ws (Wear a mask, Watch your distance, Wash your hands, Wear a BioButton) is the key reason that there have been minimal COVID-19 cases reported on campus.

Currently, we are working with the Oakland County Health Division to coordinate the delivering of the vaccine on campus in the upcoming weeks.

Meanwhile, we continue to educate our community on the merits of vaccination. In fact, on January 25, nearly 200 people attended a virtual panel discussion entitled, "COVID-19 Vaccination: Access, Awareness, and Acceptance," hosted by OU Center for Civic Engagement.

Each day, the OU leadership team meets to discuss and develop "return to campus" strategies to be prepared for the repopulation of campus.

Across the country, there are many changes affecting enrollments at universities and colleges. As you already heard from Mike, OU has been affected, but less so than our peer institutions.

OU has a sophisticated enrollment management strategy that identifies and develops initiatives to increase enrollment and student retention. And, we have a great team that is always looking for ways to connect with prospective students, and make sure we understand what students need to keep them at OU.

We realize that we must make a college education more affordable so students graduate without burdensome debt, and we take great pride in being a regional leader in addressing student debt.

Since its inception, the Golden Grizzlies Graduate, a debt-relief program, has provided support to 256 students.

And while we are always reaching out and recruiting students, a major focus of our strategy is to retain current students and get them to graduation.

I'd like to summarize several recent developments that give all of us great pride.

First, Dr. Britt Rios-Ellis began as Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost at the beginning of the winter semester.

Provost Rios-Ellis comes from the University of California, Monterey, where she was founding dean of the College of Health Sciences and Human Services.

She has a reputation for building partnerships in the national health-care community and for working on a range of diversity, multi-cultural and social justice issues.

As I mentioned earlier, research is one of Oakland's main focus areas. In the last few months, OU purchased a 73,000 square-foot building that serves as a catalyst for engineering and computer science research.

It is located a few miles south of campus.

We expect the renovations to be complete in fall 2022.

In January, OU was named the 3rd Safest Campus in the country, and the safest in the state by College Magazine.

This ranking reflects our commitment to the safety and health of our campus community; and, indicates the superb work and dedication of the OU Police Department and Student Affairs office.

Also, in January, we, once again, had a great turnout for the Keeper of the Dream event. Since 1993, OU has been honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And, as part of the occasion, we recognized students who have shown exemplary commitment to social and racial justice.

In February, Oakland announced the Futures for Frontliners scholarship for workers on the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic who earned their associate's degree from a state community college and are pursuing their bachelor's degree.

OU is the top transfer destination for students coming from community colleges and other universities.

And, and many of your already know, earlier this month, our School of Engineering and Computer Science, along with the College for Creative Studies and a coalition of industry partners¹, established the Augmented Reality Center. This would not have happened without the support and efforts of many of you here today.

The center leverages the technology used in the gaming industry to help industry find creative engineering and design solutions during product development. It's the type of leading-edge resources that we expect to continually build on.

There are also many notable physical transformations on campus.

South Foundation Hall, where every OU student has a class at one time, is closed and crews are preparing for construction. The new building will be 55,000 square feet and includes 25,000 square feet in classrooms for STEM, health sciences, education, humanities and the arts.

And, I'm here as a witness that construction is well underway for the expansion of Wilson Hall, where the President's Office is located. On most days, I split my time between the office and my Sunset Terrace office because of the pounding and construction noise.

And, I we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge that the OU Golden Grizzlies men's basketball team's success in the Horizon League tournament.

They battled through a tough season and made a comeback that eventually led to second place in the playoffs. This team has proved to be champions in the way they dealt with adversity.

And we are extremely proud of the OU women's basketball team for another successful season. The team made it to the quarter finals of the league tournament. We are so proud of their attitude and effort.

Mike has already covered a range of Advancement and philanthropy topics.

But I'd also like to mention one in particular: the Barry M. Klein Center for Culture and Globalization

Barry was a tireless advocate for Oakland University. Just like all of you in this room, he was a very proud alumni and, just like you are today, served on alum boards. OU was an integral part of his life, and now is a main part of his legacy.

Back in 2003, Barry said this about his alma mater: "I really believe that Oakland University is the most important higher educational institution in the metro Detroit area... 90 percent of graduates stay in the area after graduation. Our graduates have an enormous impact on the future of the state's economy."

I could not have said it better myself, Barry.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Lastly, as you know, Oakland has a special partnership with the city of Pontiac, and we've had great success with the OU Pontiac Initiative.

An OU alum and good friend to many of us, Samino Scott, is heading up a new project, the Pontiac Collective Impact, which takes a holistic approach to community development.

We appreciate the entire Scott family for being dedicated ambassadors for Oakland University.

Samino's wife, Trina, who is also an alum, is one of our new trustees.

And I appreciate the work and dedication of all of our engaged OU alums working for the betterment of OU and the surrounding community.

There's no question that you are the bedrock of any university.

That you are here, working on behalf of Oakland University, tells me that we're in good hands.

Thank you for being here, and making such a major contribution to the success of Oakland University.

1 Founding industry partners include ABB Inc., AM General, Continental, General Motors, Hirotec America, KUKA Robotics, Magna International, MAHLE Industries, Rave Computer, Siemens, and US Military Ground Vehicle Systems.