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University Update - January 2020

John Comerford

Otterbein University, Comerford1@otterbein.edu

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1 South Grove Street
Westerville, OH 43081-2006
TEL 614-823-1420
FAX 614-823-3114

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

January 30, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back! It seems we are already off and running in another busy semester!

I hope your break was good. We always need to remember that some staff did not get much of a break (thanks OPD and Facilities Services!), but for most of us I hope we got some time away and are back refreshed and ready. I know I am! A few updates as we start the semester:

Enrollment

We have 2,393 total undergraduates enrolled for spring semester. That's 12 more than last spring and right in line with expectations. We have 359 graduate students, which is a decline of 47 from last spring. In total, our revenue for spring enrollment is what we expected.

We are passing into a new phase of fall student recruitment. Applications have slowed and are slightly higher than last year. However, an influx of Theater and Dance applications make that misleading. When removed, our applications are down 3% (74). We have maintained academic standards and also rejected/deferred more students so our total admit pool is down 8% (139). Confirmations now become the critical metric, and we currently have 68 compared to 63 last year. All of this is to say we will need everyone's help with converting our admitted students into confirmed students. I'm sure the Admissions Office will let us all know what we can do.

Braun Farm

You will recall that Otterbein purchased the Braun Farm (south of the Point) a few months ago. The intent has been to create a development that will give us more opportunities for corporate partnerships, dining and retail opportunities for students and employees, a transit hub reducing the need for cars and parking, and a walking community connecting Uptown, campus, and Cleveland Avenue. We have an initial zoning plan ready to present to the City and will also be sharing and taking feedback from campus. Look for information soon on a Town Hall meeting.

Strategic Plan

We have received lots of great feedback from faculty, staff, students, and Trustees. It seems there is near universal agreement with the general thrust of the draft strategic priorities, but plenty of feedback about particular language. The Planning Committee reviewed and approved an updated version this week and is forwarding them to Senate. I think the goals are improved thanks to all the feedback, but know that not every comment was able to be incorporated. Just remember that perfection is not the goal. They will be reviewed annually and be used for our internal purposes of selecting annual operational goals and projects.

Speaking of selecting projects, we will also soon share the process we will use to gather and select ideas for meeting the priorities. Susan Bolt and the Budget Committee have been working on this. As a reminder, this will be new and a little rushed this spring, but will be an annual process in future years that will improve as we learn.

The Point 2.0

We are fortunate to have continued interest from more potential partners who want space in the Point or on campus. There is likely enough interest to justify an additional building or expansion of the Point. Additional space would likely include some additional academic space, but be more focused on tenant space.

We have other capital needs (i.e. Campus Center), so I do not want to start another fund raising drive or make a large withdrawal from our reserves to make this happen. Given the space ought to be self-supporting we are exploring other ways to complete the project, like leasing our ground to a developer. It is early in these discussions, but we are also pursuing state capital funding (like we received for The Point) because that cycle is now and only comes every two years.

One of the largest interested partners is Columbus State Community College. We are finalizing a plan for them to lease some existing spaces in Arts & Communication while a permanent home for them is designed in the new building. We are also starting to plan for shared 2+2 programs once they are on campus. This is an exciting way for Otterbein to capture more transfer students and re-enter the adult degree completion market.

TRHT

We were recently informed that the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) selected Otterbein as one of 23 Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers. My great thanks to Kathryn Plank, Margaret Koehler, James Prysock, Wendy Sherman Heckler, Vaughn Bell (Westerville City Schools), and Cheryl Ward (Columbus City Schools) who worked so hard to make this significant grant possible. This program will be another opportunity for Otterbein to have a leadership role in critical issues in our region and beyond. You can learn more about it from this video:

Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Campus Centers

Coronavirus

As a reminder, in this cold and flu season, it's important to take personal care and seek medical attention if you feel ill. In particular, given the recent news of the coronavirus, let's be reminded of the need to stay calm and avoid making assumptions about others while allowing the medical professionals to make appropriate assessments.

Again, thanks for all you do for our students!

Sincerely,



John Comerford, Ph.D.
President