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Renowned researcher credits OU for his successes

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

When Jeffrey Hansen transferred to Oakland University as a junior in 1979, he figured he'd finish his biology degree, graduate, and then enter the traditional job market.

As it turned out, Hansen never left academia. In fact, he's currently researching the chromatin structure of the human genome as professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at Colorado State University. In addition to his numerous articles, papers and professional activities, Hansen also is a member of the editorial board of the "Journal of Biological Chemistry," a prestigious position reserved for the field's leading researchers.

None of this might have happened had it not been for the research opportunities Hansen received at Oakland.

"The years I spent at Oakland University changed my life forever," Hansen said. "From the beginning, it was obvious that OU's biology curriculum emphasized research. At the time, I thought that research was an activity solely reserved for scientists with doctoral degrees. Yet, at Oakland, I was expected to be extensively involved in research to obtain a BS degree. This set in course the chain of events leading to graduate school and ultimately my career as an academic scientist."

Hansen returned to OU's campus last September to deliver a seminar titled "Anatomy of Chromatin in Health and Disease." Afterwards, he spoke of the quality of his undergraduate experience and how it led to a career as an academic scientist.

"Even in 1979, Oakland was clearly emerging as a Michigan university to be reckoned with," Hansen said. "When I arrived, I didn't have a clear idea of what research was, but I knew it was unusual for undergraduate biology majors to be involved with it. I recall speaking with (Associate Professor of Biology) John Cowlshaw, who told me that if I wanted to advance in this field, I needed to get involved in research."

"After I was compelled to get my butt in gear, I stumbled into (Professor of Biology) Virinder Moudgil's office. Even though it was late in my undergraduate career and he could have sent me packing, professor Moudgil took me into his lab, and I spent my whole senior year learning what research is really like. I was given all the help and encouragement needed to learn and succeed. I loved it and realized that biological research could possibly be a career choice for me."

Near the end of his senior year, Hansen expressed an interest in attending a national conference on biology with Moudgil, who adapted his presentation to include Hansen's work and helped him apply for a university travel grant. Hansen earned the grant, presented his research at the conference and decided to pursue a doctorate.

"I found my early exposure to research stimulating, and I benefited from the remarkable effort on the part of professor Moudgil. He continues to go above and beyond to do what's best for his students," Hansen said. "If I hadn't come to Oakland and received the funding to attend that conference, I have no doubt that I wouldn't be an academic researcher today."

At the conference, Hansen met Jack Gorski, a respected biologist from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a pioneer in the field of estrogen action. Gorski was so impressed by Hansen's work, he tentatively agreed to accept him into the doctoral program.

"The adjustment to include Hansen in our conference presentation was made at the very last minute, but it turned out to be one of the most important decisions I've ever made," Moudgil said. "I've always been proud of Jeff as a person with deep-rooted, good scientific values and as a scholar whose work is making a difference in the field. There are very few researchers in the country who are addressing the issue of the overall structure of chromatin, which envelops DNA."

After leaving Oakland, Hansen continued his studies at the University of Wisconsin and Oregon State University. He taught at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and directed its Analytical Ultracentrifugation Laboratory before joining Colorado State. And, he still remains impressed by OU's Biology Department and the research opportunities the university offers its undergraduates.

“Undergraduate research is just one of Oakland University’s hallmarks,” Hansen said. “I’d say nine out of 10 academics in science know about OU because of its undergraduate research program (that Moudgil initiated in 2001). There are hundreds of papers published with OU undergraduates listed as authors or co-authors. I doubt there are any universities in the country more active than OU in undergraduate research.

“Since I graduated from Oakland, the sciences have been strengthened and remain one of the things Oakland can lay claim to. There has been remarkable growth on the part of Oakland as a whole during a time when not many institutions are growing. With regard to the faculty in biology, I was surprised at the background and labs many of them came from – they were absolutely first-rate. Oakland has become an institution that is highly competitive and attractive to many of the best researchers. And I can see where there’s potential for collaboration because of the overall high quality of the faculty.”

In each place Hansen has studied and worked since leaving OU, he has returned the favor he received from his Oakland mentors by creating opportunities for undergraduate research.

“I received some wonderful graduate and post-graduate training,” Hansen said. “But it was my early exposure to an innovative curriculum and talented, dedicated professors at Oakland that laid the foundation for my future successes.

“Over the years, Oakland has matured into an exceptional university that continues to provide a unique and challenging education across all disciplines. It’s one of those rare places where opportunities abound, excellence is the norm, and the finest undergraduate education can be obtained.”

For more information on undergraduate research opportunities at Oakland, visit the [Provost’s Program for University Student Research Scholars](#) Web page.

SUMMARY

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