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## Project Upward Bound helps teens achieve dreams

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

For many teens who come from low-income households, getting through high school can be tough enough let alone preparing for college. **Project Upward Bound** (PUB) at Oakland University has not only helped thousands of students finish high school through academically enriching experiences but also helps them develop the social and cultural skills needed to realize their dreams and succeed in college and society.

Oakland's Project Upward Bound celebrated the graduation of its 24 high school seniors with a special recognition luncheon on April 24. The high school seniors received PUB certificates and gave remarks on what the program meant to them. Each of those students has been accepted to at least two colleges or universities this fall. Four of them will be attending Oakland University.

"Project Upward Bound has been an experience like no other for me," said PUB graduate Meghan Ferdon, who attends Pontiac Central High School. "The program introduced me to many social and cultural experiences. It's also given me advice on financial aid and colleges. I received tutoring that helped me throughout high school, and the program's summer academy helped me learn to live with people outside my own family.

"It was sometimes a struggle, but worth it in the end. It's been very rewarding and helped me become a well-rounded person."

PUB at Oakland University is one of 700 federally funded Upward Bound programs across the nation and a part of a national network of educational opportunity programs called **TRIO**. Nationally, about 2 million TRIO students have graduated from post-secondary education since the program began in 1966.

"When I first entered PUB, I had a completely artificial sense of myself," said Marina Carter, a senior at Pontiac Northern. "Through the program, I evolved into a full person. I learned about business, culture, public service. Now I feel adequately prepared to enter college. Upward Bound gave me the fundamental knowledge I need for every facet of my life."

PUB Oakland serves Oak Park, Pontiac Central and Pontiac Northern high schools. It includes regularly scheduled tutorials with OU students, monthly visits to their schools and student leadership conferences. PUB administrators keep in close contact with counselors at each school to monitor each student's academic progress. University resources such as **Kresge Library** and computer labs are accessible for research or homework assignments. In addition, the students attend a six-week summer academy, a university simulation experience in which they take classes and live in OU's residence halls. Parents of PUB students also contribute to the program's success by fund raising for scholarships and trips, sponsoring an annual picnic, monitoring the residence halls during the summer academy, and attending an annual Parent Empowerment Conference.

"I'd venture to say the majority of PUB students wouldn't even be thinking about college if they didn't participate in the program," said Geri Graham, director of Oakland University's PUB. "Besides helping our students, society is really at an advantage because even if the students don't complete their college degrees, they're more educated than they would have been had they not participated in PUB."

The numbers also favor PUB students. Nationally, PUB students are four times more likely to graduate from a post-secondary school than non-participants. In OU's PUB high schools, participants who complete the program have a 100 percent high school graduation rate compared to less than 60 percent for non-participants. PUB's college enrollment rate is 94 percent compared to 45 percent in the target high schools. PUB students who complete high schools also are eligible for a number of scholarship opportunities.

"The college entry rate for our PUB graduates is about 90 percent," Graham said. "Most of the students go to

universities like Oakland, Eastern Michigan, Western Michigan and the University of Detroit-Mercy. As of our last report, Oakland's PUB graduates have a 72 percent post-secondary retention rate since 1999. That's higher than the OU and national average."

PUB also polishes its students by providing conflict resolution seminars and teaching proper etiquette, appropriate dress and behavior, and conversational and public speaking. Cultural experiences include trips to museums, fine restaurants, and renowned attractions and universities during the summer academy in cities like Boston, Chicago, New York and Toronto.

Oakland's PUB participants are very aware of the positive changes they've undergone since starting the program.

"Upward Bound has made and is still making a big impact on my life," said Erica Daniel, a senior at Pontiac Central. "Before I joined the program, I was really clueless about myself and what I wanted to do. It's really helped me find myself as a person both inside and out."

Parents of PUB students also have noted dramatic changes in their children.

"Upward Bound taught my son a lot about how to be comfortable socializing with others and speaking in front of groups of people," said Geraldine Tucker, whose son, Corey, is a senior at Pontiac Central. "He used to be a very shy person, but he took a speech class through Upward Bound that helped him become more confident. Now he's been accepted at Oakland University and wants to double major in education and broadcasting.

"I thank God that my son had the opportunity to be in Upward Bound. Any student can benefit from what the program offers. The staff is very dedicated to the kids and helps them in a very positive way. They also go way beyond the call of duty if the students need extra help. They treat the kids with respect and act as if they are giving to their own children. I love the program so much, I want to continue to be involved in some way even though my son is graduating."

After investing time and energy into about 110 to 130 PUB students each year, Graham said she can't help but feel emotional during the graduation recognition luncheon.

"Our recognition program is an exciting time for the graduates," said Graham, also a graduate of Pontiac Central. "PUB is the premier community outreach and pre-college program at Oakland University. In the community, our program is known as the one that has the best college entrance rate.

"I feel wonderful when the students graduate and say they got something from PUB that will help them go on and be successful. I truly feel like it's a ministry. It's not just a job for me."

For more information on PUB programs and activities, eligibility requirements, parent programs, and application forms, visit the [Oakland University Project Upward Bound](#) Web site or contact the PUB office at (248) 370-3218.

#### **SUMMARY**

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