

2010 Student Liaison Report

Tawnee S. Milko

Distinguished members of the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, and staff: It has been my distinct pleasure representing the interests and concerns of Oakland University students, not only in this report, but throughout the course of my tenure as student liaison. This year, OU students have faced tremendous growth and expansion in nearly every aspect of their educational experience. Here are some examples:

Students are excited about the greatly expanded educational and professional opportunities that will accompany the completion of the Human Health Building and the inauguration of the OU William Beaumont School of Medicine. Demand for the Nursing program has created a multi-year waiting list, and the Honors College has attracted over 600 talented students to continue in the fall.

Another plainly visible source of growth is Golden Grizzly pride. Students this year packed the Grizz Gang sections to watch the oftentimes electrifying Summit League victories of the men's and women's basketball teams, shattered voting turnout records in the recent Student Congress elections, and represented the best of the Grizzlies whether collaborating to raise money for Haiti or comprising one of Oakland's talented varsity, club, and intramural athletic teams.

Even more, students want to live close to the expanding action. On-campus residency levels have seen unprecedented growth, cementing the identity of an on-campus culture that student life at Oakland has previously lacked. Living and learning communities like the Honors College floors are in such high demand that few freshman - of which there are many interested - even have a chance to live on them. Even small single-person rooms have all been converted to doubles. Most residents have expressed a willingness to face increased room and board rates in exchange for tremendously needed residence hall space.

Following continued growth in commuter enrollment, non-residential students face similar challenges. Working closely with the administration, students have developed creative solutions to expand convenient parking availability during peak hours. In addition to the several hundred parking spaces to be added this summer, next fall will see trial runs of the Bear Bus campus shuttle system, a student-initiated collaboration between Student Congress, the Housing department, and the administration.

Increasing tuition is one form of growth that no student welcomes, but OU students this year have experienced the benefits of significantly expanded scholarships and stimulus-money financial aid. In the coming academic year, with OU receiving one of the lowest public university appropriations from Lansing on a per-student basis, a zero-percent tuition raise is an impractical appeal. Given OU's necessary expansion, I also understand that implementing and following an overall strategic plan is important.

I entreat, however, that the Board use the care and diligence for which it is known to strike a balance between that plan and a tuition increase that is realistic for the students

and families who are struggling to make ends meet in an economic atmosphere in Michigan that is still as unstable as it is, reportedly, rebounding.

I cannot conclude my report without referencing the start of the 2009 fall semester.

Though the faculty strike directly involved OU professors and administration, it also substantially affected and impeded the learning experience of every student at this university. In addition to a delay in instruction, many students revealed that they lost faith – some in the administration, some in their instructors. As faculty-administration engagements continued throughout the academic year, many more students expressed fear that the - at times – publicly acute nature of the dispute could damage the way in which eventual employers would view an Oakland degree.

Should further disagreements arise in the future, contractual or otherwise, I would implore, for the sake of my fellow students, that every party involved address them in a manner that will not adversely impact students' intellectual and professional experiences.

As mentors and role models for the students who encounter them on a yearly, monthly or even daily basis, I would very much hope that our educational and institutional leaders can continue to mutually work toward addressing problems and concerns in an atmosphere that is as productive and beneficial for the students they serve as it is collaborative and constructive for those directly involved.

In conclusion, I, on behalf of the Oakland University students I represent, am incredibly grateful to the Board of Trustees for the immense dedication it has shown and continues to show for the welfare of this exponentially expanding university. From my observations, it is clear to me that the Board's at times conservative judgment and painstaking decision-making have played crucial roles in helping OU weather our nation's and state's recent economic storms and emerge afloat and relatively unscathed.

I truly appreciate your consideration of my words. Thank you for allowing me the honor of serving with you, learning about, and briefly being a part of the intricate functioning of this great institution.

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Corey J. Schmidt

The 2009-2010 academic year brought with it many new changes and challenges for Oakland University and its students. Academically, the university has continued to grow programs and resources. Marked by the recent approval of undergraduate degrees in Cinema Studies and Actuarial Science, such additions have garnered near universal support from students seeking diverse course and major offerings.

The approval and groundbreaking of the new Human Health Building was also an incredibly significant event for Oakland University this year. Students who have seen or heard about plans for the structure and the facilities within it have been excited by the new opportunities it will bring. Not only will the building expand and strengthen the institution's health sciences and nursing programs, it will also provide much-needed space for students of other disciplines to make use of. Needless to say, students are eagerly awaiting the chance to begin making use of this new construction.

Although the Human Health Building has been one of the most desired new additions to the campus, its construction has brought about many relevant concerns from students. Most importantly, a majority of students have questioned how the new building would affect an already cramped area for parking. Such discussion also brought up other parking issues throughout the year during private conversation, meetings, and public forums. As a student liaison, one quickly learns parking is the one issue students like to talk about most. Fortunately, answering such questions proved to be smooth thanks to much cooperation from Vice President of Finance and Administration, John Beaghan. Mr. Beaghan and his staff should be commended for the work they put into finding effective parking solutions this year. Their analysis was conducted in a timely fashion in order to address problems, and the student liaisons had ongoing contact to ensure information was being disseminated to questioning students almost immediately. Because of the nature of Oakland University's student population, parking will almost assuredly be an issue in the future, but I remain confident that cooperation between students and the administration can be achieved in order to alleviate congestion concerns.

Another reason for growing parking problems lies in the simple fact that the university is continuing to grow. OU had a higher-than-anticipated enrollment increase for the fall semester, no doubt facilitated by many endeavors which are helping to expand OU's presence in the region and nation. Such growth has especially been seen within the Department of University Housing, which has been offering more and more

students the opportunity to have a great educational experience while living on-campus. Because of such growth, there have been waiting lists the past few years to receive a room in a residence hall. While students are eventually placed, the issue of needing more space is one that the student liaisons looked into very aggressively this year. Through all of my interactions with those living on-campus, nearly all students have been in-support of new facilities for Housing. They have expressed a desire to see Oakland grow its on-campus living quarters because of the positive experiences they have had. Although such plans have yet to be formalized, it should be noted that a year's worth of dialogue with students has indicated there is a world of support for a new Housing construction in the near future.

Formal matters aside, this truly has been a great year to be a Golden Grizzly. Many departments and offices have continued to expand programs and services. Student employment on-campus continues to grow via new initiatives like the summer employment program. Attendance at sporting events is expanding, especially at the O'Rena where two quality basketball programs put together great seasons. Most importantly, spirit levels appear to be at all-time highs on the campus. Oakland University is clearly in an amazing position right now, and students are doing all they can to take advantage of the plentiful opportunities that are out there.

As we put to a close the 2009-2010 academic year, I would just like to say it has been an honor to serve as a student liaison for this term. This position provides one with unique opportunities to see how the university works and to be an incredibly important link between students and the Board of Trustees. Thank you.