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Opportunities for displaced, threatened workers abound at Oakland

By Dave Groves, news editor

In the midst of the most daunting economic downturn to hit the U.S. since the Great Depression, and in a state that likely has seen the disheartening impacts of this more dramatically than any other, it may seem there is little hope for those who've lost their jobs or fear they might soon lose them.

But even in the worst of conditions, there are opportunities for new beginnings and a more promising future. Nowhere is this more evident than at Oakland University, where administrators, faculty and staff are providing countless ways for workers to take the next step in their careers, or to pursue completely new professions.

From career counseling and job fairs to retraining and cutting-edge educational programs, Oakland is offering more than hope – it's helping workers build plans for success.

"The idea that obtaining a strong and relevant education is critical to success in today's marketplace is hardly new, but the message has become more relevant and more urgent than ever," said Oakland University President Gary Russi.

"In order to compete, workers in any profession must be equipped with the most current knowledge and skill sets. Oakland University can not only provide this, but can do so affordably."

Just one example of how Oakland is helping jobless workers forge new career paths comes from a partnership the university has established with Henry Ford Health System. A nursing recruitment effort recently offered up to 100 displaced autoworkers a chance to enroll in a pre-nursing education program.

Students who succeeded academically in the program were able to enroll in a bachelor's of nursing degree program at Oakland, and may have jobs waiting for them when they graduate in August 2010.

For others who are considering career changes, are interested in assessing their professional strengths or who want to explore their range of options, Oakland University's **Adult Career Counseling Center** (ACCC) can help with self assessment, career exploration, computerized career guidance, educational planning, resume writing, interview skills and more.

Additionally, counselors can help formulate short- and long-term goals, as well as identify existing skills that can successfully be applied to the demands of a new position or profession.

Dr. Luellen Ramey, director of the ACCC, said a growing number of visitors to the center are discouraged and uncertain as result of job losses or the poor economic conditions in general. She added that counselors who understand a great deal about today's business climate and its broader employment picture are able to provide workers with guidance they need to pursue new opportunities.

"I would say they are able to leave here with a greater sense of hope," Ramey explained.

Displaced workers looking for a competitive edge in their search for new positions can find it through Oakland University's partnership with **Michigan Works**.

"We're helping a rapidly growing number of people who've lost their jobs get the training and education they'll need to move into professions with high demand for qualified workers," said Dr. Scott Crabill, Oakland University's director of integrative studies and liaison to the Michigan Works program.

"And with help from Michigan Works, more and more of these people are finding that enrolling in certificate and degree programs at Oakland is well within their reach."

Students can receive state scholarships of up to \$5,000 per year through the state employment program. These grants, coupled with other sources of financial aid for which students may be eligible, significantly reduce out-of-pocket costs.

Oakland University certificate programs approved through Michigan Works focus on the fields of financial planning; paralegal services; assistive, vocational and licensed practical nursing; medical administration; and patient care.

In addition, nearly three dozen undergraduate and graduate degree programs in communication, computer science, engineering, human resources, nursing, education, business and public administration, social work and more have been approved by the state. University faculty and staff continue working to expand this list.

Students registered with Michigan Works also can take advantage of a host of workshops geared toward helping them prepare for either new positions or new professions.

"Given the hardships workers and their families are facing in this recession, we're doing everything we can to put people back into dependable and promising careers," Crabill explained.

With more than 225 undergraduate and graduate degree programs, there's little question Oakland can help workers in virtually any profession **return to learn**. As a matter of fact, more than one third of the university's more than 18,000 students are adults coming from a community college or returning to school to complete a degree program.

Professionals with backgrounds in math and science, for example, can enroll in the **School of Education and Human Services** to complete teacher certification in the high-demand field of secondary education. Other professionals – such as those in social work, public administration and communication – can enroll in the **College of Arts and Sciences** to complete studies that will expand their marketability. Examples include foreign language and non-profit management certification programs.

The **School of Business Administration** recently introduced certificate programs for paralegals, financial planners and project managers interested in enhancing their skills and broadening their career opportunities. Meanwhile, the school's **Center for Integrated Business Research and Education** is developing programs specifically for displaced workers.

Engineers, IT specialists and computer scientists can enroll in the **School of Engineering and Computer Science (SECS)** for skill rebuilding and professional development programs.

Dr. Bhushan Bhatt, SECS associate dean, said professionals who can show prospective employers not only a solid work history, but proof of being versed in the latest skills and technology, will be aggressively pursued by employers in emerging technical industries.

"They're making themselves more marketable, and that's the way we want to help many of our displaced workers," he explained. "We have conceived these programs specifically for these people."

And while many educational options are already available for displaced and threatened workers, Oakland University continues to evaluate, develop and implement programs to answer the needs of both prospective students and growth industries.

"Everyone here is looking at what we can offer to help the community retool, retrain and prepare for the new career opportunities emerging out there," said Christina Grabowski, OU's director of graduate marketing and recruitment. "The work really is being done campus wide."

For more information on how Oakland is working to keep its wide range of educational programs and services affordable, visit www.oakland.edu/quality.

SUMMARY

Administrators, faculty and staff are providing countless ways for workers to take the next step in their careers, or to pursue completely new professions.

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