

OAKLAND POST – September 14, 2020

## **Get the facts. Make the right choice when it comes to protecting yourself and others.**

By Ora Hirsch Pescovitz

Since March, we have been working tirelessly to preserve the unique OU college experience that promotes curiosity, self-exploration and discovery, while keeping everyone a safe distance apart and free from the threat of COVID-19.

As you know, responding effectively to the challenge posed by the pandemic requires our widespread cooperation and accountability from all members of the OU community.

I want to make a special appeal for students to do what they can to make sure they're wearing a mask, keeping a safe distance from others, and practicing a rigorous hygiene protocol, including frequently washing your hands.

Most students arrive at OU with a sense of a newfound freedom, and great excitement about the possibilities of the "college life." Unlike any other year, however, students must be especially judicious about how and where they spend their time on and off campus.

The stark reality is that the college experience has been fundamentally altered. And frankly, students find themselves on the frontline of the defense against the spread of the virus.

The OU five-point "Grizzlies Protect Grizzlies: Healthy Together" plan creates an administrative and operational blueprint in response to a range of possible pandemic scenarios. A key part of the plan is for students to take responsibility and do their part.

So far, I'm quite pleased that OU students are up to the challenge.

Each day, students are taking a health pledge. They answer questions regarding the status of their vital signs, agree to wear a mask, and maintain social distancing.

When asked how best to gain student compliance regarding taking precautionary measures, OU Dean of Students Michael Wadsworth came up with a simple, effective response: Students must educate students.

I couldn't agree more.

Students educating students is the impetus behind the Grizzlies Health Squad, a team of 10 students who promote wellness, school spirit and engagement in university issues and events.

The concept behind the Grizzlies Health Squad is an appeal to students through education and dialogue, not the threat of punishment and surveillance. As a learning community, our greatest strength is our respect for each other and for rigorous debate based on reason and common interests.

My deep appreciation to OU students who have volunteered to serve as role models on the inaugural Grizzlies Health Squad. The members include

- Tara Apostolovski
- Cassandra Zeski Cazares
- Christian Clemans
- Lydia Danks
- Allyssa Farley
- Jorge Isunza
- Gwyneth Labine
- Nancy Plascencia
- Salina Rice
- Gianna Sciortino

Watch for the Grizzlies Health Squad strolling campus, modeling proper compliance behavior. They are stocked with extra masks and answers to a range of questions about how we can remain safe and care for each other in the time of COVID-19.

They will also reach out to students through social media, and work closely with faculty and student organizations. And, if a student doesn't comply with the prevention rules, squad members will listen to their explanation. Of course, they will also present a compelling case for upholding the health recommendations.

When you come to campus, please make responsible choices. Wear a mask. Practice social distancing. Take the daily health assessment. Report any COVID-19 symptoms you may have.

Doing so shows respect for others, and yourself.

# # #