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## OU's student retention program wins national award

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

Oakland University's Trustees Academic Success (OUTAS) Program is among seven U.S. university programs awarded the Noel-Levitz 2001 Retention Excellence Award in recognition of its student retention efforts.

The award was established in 1989 to recognize retention achievements of post-secondary institutions. Noel-Levitz, a higher education consulting firm, worked with a panel of leading campus-based retention practitioners to select this year's award winners.

The OUTAS program, administered by the Office of Equity, is designed to create an ethnically and culturally diverse group of high-achieving students. The program takes progressive efforts to retain and graduate students through psychological, academic and social support, career exploration and financial assistance. The end objective is to allow all students to develop cross-cultural understanding and communication skills, and the opportunity to live, work and learn in a culturally diverse setting.

Entering freshman in the OUTAS program are awarded scholarships of \$1,000 to \$3,000 per academic year and renewed annually if they maintain full-time student status (12 credit hours), at least a 2.5 grade point average and meet bi-weekly with a counselor and weekly with a trained peer mentor. Up to 40 students per year are recruited to OUTAS from the university's admitted students based on a minimum 3.0 grade point average.

"I think the Noel-Levitz award is the most prestigious one a university can receive," said Gloria Sosa, assistant director to the Office of Equity. "Retention is what all academic institutions want. Keeping our students here is critical."

Since 1994, 203 white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Philippine, Native American and multiracial students have benefited from the OUTAS program. The program has a retention rate of 69-72 percent, surpassing the national average of 40 percent. OU's 2001 spring commencement graduates included 31 program members.

Junior Ashli Bobo, a Broadcast Journalism major and OUTAS member, said the program gave her an edge over other freshmen entering OU.

"Being paired with an upperclassman peer mentor really helped me deal with academic and social issues," Bobo said. "And the staff in the Office of Equity reached out to me and told me about all kinds of opportunities on campus. I don't think I would have become as involved as I am at OU if weren't for OUTAS. I'm a legislator for Student Congress and I became involved with community service events at Baldwin Church in Pontiac. Having a peer mentor also encouraged me to reach out and help other students. Now I'm a peer mentor myself and can have a positive impact on other students."

OUTAS program graduates numbered 62 after the winter 2001 semester. An additional 35 graduates are expected after the winter 2002 semester.

### SUMMARY

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