

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – August 3, 2020

New Chief of Staff brings proven leadership, entrepreneurial approach Joshua D. Merchant assumes role Aug. 17

Dear OU community members,

In May, after great deliberation and input from a variety of sources, I announced a range of organizational changes intended to strengthen Oakland University's leadership team. Notably, the [revised organizational realignment](#) of roles and functions is required to establish the type of flexible and innovative higher education institution that is prepared to respond effectively to the enrollment, funding, research and community engagement challenges in the days ahead.

Among the organizational changes I proposed is the addition of a Chief of Staff to serve as a trusted advisor to the president and key OU Cabinet member. After an extensive national search that attracted more than 150 candidates, I am extremely pleased to announce that Joshua D. Merchant has accepted the position. He begins August 17.

The search was conducted in an impressive, thorough and efficient manner. Over several weeks, the overwhelming response to the open position reflected the elevated national stature of our university. The list of finalists included internal candidates who have demonstrated a remarkable dedication to OU, and for whom I have great respect.

For their tireless pursuit of the right candidate, I extend my appreciation to search committee members Mike Westfall (who chaired the process), Glenn McIntosh, Steve Waterfield, Tom LeMarbe and Joi Cunningham.

The creation of the Chief of Staff position is made possible by the retirement of our former Chief Operating Officer. (The COO position will not be filled.) In addition to planning and directing administrative activities on behalf of the president, the Chief of Staff will oversee University Human Resources and University Technical Services.

Dr. Merchant brings a diverse range of experience and expertise along with a passionate belief that higher education institutions have an obligation in serving the public good. Most recently, Dr. Merchant served as President of Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa, from 2017 to 2020. His many accomplishments include the 2020 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification; creation of the Institute for Agriculture, Food and Resource Management and Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, a key component of BVU's national recognition for a focus on rural education; and, the Education for Service Scholars and Invest in Rural Iowa Scholars Program.

In addition to bringing proven leadership and an entrepreneurial approach to the Chief of Staff position, Dr. Merchant draws upon a background that gives him a broad understanding of the many roles and functions that must be integrated into a high-performing university.

Prior to BVU, he served as vice president of development and alumni engagement at the University of North Florida (UNF) and CEO of the UNF Foundation; vice president for institutional advancement at Albion College; and, assistant vice president of advancement at Interlochen Center for the Arts (Green Lake Township, Mich.). He also worked in development at Central Michigan University and Michigan State University.

Dr. Merchant received his doctorate in educational leadership, research and technology from the College of Education and Human Services at Western Michigan University. His research focus is in venture philanthropy and its impact on shared governance structures in higher education.

He holds a master's degree from the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University, and received a Bachelor of Arts from Albion College.

A native of Michigan, Dr. Merchant and his wife, Carrie, have two sons, Elijah and Griffin.

Please join me in giving Dr. Merchant and his family a warm and friendly Golden Grizzlies welcome.