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## Faculty, technology take OU forward

By **Mary E. Iorio**, OU Writer

Despite the nation's dismal economy, Oakland University continues on an upward climb with an expanding student population and a combined \$9.3 million in grants and funding for research efforts across disciplines.

Virinder Moudgil, interim vice president for Academic Affairs and provost, gave an upbeat State of Academic Affairs address to more than 150 faculty, staff and students Sept. 17, calling attention to a litany of accomplishments including national recognition of faculty research projects, renewed accreditations in six departments and expanded degree offerings in everything from physical therapy and mechanical engineering to information systems.

Key achievements include:

- More than 90 successful grant applications, garnering \$9.3 million in research funding. Of that, \$1.9 million supports initiatives at the Eye Research Institute, \$2.7 million supports the School of Engineering and Computer Science and \$1.5 million the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Technology enhancements such as e-learning courses, Web pages for every course offered, improvements in the library and new computers for all faculty. "Someone said to me last year that our faculty needed modern equipment. I said, 'Okay, we will do it. I will find a way.' And we did it. We developed a plan to help every department afford up-to-date equipment so that our faculty can work effectively."
- Faculty recognized nationally and internationally for their research. Physics Professor Michael Chopp's study earned notice from the American Heart Association as one of the top 10 research advances of 2001. Biomedical Science faculty member Shravan Chintala's paper was cited by the "New York Times" as one of the most significant publications on glaucoma research. Frank Giblin, associated director of the Eye Research Institute, won a \$150,000 grant from NASA to study the effect of radiation in space. Other faculty earned recognition for their work in statistics, narrative research and journalism.

Oakland continues to outpace other universities in its rising enrollment.

"We have experienced a 4 percent growth in our undergraduate enrollment and a 3 percent growth in our graduate enrollment," Moudgil said. "That is an enviable position to be in. Growth offers opportunities – opportunities for academic program enhancement, for expansion of student services, for new and advanced academic, research and support facilities and for corporate and community partnerships."

Moudgil cited several highly successful education partnerships between OU and economically disadvantaged communities such as Detroit and Pontiac. The Detroit Public Schools have credited OU for its Meadow Brook Writing Project, while the Pontiac School District has seen widespread success in an OU-sponsored math program. "The support in math studies has made a great difference in the lives of children in Pontiac," he said.

"We live in second richest county in the country," Moudgil said. "We should take advantage of the world-class companies that we have right next door. We have developed partnerships with Chrysler, with St. John's Health System, that allow us to tap into their experts, their hands-on experiences, while we design courses of study that prepare our students for what they'll experience in their careers."

Moudgil credited OU Alumnus and Board of Trustee member Dennis Pawley with putting his faith in the university by contributing \$1 million last year to fund the Lean Learning Institute – an initiative to streamline the learning process and find opportunities for logical problem solving. OU also joined with Cooley Law School to offer first-year law courses on campus. This year, 34 law students are studying at OU.

The university during the past year made a large investment in people, adding 56 new faculty members. The number of female faculty is up 8 percent over the past six years. Minorities make up 23 percent of OU's faculty. When asked how the university

would support junior faculty, Moudgil said he was in the process of designing an Advisory Academic Support Group to support new faculty as they make their way into the profession.

Because academic offerings make up the heart of the university, Moudgil worked with Oakland University President Gary Russi to ensure Academic Affairs would continue to enhance programs, rather than cut them, despite the flat budget year. Academic Affairs will see a projected increase in spending of 5 percent this year, Moudgil said.

Deans, directors, Moudgil and the president have been meeting to develop alternative plans for the next fiscal year if the economy continues to decline.

"We want to be prepared for the worst so that we can have plans in place that will make the least impact on our courses and our students," Moudgil said. "We hope we will never have to use those plans."

Moudgil credited lawmakers for making Michigan the only state in the contiguous United States that did not make cuts in higher education funding this year.

#### **SUMMARY**

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