

Interview with the OU Women's Employee Resource Group

November 3, 2021

Please summarize your career path that led to OU.

Career has led in the direction of “Learning, earning and returning.”

At heart, my passion is to serve.

We face many challenges as a community, region and country. Education and civility are at the heart of how we find a way to bring people together.

In addition, I believe deeply in OU’s four strategic goals – student success, research, community engagement and DEI.

What attracted you to OU?

This is a university at the cusp of becoming a preeminent regional university. The opportunity to lead and serve attracted me to OU along with the potential of the faculty and staff to work together to transform this institution.

There are few better located universities than OU.

We’re positioned as the university of choice in Oakland and Macomb counties. Our students connect with our values. We’ve had tremendous growth over the past few decades, and with the proper strategic plan, we will not only succeed in addressing the challenges ahead, we will transform Oakland into a truly authentic mid-21st century institution of higher learning.

What is a typical day/week as President of OU?

I awake as early as 4:30 a.m., and get to the office between 7:30 and 8 a.m. I keep fit riding a bike.

I am continually researching, reading and writing and in meetings throughout the day. Some weeks, I'm traveling around the country on OU businesses. I travel throughout the region as part of my obligation of serving on many boards, including those in healthcare, economic development and higher education.

Nearly every day and/or night, I'm attending an event on campus or meeting with a donor. Throughout the day, I have meetings with the OU leadership team, my staff and others. Since returning to campus, I'm making more time to meet with the faculty.

What is the most challenging/enjoyable part of your job?

Translating the needs of students, faculty and staff into meaningful policies and actions is the most challenging part of the job.

These past two years have been especially difficult in connecting with people. Virtual meetings are convenient, but there is no substitute for in-person, face-to-face interactions.

The most enjoyable part of the job is the people – the students, the fascinating faculty members, the dedicated deans, the curious students, the committed staff. I think it all comes together when we make a difference in improving student success, deepening the student experience, creating more research and scholarship opportunities, reaching out and collaborating with communities in the region, and fostering a truly diverse, equitable and inclusive campus.

Most enjoyable, when I hear....

- How we supported students who faced challenges in their journey to graduation.
- How offering a scholarship gave an opportunity to student....an opportunity that fundamentally changed their lives.
- Seeing the impact of a faculty member's research
- Visiting communities around the region (Auburn Hills, Rochester, Rochester Hills, Pontiac, etc.) and knowing that Oakland has a profound impact on the economy, and going to Pontiac neighborhoods and seeing first-hand the connections we're making with residents

What has been the greatest challenge leading OU through the Covid-19 pandemic? With your medical background, what is your assessment of the next few months or year with the pandemic and its variants?

There have been many, many challenges during the pandemic; foremost, keeping up with the latest data and making sure we're crafting policies that lead to maintaining the safest, and most healthy campus. Also.... To manage our response to the pandemic at a time of myriad financial challenges has been a profound test for our leadership.

Throughout the past year, it's been critical to be prepared, responsive, accountable, and at all times, clear with our communications.

All indications are that we're moving toward the post-pandemic phase, especially with declining number of cases along with hospitalizations and death rates. In addition, the success of the vaccines and boosters will put us in good shape.

Why do you choose to support OU through your philanthropic gifts?

I believe deeply in the mission, vision and values of Oakland University. For me, as with many people, a strong statement of my support for Oakland is through giving.

The scholarships made possible through my giving reflect my interests, and I hope will be part of my legacy.

What is your long-term vision as OU President and for yourself?

As a scientist, physician and university president, I hope we are always mindful that we must do whatever we can to be healthy mentally, physically and as a community. What does it mean to be healthy for a university? We're healthy when we foster a safe, inspiring learning environment. We're healthy when each person can be who they are, speak their mind and find comfort in a compassionate community. We're healthy when we're reaching out to our communities and utilizing our intellectual/knowledge assets to improve the quality of life for people living in the region.