



Thursday, April 29, 2004

Employees rewarded for cost-saving ideas

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University recognizes that its faculty and staff are its strongest assets. They also are the source of many great ideas for ways to reduce costs, increase revenue, and improve efficiency and service. To gather more suggestions from the university community and reward those employees whose ideas are adopted, Oakland created the **Employee Suggestion Program (ESP)** in February. Some ideas already have resulted in significant cost savings and improved efficiencies for the university.

To thank the first group of employees who have submitted their ideas, the ESP Committee invited them to a special breakfast April 29 in the Oakland Center.

"At Oakland University, we are truly blessed with a team of people who believe in what we do and go out of their way to make good things happen for our students and our community," OU President Gary Russi said during the breakfast. "As you know, Oakland University has faced, and will continue to face, financial challenges due to the state's current budget situation. Now, more than ever before, your ability to tie your input into saving money, generating additional revenue and eliminating waste or duplication of work is critical to our continued success. Your ideas, combined with new ideas from your colleagues and the university's ongoing cost-containment efforts, will help Oakland prosper."

Lisa Dillon, retention specialist for the Academic Skills Center, suggested purchasing a software program called Macro Tools, which can create macros in Windows applications that will automate daily repetitive tasks, save time and eliminate mistakes.

"We build tables containing student information in Microsoft Access that we also transfer to Banner," Dillon said. "Macro Tools essentially eliminates having to retype or cut and paste data from one program to another and can also help us remove a lot of errors from Banner. I estimate that this program saves about eight hours of work for me per semester. I know that the Registrar's Office and Office of Graduate Study also have started to use this software. If multiple offices use it across campus, it can save us even more time."

Employees whose suggestions are implemented are eligible for cash awards and prizes based on actual savings or increased revenue. Dillon received \$250 for her suggestion.

"From the University Technology Services standpoint, I'm really glad to see that a technical suggestion was given and implemented," said Theresa Rowe, assistant vice president of UTS and ESP Committee member. "I hope this encourages even more employees to contribute ideas in this area."

Chris Sellers, systems programmer II, suggested selling used computer, office furniture and other equipment on eBay, the Internet auction site.

"It's costly for the university to pay a company to pick up and recycle used and out-of-date computer equipment," said Sellers, whose idea is currently under consideration. "There's also a lack of storage space. My idea is to inventory the equipment and make sure it's usable, and then auction it off on eBay. The income we receive could be greater than selling it in another way. Quotes I've received on our used equipment have been very nominal. At the worst, I think we'd break even with the benefit of saving storage space. The income could then be used for the student technology fee or returned to central IT."

Another suggestion under consideration, submitted by Paul Franklin, coordinator of campus programs, is to seek opportunities to use Meadow Brook Hall or other campus locations in film shoots through the use of a film agent. One location that has earned more than a million dollars in this manner is the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C., which was used in the Peter Sellers film "Being There." The University of Oregon also was used in the film "Animal House."

“A lot of cities and states have film boards that help studios find locations and assist with filming logistics,” Franklin said. “Perhaps Oakland could build a relationship with the Michigan Film Advisory Board. In addition to increasing revenue, the public relations value of having OU used in a film would be phenomenal.”

To show further appreciation for employees’ commitment and participation in the program, a random drawing was held at the breakfast for a Coleman Roadtrip Grill. Lori Boughner, office assistant II in the School of Health Sciences, was the winner.

All full- or part-time OU employees (faculty and staff), including student employees, are eligible and encouraged to suggest ideas through the **Employee Suggestion Program** Web site. Visit the site to learn more about submission guidelines, the evaluation process and prizes. You also can obtain more information by e-mailing suggest@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

Oakland University employees are often the source of many great ideas for ways to reduce costs, increase revenue, and improve efficiency and service. To gather more suggestions from the university community and reward those employees whose ideas are adopted, Oakland created the Employee Suggestion Program (ESP) in February. To thank the first group of employees who have submitted their ideas, the ESP Committee invited them to a special breakfast April 29 in the Oakland Center.

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