



Thursday, February 28, 2002

## President Russi addresses state senators

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University hosted a meeting of the Michigan Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education on Feb. 22. OU President Gary Russi and the presidents of U of M – Dearborn, Central Michigan and Michigan State each delivered presentations in the Elliott Hall conference room before Senator John J.H. Schwarz, M.D. [R]-Battle Creek and chair of the subcommittee; Senator Phillip E. Hoffman, [R]-Horton; and Senator Kenneth DeBeaussaert, [D]-Chesterfield Township, an OU alum and member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Russi's presentation highlighted OU's recent growth and achievements as well as measures the university has taken to contain costs while still providing a top-quality education.

"The meetings give us a chance to talk about higher education as well as the state of Oakland University – where we're at and where we're going," said Rochelle Black, OU director of government relations. "It's a favorable, very friendly process. The state revenue situation is very tight, but the subcommittee members are among our strongest advocates in the Legislature."

In January, Michigan university presidents agreed in principle with Governor John Engler and state legislative leadership to accept a flat budget for fiscal year 2003 and not to raise tuition rates in the next year higher than 8.5 percent or \$425 per student, whichever is greater. On Feb. 26, the state Senate approved a \$1.7 billion budget for fiscal year 2003, about the same as last year, for Michigan's 15 universities, which would mean no increase and no decrease in funding levels from fiscal year 2002. The budget now will be voted on by the state House of Representatives.

Russi's presentation showed the university's phenomenal growth over the past 10 years, which would not have been sustainable without state funding support, and indicated that this trend is expected to continue based on high school graduation rates and OU's increasing market share. Based on recent trends and projections, OU's enrollment is expected to reach 20,000 students by 2010.

Russi also detailed various cost-containing measures the university has implemented at a time when insurance premiums, energy, health care and technology costs are rapidly rising. Russi said OU also is concerned with having the proper facilities to accommodate its enrollment growth, and noted that it ranks 13th out of 15 Michigan universities in square footage per full-time student.

He also outlined various challenges the public higher education community will face in the next several years, including slower economic growth, lower state revenues and term limits for elected officials that will result in the loss of many strong supporters of higher education.

Another challenge Russi cited is increasing public awareness of the top-quality education Michigan's public universities provide at a reasonable cost. The total cost expenditures for a full-time undergraduate at OU is comparable to the per-pupil foundation allowance at area school districts and considerably less than the tuition at private institutions. Since private colleges and universities do not receive state support, their tuition and fees are two to three times the average cost of public institutions.

Russi stressed that cost should not be a barrier to a high-quality education, and that it is important for individual institutions and state and federal governments to do all they can to contain costs and provide need and merit-based grants and scholarships for qualified students. He noted that universities are expected to be on the cutting edge of education, technology and research, which underscores the importance of keeping higher education affordable.

Russi also presented an overview of OU's 2001 achievements, which can be found on the **Year in Review** Web page on **The News @ OU** Web site.

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee meetings on higher education are held at several sites throughout the state and continue through March 8. For more information on these meetings, visit the **Michigan Legislature** Web site.

### SUMMARY

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