

# OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

OAKLAND  
UNIVERSITY

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## Thirst for knowledge drives award-winning OU grad

When Oakland University graduate Johnny “JL” Ricks was a child, his favorite pastime was flipping through a set of Encyclopedias given to him by his maternal grandmother.

In short order, the Detroit native finished the complete set and was hungry for more.

Ricks’ thirst for knowledge stuck with him, and translated into writing and communication, his major at Oakland. He recently won first place in the Oakland University Writing Excellence Award from the university’s Department of Writing & Rhetoric for his analytical essay titled “The Gentrification of Detroit.”

Ricks, CAS ’15, graduated from Oakland in December. During his time as a student, he wrote for The Oakland Post. Since graduating, Ricks has written for Huffington Post and was briefly co-host of “On Point with Ralph Godbee,” on radio station WFDF 910AM, talking about issues of the day with the former Detroit police chief.

He is also a member of several different professional organizations – including Toastmasters International – and was recently accepted to Wayne State University to pursue a master’s degree in communication with a concentration in public relations.

The 35-year-old’s drive, however, is not only illustrated in his academic and literary accomplishments. It’s also obvious in his diverse background. Ricks is a U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard veteran.

While on active duty for the Air Force and later for the Air National Guard, Ricks was awarded more than 20 medals and ribbons for distinguished service in combat, combat support and humanitarian aid.



In 11 total years of service – he originally enlisted in 1999 – Ricks also earned two Air Force occupational badges and achieved the rank of Technical Sergeant.

Ricks’ military service instilled in him a mantra that he still lives out daily. The three core values of the Air Force – integrity first, service before self and excellence in all you do – remain the principles he bases his work and personal life on, he said.

His award-winning article, “The Gentrification of Detroit,” was written for his Rhetoric 160 course, and won first place in the

analytical essay category. It discusses the “urban renewal” that is happening in the city, and how groups of low-income African-American Detroiters are being negatively impacted by gentrification.

“I wanted to talk about what I perceived the problem to be, which was an atmosphere of exclusiveness as opposed to inclusiveness in Detroit, and the powers that be pushing poor, black and brown folks out of the city,” said Ricks. “I talked about a City Council meeting I went to, where council debated the implementation of a city wide curfew for the fireworks last year – it was a prime example of exclusiveness.”

In the professional realm, Ricks discusses and writes about racial issues, issues in the Detroit community, current events, geopolitics and more. His motivation is to “reach the community and spark a discourse about what is going on in our country, especially within the black community,” said Ricks, “and to get people to employ critical thought and question what’s going on around them.”

With an open horizon in front of him, Ricks said he is excited for his next challenge, graduate school. “My hope is to eventually obtain a Ph.D.”

His thirst for knowledge, it’s clear, hasn’t waned a bit.

# NEWS YOU CAN USE

## **Oakland University Receives Beacon Award**

The Michigan College Access Network held its annual conference and College Access Impact Awards Dinner in Lansing and recognized numerous outstanding college advocates from across the state. In all, eight award categories recognized the hard work and dedication of 22 individuals and organizations that have gone above and beyond to improve postsecondary attainment.

The Beacon Award recognizes those who strengthen success through partnerships. Oakland University earned MCAN's Beacon Award through its philosophical and financial support of MCAN's mission and activities through the AdviseMI partnership program. This program places the best and brightest alums as college advisers in high schools where the AdviseMI program serves a significant number of low-income and first generation college students.

The Beacon Award went to 12 Partner Colleges from the AdviseMI program, including: Alma College, Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, Madonna University, Oakland University, Saginaw Valley State University, University of Michigan-Dearborn, University of Michigan-Flint, Wayne State University and Western Michigan University.

"Every one of the individuals and organizations recognized from this year's awards have played a vital role sparking change statewide and

in their communities," said Brandy Johnson, executive director of MCAN. "We know one of the most successful drivers for people is to hear personal accounts of perseverance when it comes to higher education. This year's award-winners are a fantastic group of individuals and organizations who are on the ground and working to drive change by increasing the number of Michigan residents with postsecondary degrees and certificates in our state."

In addition to the award ceremony, the Michigan College Access Network hosted more than 450 college access professionals and leaders during the two-day conference. The conference theme, "College Changes Everything," focused on highlighting personal stories and showcasing the impact postsecondary education makes in our communities and in our personal lives through a pre-conference, 35 breakout sessions, and three keynote speakers.

## **Dearborn high school students get "Divine" journalism pointers at Oakland University workshop**

Twelve students and two faculty members from Divine Child High School in Dearborn visited Oakland University for a journalism workshop on Tuesday, May 3. Leading their group was school librarian Serge Danielson-Francois.

The students participated in a half-day program to learn more about the field of journalism as a possible profession.

Garry Gilbert, director of the journalism program at OU, greeted the group and coordinated the visit. He introduced two new graduates

from Oakland's program to talk about their path to employment and the peaks and valleys associated with earning a degree in journalism.

Then, the group divided up and took part in several breakout sessions conducted by Oakland University faculty members on a wide range of journalism-related topics including: feature writing, media ethics, media law, intro to PR as a profession, social media, photojournalism, internships and the college admissions process.

## **Marketing alum propels family business to new success, recognition**

For Oakland graduates, their diploma is more than just a degree. It's the launching pad for a successful career.

Just ask Andrew Androff, Marketing '02, recently named one of Oakland County's Elite 40 Under 40, who says "my time spent at OU helped lay a tremendous foundation for my success in business. I continue to apply marketing principles learned inside Elliott Hall to every campaign I develop."

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson started the 40 Under 40 program in 2012 to honor young, dynamic leaders who live or work in Oakland County.

Androff fits the bill. He is the co-owner and director of marketing for Professional Movers.com, an award winning residential and office moving company headquartered in southeast Michigan.

# STATE AND NATIONAL HEADLINES

## **Survey: Many 2-Year Grads Want to Get Bachelor's Degrees but Don't**

A new report from Gallup and USA Funds found that 72 percent of associate degree graduates have considered enrolling in four-year programs, but 64 percent don't because of family obligations, cost or job commitments.

The report also found that associate degree graduates are as likely as their counterparts with four-year degrees to strongly agree that their educations were worth the cost. Half of two-year graduates said they would recommend an associate degree program to others.

But the survey also found that associate degree holders are behind bachelor's degree graduates in Gallup's measures of life well-being after graduation.

*Inside Higher Ed*  
April 12, 2016

## **New Study Shows Advances in Higher Education Outcomes for African Americans –**

The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education and the University of Pennsylvania's Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy recently released a study examining trends in higher education based on family income, race/ethnicity, and family socioeconomic status.

The report, "Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United State — 2016 Historical Trend Report" highlights some bright spots but also some less positive trends.

For example, the report shows that while bachelor's degree attainment rates have increased for all family

income quartiles, the distribution of bachelor's degree attainment between family income levels has remained relatively unchanged since 1970, with students from the top two income ranges garnering a majority (77 percent) of all degrees in 2014.

"Whether we believe that higher education is a civil right, an essential element of a full democratic society, or a fundamental requirement to enabling all to achieve the American dream, the 2016 Indicators Report shows that higher education opportunity and outcomes are highly inequitable across family income groups," the report read. "Moreover, on many indicators, gaps are larger now than in the past."

The report purports that the disinvestment of state funds from public institutions and declining federal aid lent toward the income inequities.

On a more positive note, the report does indicate that college enrollment and degree attainment rates among Black students have increased. For example, in 1970, almost one-third of Black high school graduates enrolled in college and, by 2014, that figure rose to 58 percent.

*AFRO*  
May 7, 2016

## **Higher ed engineers the future**

Graduates must solve real-world problems at the intersection of technology and society.

With unsafe lead levels in city water systems, injured military veterans in need of smart prosthetics, and a demand for sustainable sources of clean energy, our need for engineers has never been greater.

The good news is that despite

concerns to the contrary, the ranks of engineers in the United States are growing. About 100,000 engineers graduated with bachelor's degrees from U.S. universities last year, a number that has grown by 25 percent in the last decade, according to the American Society for Engineering Education.

Training engineers to take on the challenges of the future is one of the most important contributions that colleges and universities make to advance the human condition.

*University Business*  
April 2016

## **Americans Still Say Postsecondary Education Very Important**

- 70% of Americans say postsecondary education "very important"
- Blacks and Hispanics attach greater importance than whites
- Individuals seen as most responsible for increasing percent attaining degree

PRINCETON, N.J. -- Americans strongly endorse the value of postsecondary education, with 70% saying it is "very important" for adults to have a degree or professional certificate beyond high school. The percentage of Americans who view having a degree or certificate as very important has held steady near 70% since 2012, even amid declining college enrollment and growing discussions in this country about the value of higher education.

*Gallup*  
April 12, 2016



Wilson Hall, Room 123  
371 Wilson Boulevard  
Rochester, Michigan 48309-4486

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**OAKLAND UNIVERSITY  
OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT AND  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS**  
(248) 370-9892 | oakland.edu/govrel

**Rochelle A. Black**  
Vice President  
black@oakland.edu

**Nicole Wells Stallworth**  
Assistant Vice President  
wellstallworth@oakland.edu

**Bonnie Bochniak**  
State Relations Director  
bonniemaluchnik@oakland.edu

**Claudia DiMercurio**  
Executive Assistant  
dimercur@oakland.edu

**Jacqueline Racchi**  
Executive Secretary  
racchi@oakland.edu

**State and National Headlines *CONTINUED***

**Degree Attainment in U.S. Continues to Increase, Especially for Young Adults**

**Quick Takeaways**

- Postsecondary attainment in 2014 was 45.3 percent, which includes 40.4 percent of U.S. adults who attained a degree (two-year or four-year) and 4.9 percent of U.S. adults who obtained a high-quality credential.
- Adults 25 to 34 had the largest boost in degree attainment from 2008 to 2014, rising from 37.8 percent to 42.3 percent.
- While these numbers bode well for potential increases in attainment, they are “still not enough to get the nation to Goal 2025,” wherein 60 percent of U.S. adults hold degrees, certificates, or other high-quality credentials by 2025, according to the Lumina Foundation.

The degree-attainment rate among U.S. adults between the ages of 25 and 64 has increased slightly from 2008 to 2014, indicating a promising trend in the national effort to meet Goal 2025, according to a new report from the Lumina Foundation.

**NASFAA**  
April 12, 2016