

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – May 5, 2020

## **UPDATE: New leadership structure positions OU for exciting future**

**Interim Provost named, CAS Dean remains in place, key searches recommence; changes effective June 15**

In this extraordinary time of daunting challenges, we have an opportunity to establish Oakland University as a foremost institution of higher education, research and community engagement.

Since I began my tenure in July 2017, I have been determined to guide Oakland to be a leading university, and at the forefront of engendering public trust, making college accessible, affordable and serving the common good.

We have made great strides in nearly three years, but there is more work to be done.

While the demands of the current pandemic require immediate attention, Oakland must be financially and organizationally sound in order to navigate the challenges that lie ahead. Profound changes await all of higher education, from small private colleges to large state-funded universities.

The changes have been underway long before the COVID-19 crisis, but the threat of the coronavirus has effectively sped up the need for higher education to face a range of compelling realities.

A critical part of our success as a university within the current context of dramatic and historic change depends on a shared understanding of our rationale and strategy as we determine what must be done to address the immediate and long-term organizational challenges of Oakland University.

On a broad level, this means we must recommit to be “The University of Choice.” Ensuring that the university provides students, faculty and staff with a thriving learning community of enriching

educational and cultural experiences is at the heart of our endeavor, and the basis for our decisions to reform the university's leadership structure.

### **New organizational structure: Responsive & Strategic**

Recent changes in our operations, work-at-home arrangements and course delivery methods have made us aware of the necessary changes that must be made for us to thrive in an uncertain environment.

But it's not enough to respond to challenges; we must plan and act strategically. And, above all, we must realize our greatest resource is in our collective ability to innovate, remain composed in the face of change, and advance with our shared mission in mind.

In a period of great uncertainty whereby we are increasingly tuition-dependent, this we know for sure: Having a strong organizational structure and leadership team are prerequisites to respond effectively to a varied range of revenue and enrollment projections, increased demand for online learning along with unanticipated scenarios of the future.

In consultation with our Board of Trustees, a range of advisers, and a Reimagining OU subcommittee, we have evaluated the university's leadership structures and processes. This has led to a leadership organizational structure designed to foster greater accountability, efficiency and responsiveness.

The new leadership organizational model takes effect June 15, subsequent to the retirement of OU Chief Operating Officer Scott Kunselman, and the departure of Senior VP, Academic Affairs and Provost James Lentini, who will become President at Molloy College in Long Island.

Highlights of the revised organizational structure include:

- Modifications to the organizational leadership will not increase expenditures.
- Responsibilities formerly held by the COO will be distributed among other cabinet members, and a newly created Chief of Staff.
- Enhanced focus on strategic enrollment, research and community engagement.

- Regular meetings of the executive cabinet, full cabinet and forums with deans, who play a vital and invaluable role in the administration of our university.

### **Interim Provost appointed**

Effective June 15, Dr. Michelle Piskulich will serve as interim provost, filling the role to be vacated by Provost Lentini.

Dr. Piskulich, a senior associate provost and associate professor in political science, has consistently demonstrated a thorough understanding of academic priorities and an ability to respond effectively to challenges as they arise. She began as associate provost in the provost's office in 2009, and was promoted to senior associate provost last year.

In the last two months, Dr. Piskulich's tireless work and leadership have been instrumental to our successful transition to remote and online learning. She has worked closely with Provost Lentini for seven years, and I have great confidence in her competence, judgment and work ethic.

She will serve until a permanent Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs and Provost is in place.

The national search was temporarily suspended due to travel restrictions and the widespread uncertainty caused by the coronavirus threat. The search has recommenced.

### **Dean Corcoran to remain at CAS**

I am delighted to announce that Dean Kevin Corcoran will continue in his position as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) until a new dean is appointed and assumes the position. He had previously announced that he would retire in July.

The search for the new CAS Dean is continuing.

We greatly appreciate Dean Corcoran's selfless decision, which provides much-needed stability and is another impressive example of his leadership. Those of us who have worked with and

admire Dean Corcoran realize how typical it is of him to respond in this time of need, and to serve the best interests of the university.

### **We are OU, and We Value You**

One day, all of us will return to campus. We hope that will be soon.

For many of us, it won't be easy. Yet, we must realize that our success will largely depend on our willingness to adapt to the "new reality."

As we consider options in this "new reality," we may also face revenue shortfalls. We are considering every possible measure to remain financially stable and a place where Oakland employees engage in meaningful work; where they are treated fairly and respectfully; and where they feel both gratified and are proud to be employed.

Over the years, Oakland has been an exceptionally stable employer. I want you to know how much I value you and your contributions. What makes Oakland University such a special community is our people.

In all my years in higher education, health care and the private sector, I have never been prouder of my association with a community of dedicated colleagues, many of whom prove themselves day after day as highly principled, selfless public servants.

As a community, we remain OU strong, and we will move ahead together, guided by the values of collaboration, integrity and respect.

In appreciation,

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.  
Oakland University, President