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University Update - August 2019

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

August 12, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

August is here! Our campus is soon to be bustling again. Graduation day may be the best day of the year (in my opinion), but move-in day is a close second. Thanks to the Facilities, ITS and other crews that have gotten us ready to go. And, of course, to everyone in Enrollment Management for their work bringing us a class of around 705 new students!

Click on [First Flight Schedule](#) for information about all starting activities.

Please make a special note of the following:

Monday, August 19: Welcome Back Celebration from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at The Point
Wednesday, August 21: New Student Move-in from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Thursday, August 22: Clap-in the Class of 2024 at 9:00 a.m. along Grove Street
Thursday, August 22: New Student Convocation from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. in Cowan Hall

Budgets

It seems no update letter is complete without a budget update. Last year (2018-19) closed in positive fashion. We ended the year with a deficit of \$2.9 million, about \$1.9 million better than our planned deficit of \$4.8 million. The lion's share of the difference was in lower health insurance costs. Apparently we had a healthy year as a campus, though we cannot count on that every year.

Thanks to the hard work of Susan Bolt, Julie Sosa, and many others we have also make progress on this year (2019-20). We are cautiously optimistic that we are on target with our planned \$2.4 million deficit. Major changes include an increase in funded scholarships (from the STAND Campaign) that will offset some of the unfunded aid. We also believe that additional savings are possible in the health insurance budget.

Advancement

We can congratulate the Institutional Advancement staff (and all of us who donated) for achieving the \$800,000 annual fund goal. Total dollars raised in FY19 were \$4.2 million, a strong year especially for just after a campaign conclusion.

The success of the Where We STAND Matters campaign also contributed to Otterbein receiving the CASE Educational Fundraising Award. The award recognizes exemplary development programs based on a blind review of three years' worth of fundraising data submitted to CASE's AMAtlas Voluntary

Support of Education Survey. Otterbein was recognized for its overall improvement, demonstrating significant program growth during that time period, which includes the conclusion of the campaign. And certainly, we are grateful for another strong showing from our faculty and staff with over 50% participation!

Land

As many of you will recall, at the end of 2012 Otterbein acquired land from the “Braun Farm” located on the East side of Cleveland Avenue over to Alum Creek bisected by Cooper Road. The portion originally acquired was approximately 25 acres south and west of The Point. The remainder of the undeveloped land within Braun Farm has begun to be sold. You will have recently seen a new apartment complex and retirement center on sections of this land.

Rather than a series of unrelated developments bordering our campus, we would certainly prefer a holistic development that could feature retail, dining, and housing options attractive to our faculty, staff, students and the Westerville community at large, as well as commercial developments desired by the City of Westerville. To that end, Otterbein has purchased all remaining acreage within Braun Farm.

Note that the purchase has been structured in such a way to not affect Otterbein’s operating budget, endowment, or other assets in any significant way. It is our intent to engage a development partner to create the environment we desire on this newly acquired land and much of the land we purchased in 2012. Otterbein will benefit from the sale of the land and the development that will follow it. This is our chance to ensure we are nestled between a vibrant Uptown and a new exciting area that will benefit our campus as well as the entire Westerville community for decades to come.

HLC Accreditation

We recently completed our four-year review with the Higher Learning Commission. The four-year reviews do not involve a campus visit, but do involve a full self-study just like the ten-year cycle.

I am pleased to report that we received reaccreditation and a very positive review. In fact, we are not required to complete any further follow-up reports until we face the next report in six years. Being on these HLC review teams myself, such a result is rare and evidence of all our work to serve our students well.

We should especially thank Katherine Reichley, Kathryn Plank, Jeff Ankrom, Gretchen Sasfy, Kristi North, Sean McLaughlin, and Wendy Sherman-Heckler for driving this to such a positive conclusion.

Textbook Affordability

As we focus on affordability and open the doors to higher education to more students with financial need, we also need to think about other costs like textbooks. Several faculty are already using open source textbooks and the Library staff have spearheaded other affordability initiatives.

I have asked Vice President for Enrollment Management Jefferson Blackburn-Smith to convene a group to look at other models for textbook delivery. Distributors like Follett are beginning to offer inclusive packages and textbook publishers are offering Netflix-style subscription services (their full library for a flat fee). I am hoping there are ways to dramatically lower costs and ensure every student can afford books, and have them on the first day of classes or earlier. As the options become clear, we will certainly report back.

ITS

I noted in an earlier announcement that we will soon have a leadership change in Information Technology Services. This provides an opportunity to review our current operation to ensure it is sustainable for ITS staff and the rest of campus. To that end, we have hired an IT consultant named Willie Neumann to embed himself with the ITS staff over the next few months and make recommendations as a result of this work. Willie founded and eventually sold a software company and has been doing consulting and interim-CIO work for many years. His contract CIO and tech consultant positions over the past 15 years have included Donatos, HTP Inc., Assurex, Apprises, Express Scripts, and United Church Homes.

Finally, I couldn't sign off without sharing a few sentiments regarding the recent tragedies in El Paso and Dayton.

As we hold the families of victims and all impacted from these tragic events in our thoughts and prayers, it remains ever so critical that we live our mission here at Otterbein. Our high held values are too important to our community and society not to do so. Racism, hate and other evils are real. That's why we stress values such as diversity, inclusion, and the common good for our communities.

Otterbein has an opportunity to not only send out well educated citizens into the workforce, but people with a sense of purpose and a stronger moral and ethical compass. All lives must be valued and all humanity deserves respect, love and protection.

Thank you all for your work! I'm sure we're off to another wonderful year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Comerford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

John Comerford, Ph.D.
President