

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

Office of Government and Community Relations

December 2013

Scholarship helps students come back to graduate

Oakland University knows that all students aspire to earn a degree and celebrate the rewarding experience that comes with graduation. The university also understands that sometimes life happens and plans change.

Some students are short a class or two, and for whatever reason – financial situations, illness, a job, family crisis, or some other unexpected circumstance – are unable to complete the requirements for the degree they've worked toward.

To support and encourage these students, the Office of the Registrar has developed the "Don't Be Late To Graduate" scholarship, which is offered to students who have completed at least 80 percent of their major coursework to earn a bachelor's degree.

"This scholarship tells students that Oakland values the degree and your

education. We care about you and we want to remove those barriers, whatever they may be, between you and graduation," said Registrar Steve Shablin.

Brittani Burroughs, the first scholarship recipient, was at a standstill just 12 credits shy of a Bachelor's of Science degree in Health Sciences with a concentration in exercise science when she learned about the initiative.

Burroughs has returned to OU and is currently completing those credits, and expects to graduate in December.

"To me, this scholarship means that my university cares enough about their dedicated students, to meet a need and help them graduate," Burroughs said. "It means that I'm one step closer to becoming the first in my family to earn an undergraduate degree. It's a blessing to be awarded this scholarship."

The initiative was developed by Amy Lindsay, graduation project liaison, and Tricia Westergaard, associate registrar. They collaborated with Oakland's administration and academic advisers to make the scholarship a possibility.

"We focus on the student's future success and everyone needs encouragement," Lindsay said. "We're throwing students a line to come back and complete their degree."

Westergaard estimates that ten percent of the roughly 3,700 students who apply to graduate are not awarded a degree. The sooner a student is able to complete that degree, the less likely it is there will be major changes in requirement.

"There's a limited window of opportunity, and it's easier to keep working towards graduation sooner than later," she said. "We want to help students come back to Oakland."

OU students thrive at archaeological digs in Israel

At a university that boasts many and varied opportunities for undergraduate research and unique academic experiences, perhaps one of the most extraordinary is the Summer Field School in Israel.



Each summer for the past five years, a select group of Oakland University students has flown halfway around the world to get their hands dirty digging at the biblical fortress excavation site of Khirbet Qeiyafa.

Setting the romantic vistas of popular culture aside, these students undertake serious archaeological work and study the history, culture and vast religious significance of the region. They learn proper artifact handling and pottery processing, excavation techniques, drawing of plans, and participate in lectures related to archaeology.

Led by Michael Pytlik, director of Oakland's Judaic Studies program, student and faculty participants spend the months of June and July working at the excavation site, and taking side trips to explore museums, parks, cultural sites and important religious sites of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

"Oakland has been instrumental in the dig making such progress," he said. "Oakland always fields the more ener-

getic group at the site, as the dig director Yossi Garfinkel, from Hebrew University says."

Over the years, archaeologists and students at the dig have uncovered many finds, from pottery and iron tools to architecture, houses, piazzas and city gates.



To learn more about the Summer Field School in Israel, contact Pytlik at pytlik@oakland.edu.



Student diplomats win top honors at regional conference

Oakland University's Model United Nations team recently took first place in competition, with several members earning individual awards for their performances. In all, 13 OU students traveled to Cleveland for the Lake Erie International Model UN Conference, matching wits with students from colleges and universities nationwide.

"I could not be more proud of how our team did," said Dr. Peter Trumbore, team adviser and associate professor of political science.

"Only four of our team members had participated in Model UN before, and so for a team made up mainly of 'rookies' to take first place is a real testament to how hard they worked to prepare themselves to learn not just the rules of procedure, but more importantly to accurately portray the countries they were representing."

During competition, participants were judged based on how well they represented the interests of different countries on actual United Nations committees and organizations. Two OU students, Scott Farida and Sam Hyrns, earned "superior" ratings at the event.

Farida was a member of the conference "A-Team," which required him to represent any country or organization and answer questions posed by other committees. He also received his committee chair's gavel as the most outstanding member of his team. Hyrns represented Syria in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

"The scoring system used by the conference awards the most points to individual delegates for 'staying in character,' so that should give some idea of how well prepared our students were on the substance of the issues and their countries' policy positions," Dr. Trumbore explained.

To prepare for the conference, students

spent weeks learning about the issues – developing research and presentation skills – to effectively advocate for their countries' interests.

Dr. Trumbore added, "Participating in Model UN really helps the students hone their research skills, and we spend a lot of time working on public speaking and debate so that when they get to the conference they are able to make their arguments accurately and present their positions clearly and persuasively. It was really great to see some of the new students really develop a stronger sense of self-confidence during the weeks of preparation and then to have that pay off for them at the conference."

Model UN is open to students of all majors and can be taken as the two-credit course PS 362. This is Oakland's fifth year in the program, and the team has established a consistent record of success at conferences. This February, OU plans to compete in the North American Model United Nations Conference in Toronto. For more information on Oakland's Model UN team, contact Dr. Trumbore at ptrumbor@oakland.edu.

OU forensics team members among best in the U.S.

Thanks to strong showings in regional competition, several members of Oakland University's forensics team recently won the chance to compete on the national stage.



During the past month, the team participated at two events, with members qualifying for national competition in multiple categories. Jeffrey Butts qualified with a third-place ranking in poetry

interpretation, while Steve Killius and Max Sarvello advanced with first- and second-place finishes in prose interpretation.

In forensics competition, students take part in a variety of events in the areas of public speaking, reading, acting and interpretation. Butts, a senior communication major, serves as president of OU's forensics team and describes the competition as a "marathon," in which events are held in rapid succession with little break in between.

"Each category has two rounds, each with one judge," he explained. "From there, they narrow the category down to the top six scores, and those six competitors are sent to the final round. The top overall winners in each category qualify for nationals."

"The team has really enhanced my school experience and has brought a deeper social level to my education," said Butts, who has been involved in forensics since high school. "It's a lot more fun. Before the forensics team, college was simply a chore. Now, I'm invested in the university itself, which definitely gives a sense of pride."

Charles Rinehart, faculty director of the OU forensics team, has high hopes for the entire group.

"As a team, we have about five or six competitions prior to nationals, so hopefully all students can advance," he said, special lecturer in Communication and Journalism. "The team is practicing hard and learning a lot, and that is all I can really ask for."

"We hope to use the experience gained from earlier tournaments to make a big splash there," Rinehart added. "The plan is to have our full team with all events that students have been preparing for since September."

The national competition is slated for April 2014. To learn more, contact Rinehart at rinehart@oakland.edu.

State and National Headlines

CO: Governor's budget plan calls for \$100 million funding increase for higher education

Last week Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper (D) released a blueprint for the upcoming state budget, which included a \$100 million, or 15 percent, funding increase for higher education. The governor's plan would direct \$40 million of the \$100 million for student financial aid. Hickenlooper also indicated that he had a "handshake agreement" with state higher education leaders to limit tuition increases to no more than 6 percent.

The Durango Herald
November 1, 2013

ME: Lawmakers to explore student debt, "tuition free" college in next legislative session

Maine lawmakers are crafting policy proposals for the next legislative session designed to encourage students to pursue higher education and reduce student debt. One lawmaker is calling for examining the "tuition free" program crafted in Oregon; this plan would not charge students tuition during college, instead making them pay back a portion of their earnings for an extended period after graduation. Legislators have signaled that higher education will be a key issue in the upcoming legislative session.

The Associated Press
October 31, 2013

MI: Public universities to extend in-state tuition to all veterans

Michigan's 15 public universities announced on Veterans Day that all U.S. military veterans, regardless of residency status, will be eligible for in-state tuition. According to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, 20 states have laws that extend in-state tuition to all veterans, while seven more have policies in place

to that end.

Associated Press
November 11, 2013

UMass seeks second straight \$40 million state budget increase

Gov. Deval L. Patrick Wednesday said he would do his "very best" to provide a second straight \$40 million increase for the University of Massachusetts system to again freeze tuition and fees for students.

UMass President Robert L. Caret on Wednesday announced that the five-campus system will ask the governor to approve \$519 million for the university in the state budget for the next fiscal year. That would be a \$40 million hike to match this year's increase, which Caret said was the largest in the university's history.

"I'm going to do my very best," Patrick said in a phone interview with *The Republican* when asked if he would include the money sought by Caret in the governor's version of the budget to be unveiled late next month. "We owe it to this generation and generations to come - socially, educationally and economically -- to make sure public higher education is affordable."

The Republican
December 6, 2013

Congress introduces bill to consolidate tax credits for higher education

A pair of lawmakers have introduced legislation to simplify the Tax Code to enable families to more easily afford the cost of higher education.

Reps. Diane Black, R-Tenn., and Danny K. Davis, D-Ill., introduced the Student and Family Tax Simplification Act on Wednesday. The legislation is designed to make it easier and simpler for families to afford the costs of higher educa-

tion by consolidating four separate tax provisions into a single education tax benefit.

The proposed legislation would consolidate the Hope Credit, the American Opportunity Tax Credit, the Lifetime Learning Credit, and the tuition deduction into a single, but more robust American Opportunity Tax Credit. The new AOTC would be permanent and partially refundable and would provide a 100-percent tax credit for the first \$2,000 of eligible higher education expenses and a 25-percent tax credit for the next \$2,000 of such expenses, for a maximum credit of \$2,500.

In addition, the first \$1,500 of the credit would be refundable, meaning that families could receive the benefit regardless of whether or not they have federal income tax liability. The credit could be used to offset expenses for tuition, fees and course materials. It would be available for up to four years of post-secondary education at qualifying four-year universities, community colleges, and trade and vocational schools. The proposed AOTC would begin to phase out for families with incomes between \$86,000 and \$126,000 (half those amounts for single individuals), ensuring that the credit provides the greatest benefit and value to low- and middle-income families.

Accounting Today
November 1, 2013

US: Voters approve bond measures

Maine voters approved three bond measures to enhance higher education facilities during Tuesday's off-year election. Similar measures in Michigan, North Carolina and Wyoming were approved at the local level. Officials cited job creation as a key reason that the measures were approved.

Inside Higher Ed
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State and National Headlines *CONTINUED*

Will UVa become Virginia's first PINO university?

A few months ago, a furor erupted when a University of Virginia committee proposed privatizing the institution. The General Assembly thundered, while well-heeled alumni cheered. President Teresa Sullivan quickly dampened the controversy with a firm denial.

Although the topic has been banished from the Grounds, Virginians who value the university's public character still have reason for concern. Pushed by the General Assembly's long-standing underfunding of higher educa-

tion, U.Va. has taken steps converting it to the commonwealth's first PINO university — Public In Name Only.

As elected officials duck financial responsibility and tuition soars to compensate, admission to U.Va. is increasingly limited to those who can pay, sons and daughters of the wealthy. Gentrification of higher education is a reality in the Old Dominion, and my alma mater — which once served students from all socio-economic strata — is now behaving like a private institution.

Times Dispatch
December 4, 2013