



Wednesday, September 3, 2003

Vice President for Student Affairs Mary Beth Snyder speech

Thank you, Steven, and good afternoon to everyone.

I, too, want to extend a warm welcome to our new transfer students, to members of the freshmen class and to visiting family members.

Today's events mark the first formal academic celebration conducted in honor of our incoming students. The only other time you'll all be together in as large a group, with such pomp and circumstance is when you graduate from Oakland University.

I'm sure your commencement seems a fuzzy, distant goal, occurring ages from now, but I assure you that time flies when you're trying to juggle classes and study time, produce class projects, work a job, attend to family responsibilities and have a social life.

The decisions and the choices you make between here and your Oakland graduation there will definitely have a bearing on how well you handle your responsibilities along the way. I've told my own college-age son the same thing I'm going to tell all of you — listen...listen to what others with more experience have to tell you about how to get the most out of your "college years."

Please listen to the many faculty and staff members who are more than happy to talk with you about what does and does not work for students. They've helped thousands of students just like you along the road to achieving a good education, a satisfying and fun college experience, and financial independence. And, students, don't ever forget that the financial independence is a goal that is really important to your parents!

For today's convocation, I called on another group of people to help me dispense advice. These individuals should be familiar to many of you — they are the orientation group leaders, fondly referred to by all of us as OGLs. They're here today on the big screen to pass along some first-hand advice that they've learned through trial and error.

As you saw this summer, most of the OGLs enjoy hamming it up, so feel free to give them well-deserved applause for their unrehearsed tidbits of wisdom.

To warm them up I asked them a general question: What's been the very best thing about being a student so far at Oakland? Here's what they had to say... (video clip)

Well, those comments by Eric, Tyshara, Brian and the others should give you some good starting points on what you can do to squeeze as much as possible out of your "Oakland experience."

The first official piece of OGL advice I asked them has to do with the most valuable word in your vocabulary as of this moment — "time."

Time, and the management of it, may be the single most useful skill a student can master in the first year of college.

Let's listen to what a couple of your OGLs had to say about this subject of time when asked: "How do you juggle demands on your time?" (video clip).

That's very good advice from the mouths of students whose lives are incredibly full, as yours will be shortly.

A second area that I asked the OGLs to comment on has to do with what I call "assistance avoidance." Most of you were afflicted with this condition throughout high school — even if your life (or a grade) depended on it, you probably bent over backwards so as not to have to ever ask anyone for help. The opposite is true at Oakland. In college, we want you to come to us. Your academic success and your overall general satisfaction with everything is heavily dependent on your willingness to let us know when you need academic help or some other form of assistance.

Here's what some of the OGLs had to say about "where they go when they need a bit of help." (video clip)

As you just heard, others students, professors and university administrative offices are there to offer an abundance of help right here on campus, but you have to ask for it. Don't keep your academic or personal problems a secret — we know stuff happens in life that impacts how well you're going to do in your coursework. Please let your professors, other students or the professional

staff know if you're experiencing difficulties. Problems have a way of multiplying if you don't seek solutions early on.

A third piece of advice crucial to your enjoyment of college is to take steps this first week to get involved in at least one campus activity. It might be a student club, a research project with a professor, an on-campus job, an intramural sports team, a service project or a student government position. You could write for the student newspaper, be in campus radio or get involved in a community service project. You'll find out quickly that your participation in a single activity can soon lead to multiple forms of involvement.

To find out what's going on around campus, I recommend you scan the student newspaper weekly, check out the Oakland Center banners, log on to the Oakland Web site, pick up departmental fliers and the like. Just don't allow yourself to fall into the bad habit of leaving campus the minute your classes are over for the day.

Extracurricular activities are, indisputably, the very best way to make friends, meet professors and have a good time. In the long run, what you end up doing with your time outside of classroom hours is going to be as important to your overall success as is your commitment to your academic workload.

Let's hear what some of these smart OGLs have to say about how they first became involved at Oakland and what it has meant to them. I asked each of these students again: "What activities wouldn't you have wanted to miss out on while at OU?" (video clip)

Students, our final piece of advice is for your parents and family members. Your starting at Oakland University is a time of change and adjustment for them as well. You'll want to cut them some slack until they become accustomed to your new routines. I want to assure you, as did Professor Stein, that we care about your sons and daughters and will guide them as if they are part of a second family. I thought our OGLs had some good advice for those of us who are parents as well: (video clip)

That's great advice – for me as well.

I wrapped up the OGLs time in the spotlight by asking them to think back to when they were a new student and give you some final, off-the-cuff, advice to start you on your OU career: (video clip)

That's great advice – especially the advice about going to class.

I hope that these pretty serious remarks by a group of fun-loving OGLs get you thinking. Oakland University has so much to offer you in the way of outstanding academic programs, great students and first-rate professors. We're aware that each of you will have unique challenges ahead of you this year, but college requires you to confront them head-on, but with the knowledge that you are in a community that truly believes in the motto "we're all in this together" – students, faculty and staff.

If you do your best to manage your time well, get involved, ask for help when you need it, and strike up friendships, then we'll do our best to get you to your graduation ceremony at the other end.

In closing, I want to alert you that you and your parents will continue to hear from us through weekly e-mails with advice, alerts and announcements. These notices are called Freshman Outlook and Parent Outlook. Please watch for these electronic freshmen newsletters and your invitation to log on. If you haven't already received your invitation, we have people here today to help you log on.

One additional item you need to know for the fall. You will be receiving your schedule of classes, information about class registration, grades, tuition bills, mid-term grade reports, your financial aid and other business items directly through e-mail. This is Oakland's official method of communicating with our students. All of you should acquire the habit of reading your OU e-mails and first searching OU's Web site and Sail system for information and services that are crucial to your success. There's so much information on our Web site and Sail system.

We're really glad you're here. Have a great time in the fall. And, I truly want to thank all of you for being here this afternoon. Thank you for coming today, and Go Grizzlies!

SUMMARY

During her speech, Vice President for Student Affairs Mary Beth Snyder showed a video presentation containing helpful advice from current students on topics such as time management, asking for help when needed, building relationships with faculty, and becoming involved in student activities.

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