THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE OAKLAND WAY

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At the end of World War II, the United States embarked on an extraordinary expansion of higher education. Convinced that the future of the nation depended on raising the number of college graduates, policies at both the federal and state level were implemented to meet that mission. Colleges and universities across the nation opened their enrollments, but this was deemed to be insufficient. New institutions of higher education had to be created to enable the nation to meet the demand for highly-educated leaders for the future.

The heady days of the Cold War era transformed the American university system. Established universities saw their student populations explode. Students were more likely to be the first members of their families to attend college; they were more likely to be older; they were more likely to be married. Universities had to expand facilities through the construction of new buildings and even satellite campuses to accommodate this new student body.

Of course, all of this was expensive. But education was viewed as a prerequisite to world leadership. The United States could not be a superpower without knowledgeable, articulate leaders. This exponentially increasing demand for leaders required a limitless resolve to expand access to college education.

This was the political climate that gave birth to Oakland

University. We were merely one of a legion of new colleges. Even in Michigan, Oakland was nothing more than one small element in post-war expansion that had begun with the founding of Lake Superior State in 1946 and had continued into a frantic rush to create new campuses in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[1] We were anything but unique, a small player in a massive reconfiguration of American education in the post-war period.

After Oakland's creation in 1957, we continued to follow the growth trajectory of state colleges across America. Like the State University College on Long Island (now SUNY—Stony Brook), the Louisiana State University at New Orleans (now University of New Orleans), and Portland State College (now University), Oakland enjoyed the free spending of state legislators in the 1960s only to succumb to the economic downturn of the 1970s. These young, barely-organized state institutions had few alumni, fewer lobbyists, and shallow support from their local communities. When competing for scarce tax dollars, these new colleges were quickly marginalized by the large, flagship state universities. Without the free flow of money, the administrators of these institutions fell to unimaginative solutions to their budgetary problems; they eliminated "frills" by removing unnecessary programs in fields like the classics or Asian languages, minimized salaries for faculty, and maximized efficiency by embracing large lecture halls for freshmen and sophomore classes.

It was not until the 1990s that these young state universities began to pull away from the malaise that had beset American higher education. Their relief did not come from a return of state money, however. State appropriations continued to falter as public sensibilities changed. Higher education in Amer-

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[1] From 1955 to 1965 University of Michigan created two new campuses at Flint (1956) and Dearborn (1959); Wayne State was reorganized and made a "constitutionally established" university (1959); Grand Valley State was formed (1960); and two-year Delta College was transformed into Saginaw State (1963).

ica was no longer a civic commitment, a necessary tool for any respectable superpower. The need for a college education was now couched in terms of its financial impact on the student—a college education was less a means of fostering intellectual improvement and more a tool for raising earning power. This logic demanded that the burden of paying for a college education now rested with the student. In this climate, successful state universities had to become entrepreneurial. They had to carefully calculate tuition to maximize income, finding the tipping point where tuition increases would start to drive away students. They had to engage in fund raising to make up for the shortfalls in income from state allocations and tuition dollars. They had to learn to market themselves.

In the face of these changes since the 1970s, Oakland University followed a path remarkably similar to its counterparts. We followed in a quick lock-step through various reforms—all dictated by the educational fashion of the time. Lacking any real tradition or financial independence, universities founded in the post-war period have behaved according to a remarkably similar pattern. Successful institutions responded to the economic and cultural climate; they could not mold it. Like big box retailers, success has come at the price of uniformity.

This being said, Oakland is faced with an interesting conundrum. Although it is remarkably like its brethren post-war universities, Oakland University must market itself as unique. It must be a center of excellence unlike those other centers of excellence throughout the nation. Fortunately, in only fifty years, Oakland has built a mythology and mythologies are very powerful tools for social construction.

Oakland's creation in 1957 was the outcome of a strange mélange of boosterism and spite. In the 1950s the presidents of the University of Michigan and Michigan State University were locked in an intense rivalry. President John Hanna of MSU sought to shake the institution's status as a mere "cow college." This required a massive expansion, particularly in its graduate programs in the liberal arts. However, the most direct

assault on the prestige of the U of M came when MSU joined the Big 10 in 1950. Unable to curb the Lansing rival, President Harlan Hatcher of the University of Michigan embarked on a different sort of expansion, launching branch campuses, first in Flint and then in Dearborn.

Spurred by the University of Michigan's creation of branch campuses, John Hanna decided that MSU needed to follow suit. He found fertile ground in Oakland County. The County Planning Commission had been actively lobbying Matilda Wilson to donate her property on Adams Road for the construction of a community college. Wilson favored the idea of supporting higher education in this manner, but a community college lacked the prestige she sought. As a former member of the Board of Trustees of Michigan State, Wilson found the idea of supporting a branch campus of MSU more appealing. She was particularly motivated by the recent announcement that Henry Ford would donate property surrounding his "Fair Lane" estate to the University of Michigan for the creation of a satellite campus. Still stung by Ford's comments in the 1910s that her first husband lacked sophistication, Matilda Wilson decided that gifting John Dodge's country property to MSU was the perfect response.[2]

MSU—Oakland could have become nothing more than a regional branch of a larger, more prestigious flagship institution. However, John Hanna of MSU aspired to better things. Oakland had to be special. He delegated one of his chief lieutenants, Durward "Woody" Varner, with the task of establishing the new campus. Varner was enthused with the prospect of building an entirely new college and wanted it to be distinct from MSU. It would be structured as a response to the sense of intellectual inferiority brought on by the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik.[3] With the enthusiastic support of Matilda

[2] Durward B. "Woody" Varner, interview by Paul Tomboulian, December 2, 1996.

[3] Durward B. "Woody" Varner, interview by Paul Tomboulian, December 2, 1996.

Wilson, he embarked on what proved to be the birth of the Oakland mythology.

To organize this new institution, the founding administrators of MSUO arranged a series of meetings of a group which was, in Woody Varner's words, "the brightest people we can find." These "Meadow Brook Seminars" were charged with establishing a set of principles that would define the campus's new mission. The participants were instructed to imaginatively tackle the great limitations extant in higher education; they were not to concern themselves with implementation or other pragmatic concerns.[4]

Under the guidance of the "Meadow Brook Seminars" MSU—Oakland took on an ambitious charge. It would provide a top-flight education. Faculty would come from the most prestigious graduate programs in the country. The curriculum would be innovative—stressing interdisciplinary studies, relying on small class size, encouraging off-beat intellectual pursuits. Standards would be as rigorous as those at any institution in the country. Yet the student body would be drawn largely from southeastern Michigan.

For minimal cost (costs of attendance ranged from $200 to $550 per semester) students would receive a liberal arts education that was designed to encourage self-reflection and intellectual curiosity. In the words of Dean of Faculty Richard G. Hoopes, "This is to be a place of the mind, and the mind is an activity, not a repository."[5] The relationship between students and faculty would be unconventional. Because responsibility for learning lay with the student, class attendance would not be compulsory. All students were to have "free access" to the faculty so that they might develop a deeper intellectual relationship. Over the protest of the English department at MSU,

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[4] In fact, the records of these meetings are rather sparse. No detailed minutes were kept for the sessions. Each session was summarized by Woody Varner and Thomas Hamilton (Vice President for Academic Affairs at MSU).

[5] "Michigan Maps New State School," *New York Times,* June 17, 1959.

there would be no freshman composition course; rather, faculty in every discipline would require extensive writing assignments. The curriculum would be less segmented; students would take fewer courses each term, but those courses would be worth more credits.[6]

Responding to the recent launching of Sputnik, the curriculum emphasized science and foreign studies. All students were required to demonstrate proficiency in calculus and complete two years of training in a foreign language. To enhance the intellectual rigor at MSUO, social distractions were to be limited. Fraternities and sororities were banned. Although intramural sports would be encouraged, there would be no intercollegiate athletic competition.[7] Oakland was to be a "seminary for democracy."[8]

The launching of MSUO occurred in a climate of hot competition for freshmen students. The flagship campuses at Ann Arbor and Lansing ferociously recruited the top students in the state's high schools. Established state colleges were also seeking to expand in this climate of support for higher education. To rise above this cacophony, the new campus at Oakland had to engage in a massive propaganda campaign. Chancellor Woody Varner hired Loren Pope, the former education editor of the *New York Times*, to oversee the campus's public relations campaign and to recruit students. Pope's expertise proved invaluable; newspapers in southeastern Michigan provided extensive coverage, but also articles appeared in far flung publications such as the *New York Times* and the *New Orleans Picayune.*

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[6] Thomas H. Hamilton to John A. Hannah, June 20, 1957 and "Summary of Comments from Honors College Group Concerning Tentative MSUO Curriculum," Meadow Brook Seminar Collection, Oakland University Archives, Oakland University.

[7] Unlike most universities at the time, Oakland also would not accommodate ROTC. This did not reflect an anti-militaristic sentiment, but rather setting up ROTC training was deemed to be too expensive.

[8] Loren Pope, interview by Paul Tomboulian, March 20, 1998, Oakland University Chronicles, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

Quickly the brochures and press releases touted MSUO as "the Harvard of the Midwest."[9]

The charter faculty for this revolutionary campus was recruited in an astonishingly short time. Although the "Meadow Brook Seminars" had favored the creation of a faculty that was dominated by Ph.D.s, they provided little more direction. There was no agreement on a particular intellectual approach; the campus would not be constructed around a particular ideological bent or academic school. Because much of the initial faculty recruitment was done by Woody Varner, whose academic training had been in agricultural economics, most members of the charter faculty were hired by someone without expertise in their discipline. More important than any ideological bent or methodological approach, Varner seems to have been searching for faculty who displayed enthusiasm for the educational experiment that was being conducted at MSU—Oakland.

At the outset, there were only twenty faculty members at MSUO. They were not simply shipped over from the East Lansing campus, but recruited from Ph.D. programs across the nation. They were not organized in departments; departments were viewed as constraining intellectual discourse. This charter group was dominated by humanists, who were charged with the task of establishing the initial general education curriculum. They were young—the average age was under 35. Young and bright, these faculty members were attracted to MSUO because it seemed to provide them with limitless freedom in their careers. They would not have to compete for power with senior colleagues; they could design their own curriculum with few restrictions; they even controlled library acquisitions in their fields.[10] Bound together in

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[9] This must have caused some confusion since Antioch College in Ohio already advertised itself as "the Harvard of the Midwest." Oakland was simply jumping on a great tradition of American higher education. Nearly every ambitious college administrator has referred to his or her school as "the Harvard of the *quelque chose*"; it is said that Washtenaw Community College refers to itself as "the Harvard of Washtenaw County."

[10] David Riesman, Joseph Gusfield, and Zelda Gamson, *Academic Values and Mass Education: The Early Years of Oakland and Monteith* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971), 66–68.

this new intellectual enterprise, they formed a tightly knit community.

The initial curriculum was imaginative and rigorous. Freshmen were required to study a modern language (either French or Russian), calculus, and a course in the history of western civilization; many also studied microeconomics, chemistry, or political science. This approach to first year study was not well suited to the high school preparation available in most public schools. The student body that had come to MSUO was good, but not exceptional. A new campus, with no classroom buildings to speak of, no organized social life, and no reputation beyond the press releases churned out in Rochester and East Lansing, was strangely unattractive to most high school graduates.[11] Although a few adventurous souls were recruited from East Coast high schools by Loren Pope, the vast majority of the first students at MSUO lived in Oakland County and found the campus an inexpensive alternative to going away to school.[12]

The faculty was ill-equipped to deal with the student body. Many had no teaching experience whatsoever; those who had, had taught for a few years at highly selective colleges, such as Stanford or Columbia. Although both the faculty and students were earnest and dedicated to the success of "the Harvard of the Midwest," the pedagogical disconnect was almost immediately apparent. Of the 570 students who were members of the charter class, 35.8 percent failed at least one course in the first year.[13]

The high rate of failures generated a crisis for both the

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[11] David Riesman described the location as "an ex-urban wasteland." Riesman, et.al., 68.

[12] Of the 570 in the charter class, 77% came from Oakland County and 1% came from out of state.

[13] Riesman, et.al., 136. Later recollections of this first terrible year softened the damage; Donald O'Dowd, the Dean of the University at the time, remembered that about 17 percent of the grades had been Fs. Donald D. O'Dowd, interview by Harvey Burdick, September 17, 1999, Oakland University Chronicles, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

students and faculty. The sociologist, David Riesman, described the students' experience as "a bit like people who might find themselves unexpectedly drafted into the Marine Corps when they had expected to be passengers on a cruise ship."[14] Some students simply took more than four years to graduate, adopting a pattern that was increasingly common in public universities, but unusual in the liberal arts colleges that had served as models for Oakland.[15] Others moved on to different schools. Of the 570 students who enrolled in the first year at MSUO, only 125 graduated with the charter class in 1963. The crisis also left a mark on the faculty and administrators. In "the Oakland Chronicles," a series of oral histories collected in the late 1990s, a recurring theme was the embarrassment over the press coverage of Oakland's high failure rate in the first year. One particular article had been especially humiliating. Although interviewees were in disagreement about where the article appeared, all vividly remembered some version of its title, "Brainy Flops."[16] The faculty made adjustments. One of the most important was to permit students to retake failed courses for a higher grade. This bridged the inherent contradictions of two of the critical founding ideals of Oakland—the academic standards would be as high as any Ivy League university, but the student body would be recruited from the local public high schools.[17] In addition, the deadline for dropping a course was extended from the end of the sixth to the end of the ninth week of the term.[18]

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[14] Riesman, et.al., 34.

[15] According to George Matthews, the last member of the original freshman cohort to graduate did so in 1971. George T. Matthews, interview by David Lowy, October 24, 1996, Oakland University Chronicles, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

[16] The article was ascribed to the *Detroit News, the New York Times,* and *Time Magazine* among others. It actually appeared in *Newsweek* on February 8, 1960. Its force over people's memories is rather striking in that it was extraordinarily brief—only three inches long.

[17] Donald D. O'Dowd, interview by Harvey Burdick, September 17, 1999, Oakland University Chronicles, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

[18] Risman, et.al., 150.

In that first year the administration and faculty of MSUO simultaneously had to implement the freshman program and prepare for further expansion. While still learning the strengths and weaknesses of the campus's innovative curriculum, they had to plan the course offerings for the next year's sophomores and juniors. In addition, they had to anticipate the need for new faculty members that would be required in the near future. Those first twenty faculty had been sufficient for the charter class, but the size of the faculty would have to almost double the following year. For the most part, the charter faculty had been personally recruited by Woody Varner, who actually traveled to the prospective candidates for their interviews. In the second year, the task of recruiting new faculty was delegated to individuals in the charter cohort. Without departments or department chairs, the responsibility for hiring fell to people with minimal experience. George Matthews, who had received his Ph.D. only five years earlier, was made a Professor of History and began gathering names of prospective colleagues.[19] However, when confronted with the task of writing to these candidates he recognized a problem. Would potential faculty even respond to a letter that was not written by an officer of the university? As he described it, "this was ridiculous, and [so] I listed myself as Chairman, of the Department of History and pretty soon everybody agreed and we had departments and chairmen."[20]

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[19] For those not familiar with the current system of tenure and promotion, faculty at Oakland normally are hired as untenured assistant professors (often having several years experience between the receipt of the doctorate and the arrival at OU); if they pass the tenure review process during their sixth year at the university, they are then tenured as associate professors; the normal period of time between becoming an associate professor and being promoted to a (full) professor is ten years. In all fairness to Matthews, he had taught in the Comparative Civilization program at Columbia University for several years and had published two books by the time he was appointed as an associate professor with tenure at MSUO, though his subsequent administrative duties prevented him from ever publishing another book on early modern French history.

[20] George T. Matthews, interview by David Lowy, October 24, 1996, Oakland University Chronicles, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

Matthews's experience in recruiting new faculty was emblematic of the institutional culture emerging at Oakland. Faced with the problem of implementing the idealistic mission conceived in the "Meadow Brook Seminars," the young faculty simply made adjustments. These adjustments were not necessarily the result of a larger set of principles; they were pragmatic, sometimes spontaneous, reactions to a specific problem. This approach functioned fairly well in the early years. The faculty was small and members could thoroughly discuss problems through informal channels; in addition, they had a constructive working relationship with the Chancellor, Woody Varner.

The Oakland that emerged in the early 1960s continued to hearken back to the mystique of the "Meadow Brook Seminars." Shielded by its affiliation with MSU, Oakland was able to withstand external criticism regarding its liberal arts emphasis and its high student attrition rate. It continued to grow, albeit at a slower pace than originally planned.[21] Receiving substantial financial support from the state, the school's infrastructure expanded. New academic programs, including music performance and the Urdu language, were added. New cultural institutions, such as a reparatory theater and an outdoor performing arts pavilion, were established.[22] Beyond the construction of new dormitories and classroom buildings, other atypical

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[21] Early plans estimated that there would be 5,000 students in the campus's fifth year and 10,000 in its tenth year. Donald D. O'Dowd, interview by Harvey Burdick, September 17, 1999, Oakland University Chronicles, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan. The university had only a little more than 6,000 students at the end of its first decade.

[22] Both were considered to be of outstanding quality. The pavilion was part of a nation-wide movement to create high quality outdoor music venues. It was created to serve as a major performance site for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, as was viewed as having superb acoustics. "Music: Michigan Festival," *The New York Times*, July 25, 1964. The theater was conceived as means of making the Detroit area a center for stellar regional theater; its first director was John Fernald, who had spent the previous ten years at London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. "Midwest College to Start Theater," *The New York* Times, August 12, 1966.

student amenities were created, including a child care center and a ski slope with a tow.[23] However, this growth sometimes diverted from what was perceived as the original intent of the "Meadow Brook Seminars." A system of intramural sports dating back to the charter class began to evolve into organized extramural competition; first, sports like cross country and tennis, which relied more heavily on individual training, were added as intercollegiate options. The university's original commitment to exclude mainstream competitive athletics was dropped in 1965, when the University Senate voted to temporarily add basketball as an intercollegiate sport. Although this decision had support within the university community, many faculty felt the initial objectives of the university had been betrayed.[24]

As Oakland expanded in the 1960s, it gained greater independence. Its official name had been Oakland University since 1963, but it retained its status as a branch of Michigan State. In 1970 the state legislature made Oakland fully independent of MSU, and the university's first Board of Trustees was appointed by the governor. In that same year, Chancellor Woody Varner resigned to become the President of the University of Nebraska. The confluence of these two changes had important implications for Oakland's institutional health in the 1970s and 1980s. As an independent university, Oakland would have to compete for state funding without the aegis of MSU. Although its size certainly warranted a separation from Michigan State, Oakland became independent at a time of great turmoil in higher education. Educational theory was beginning to put

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[23] *Oakland University General Catalog, 1971–1972,* 311–316.

[24] Riesman, et.al., 30. The initial move toward intercollegiate basketball was quite timid. The University Senate only authorized a trial period of three years followed by a re-evaluation. However, at the end of three years, the Senate mysteriously neglected to reconsider the issue of basketball. As the Senate concentrated on far more emotional issues, such as determining the role of the Registrar's Office in reporting male students eligible for Selective Service or banning California grapes from the university dining facilities, basketball quietly continued at Oakland University without receiving a more thorough-going mandate. See Oakland University Senate Minutes, January 12, 1965 as well as the minutes of September 19, 1968–August 7, 1969.

greater emphasis on professional training and less on liberal arts; students were becoming more vocal in their calls for practical course work.[25] It would become difficult to justify the continuation of programs in Latin to the state legislature.

This already complicated situation was made worse by the departure of Woody Varner. He had been the guiding force in the creation of Oakland. He was respected by faculty and students alike.[26] Under his leadership the construction of university policy was fluid, but not chaotic. He had effectively used his political contacts in Lansing to foster Oakland's growing independence and cultivate recognition at the national level. Varner's decision to leave for the more prestigious appointment in Nebraska would remove an important stabilizing force that had been critical to Oakland's academic evolution.

When Varner left the university in 1970, Oakland still held many of the characteristics first targeted in the "Meadow Brook Seminars." Class size remained small, particularly at the freshman level. Each freshman was required to take two "freshman exploratories," seminars designed to foster student/faculty interaction and encourage student research. Most majors required senior seminars. To accommodate the growing student body, the size of the faculty had expanded to slightly under 250 members. The emphasis on scientific knowledge and foreign relations continued, with a broader range of course offerings available to students. Departments had grown substantially and offered a broad range of sometimes esoteric classes.[27]

As Michigan fell into an economic crisis in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Oakland University as described by the

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[25] "'New Vocationalism' Now Campus Vogue," *The New York Times*, December 25, 1973.

[26] In response to the announcement of his resignation, hundreds of students protested outside Varner's offices. To this day, the veneration of Woody Varner takes on a cult-like dimension in some quarters.

[27] For example, in 1971 the Department of History had 28 faculty members and taught a wide range of courses, including the atypical "History of the Maghrib since 1830" and "History of the Second Jewish Commonwealth." Today, with a student body nearly twice the size, there are sixteen full time members of the department. We do maintain the tradition of esoteric courses such as "Scotland: 1689 to the Present," and "Working Detroit."

"Meadow Brook Seminars" proved impossible to maintain. Pressure was put on departments to increase the ratio of students to faculty, and class size quickly rose, particularly in the introductory courses. This growth in class size yielded a declining emphasis on individual student research and faculty-student interaction. Freshman exploratories, once viewed as an imaginative mechanism for introducing students to the life of the mind, were being criticized as expensive and pedagogically deficient. As faculty members resigned or retired, they were not necessarily replaced. Economic efficiencies reached levels of the banal, when alternating light bulbs were removed in O'Dowd Hall to cut energy costs.[28]

Tensions between the faculty and administration continued to heighten during this budget cutting era. The result was a growing adversarial relationship and an abandonment of the clubby atmosphere that had existed for the founders. No single vision for the future of the university dominated policy making discourse; a commitment to a rational search for common ground was deteriorating as well. Frustrated by actions of the administration, the faculty sought redress through a union contract. From this point, university policy would be determined through a continual jostling of administrative and faculty interests, punctuated at three year intervals by a newly negotiated faculty contract.

The result of these forces was the transformation of Oakland from an idiosyncratic place of higher education to a typical second tier public institution. Like other state schools, we focused on cost-cutting and creating a curriculum that was "student friendly." New majors were added to meet student interests in professional training and some programs were dropped due to lack of sufficient student interest.[29]

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[28] They were not replaced until the administration of Sandra Packard, long after energy costs had dropped to pre-OPEC embargo levels.

[29] For example, the entire classics department was eliminated and the Swahili language was discontinued. Majors in nursing and journalism were added. The School of Performing Arts was folded into the College of Arts and Sciences as the Department of Music and the Department of Theater and Dance.

The university had taken on a different structure which retreated from the idealistic conceptions of the "Meadow Brook Seminars." Although the university had engaged in the training of businessmen, teachers, and engineers since its inception, these programs had been removed from the College of Arts and Sciences and transferred to separate professional schools. This rising profile of professional education was further expanded with the creation of schools of nursing and health sciences. Professional education was becoming more separated from liberal arts education. The College of Arts and Sciences was also changing its character. By the end of the 1970s the curriculum included remedial courses in reading and writing as well as mathematic courses that were prerequisites to calculus. Campus social life had changed as well. Fraternities and sororities had become active. Oakland embraced NCAA competition by becoming a founding member of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

This shift in the focus of Oakland's academic mission required a complicated memory of the university's founding. During the 1970s and 1980s the institution continued to vaunt the founders through the symbolism of naming buildings. Varner Hall was named after the first Chancellor, and O'Dowd Hall was named after the first Dean of the University. Faculty and administrators alike continued to tout the university's commitment to liberal arts education and highlight the academic rigor of its programs. However, a rhetorical shift had begun to take place regarding the founding of the institution.

In celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the school, President Joseph Champagne called for a second "Meadow Brook Seminar." As Woody Varner had provided the summary of the meetings twenty-five years earlier, Keith Kleckner (Senior Vice President for University Affairs and Provost) provided the distillation of ideas coming out of these sessions. Kleckner noted that the climate of higher education had changed considerably. In 1984 all Michigan universities were faced with declining enrollments; to compensate for the decline in traditional students, Oakland had to re-orient itself to-

ward professional development and continuing education. Like the founders of the university, Kleckner believed Oakland had a critical role in providing leadership to business, teaching, and engineering. However, Oakland's mission was no longer viewed as providing future leaders with a foundation in liberal education by instilling both a sense of inquiry and a willingness to challenge convention. The new Oakland mission placed much greater emphasis on updating professional skills and providing technical expertise. Faculty would concentrate on research; their role as undergraduate mentors would be assumed by a new core of professional advisers, whose expertise was not in a specific academic discipline, but in counseling.[30]

This rather subtle shift in administration rhetoric was reflected in the restructuring of the general education system in the 1980s. General education at Oakland had gradually evolved from the system introduced in 1959, with each professional school and the College establishing its own criteria. In the early 1980s it still held onto characteristics that harkened back to the charter class. Freshmen were still required to take exploratories in lieu of a freshman composition sequence. Students had to pass courses in international studies and needed to demonstrate proficiency in either math or science. However, this general education sequence was coming under increasing scrutiny and in 1985 the university announced a major reform. The new system was strikingly similar to the old general education requirements of the College of Arts and Sciences, though the freshman exploratories had been abandoned and replaced with a more conventional rhetoric sequence. Although the final content of the new general education system still strongly resembled the previous College

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[30] Keith Kleckner, "Address," November 19, 1984. This pattern of lifting the responsibility of advising from faculty and transferring it to non-academic offices has continued. The reforms of the Champagne era, establishing advising offices in each school and the College, has continued. In addition, specific offices have been created to deal with issues like athletics, academic probation, and disability support. We have even entertained the proposal to separate all freshmen advising from the academic units and transfer it to Student Affairs.

requirements, the deliberation that had led to the new system was substantially different than it had been during the Varner years. Fearful of losing "head count," departments in the College fought vigorously for their disciplines. Intellectual idealism had not been abandoned, but now had to share the stage with the pragmatic concerns of program enrollment.

Academic culture at Oakland had become conflicted. Financial constraints had forced the leadership of the university to construct policies around issues of economic efficiency. The instructional mission of the institution had changed in response to these pressures. At the same time, nostalgia was becoming more deeply ingrained in the day-to-day life of the institution. Discontented faculty, and even some administrators, harkened back to the golden years of Oakland's past, when we were "the honors college of MSU."[31]

The memory of Oakland's greatness, first defined by the goals of the "Meadow Brook Seminars," took on a life of its own. Under the pressure of this cultural force, faculty and administrators were doomed to either relinquish hope and pine for the lost days of academic triumph, or try to somehow recapture the high academic achievements of bygone days. This continual pressure of Oakland's golden age was at odds with the realities of public funding for education and the fashions of educational theory. In the 1990s and 2000s university administrators still harkened back to the bygone days of the "Meadow Brook Seminars"; yet the policies that were adopted spoke to a decidedly different academic direction.

The contemporary Oakland is not the idiosyncratic liberal arts college envisioned by Woody Varner. Adopting capitalism's principle that failure is defined by a lack of growth, the university has embarked on a series of expansion programs. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in the student popu-

[31] Although this terminology has become widespread in the folklore of the university, Oakland was never conceived to be an honors campus for Michigan State University.

lation; moreover, it has triggered a transformation in institutional values.

Over the past fifteen years, Oakland has launched a major campaign to increase the size of its student body. Touting its status in national ranking reports done by the Princeton Review and *U.S. News and World Report*, Oakland has marketed itself as providing a "distinctive undergraduate education" where "less than one percent [of courses] are taught by teaching assistants." It has improved student amenities on campus and made navigating university bureaucracy easier for students. These changes, combined with an aggressive advertising campaign, have yielded consistent improvements in student enrollment. Yet, the university has had trouble matching this student growth with faculty expansion. Oakland has become increasingly reliant on hiring part-time, term-appointed faculty to provide all the sections needed for the growing student body. Like other public institutions formed in the post-war era, we are reliant on a cadre of part-time instructors who receive limited compensation and more limited benefits.

Driven by state budgeting prejudices and the more glamorous image of graduate education, spending priorities have shifted to creating new masters and doctoral programs. Rumors, both confirmed and unconfirmed, of new law schools, pharmacology schools, and medical schools have abounded for the last decade. This new emphasis on graduate education has put a premium on faculty research. Through both the hiring process and the tenure review procedures, faculty members are required to demonstrate a much greater activity in research and publication than was the case fifty years ago.

As the nature of the student body and the composition of the faculty have changed, the iconography of the university has adjusted during the last two decades. In the 1990s, new buildings no longer took on the names of the founders, but their function—Science and Engineering Building, or Recreation and Athletics Center. This shifting iconography was particularly significant in the case of the new gymnasium. The new building was an expansion (albeit massive) of the old Hollie

Lepley Sports Building. However, when it was completed, the old name disappeared and was replaced by the more generic Recreation and Athletics Center. Lepley had been hired to run Oakland's first intramural sports program and served as the university's first Athletic Director, so this naming decision took on particular symbolism.

In 2000 the university adopted the practice of naming buildings as a reward to major contributors. This practice, widely used by private universities throughout the twentieth century, has been embraced by public institutions in the face of declining financial support from their states. It is a mechanism for rewarding large contributions, but also for soliciting them. The symbolism speaks to the new entrepreneurial spirit of higher education.

Symbolism at the university has had perhaps its most dramatic shift in the area of sports. When Oakland embraced competitive team sports in 1965, it did so almost apologetically. Supporters of intercollegiate athletics consistently argued that the initial prohibition against sports was only against *contact* sports; hence basketball, soccer, swimming, and baseball were all permissible.[32] As a sop to opponents of intercollegiate competition in the 1960s, the university teams' name was "the Pioneers" in honor of the intellectual pioneers who founded the university. The first mascot of the university was Pioneer Pete, who took on an image reminiscent of a slightly deranged younger brother of Fess Parker's Daniel Boone. However, in the new entrepreneurial Oakland, Pioneer Pete was too self-deprecating, too ironic to be the symbol for the institution. After long consultation with public relations experts, the university, in 1998, abandoned the "Pioneers" in favor of the more conformist "Golden Grizzlies." This new appellation better suited the university's aspirations to becoming an NCAA I school.

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[32] This argument does require a certain suspension of disbelief for anyone who has brought down a rebound or slid into home plate. More importantly, it ignores the fact that from its origins, Oakland promoted intramural wrestling and fencing in addition to tennis, volleyball, and handball.

This transformation of sports identity has had a major impact on the university's interaction with its students. To be a student at Oakland today is to be a "Golden Grizzly," a term that has an unambiguous tie to intercollegiate sports and no possible connection to the faculty or founders of the institution. Student identification numbers are "Grizzly IDs." Some university offices now end their correspondence with the complimentary close, "With Grizzly Pride." Students now pose for graduation pictures in front of the Recreation Center's bear statue, whether or not they have ever attended an NCAA basketball game. The adoption of this symbol of school identity has been nearly complete. Although the street in front of the Recreation and Athletic Center retains its name "Pioneer Drive," it is festooned with enormous yellow "bear tracks." The pond in front of Vandenberg Halls has managed to retain its name "Beer Lake," and not be renamed "Bear Lake."[33]

Despite this seeming repudiation of the Oakland of the "Meadow Brook Seminars," today's Oakland is still consciously tied to its past. The mere fact that we are immersed in a fiftieth anniversary celebration is demonstration that the old Oakland has not exactly been repudiated. The story of the university's founding is retold, with emphasis on the generosity of Mrs. Wilson's gift, the ambition of its founders, and the vigor of its first students. Without a hint of irony, the official memory of the old Oakland is "the Harvard of the Midwest." It is this idealized memory that sets our current goals and provides justification for our new initiatives. Like those participants in the first "Meadow Brook Seminars," we know what we want for our future, but we can merely hope that vision will be attained.

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[33] This was not because of some great nostalgia for the origins of the name, when dormitory residents tied their six packs of beer to string and suspended them in the pond like so many trout lines. Rather it is because "Beer Lake" appears on state maps, and so changing the name would require enormous efforts to navigate the bureaucracy in Lansing.