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University Update- December 2019

Academic Affairs

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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December 2, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

It is hard to believe that there are just a few weeks left in the semester. It has certainly been a busy one for us all, but I know we are getting some great things done.

I returned two weeks ago from a trip to four countries in Asia, visiting alumni and six institutions with which we could form partnerships to enroll students. It was a reminder of how extensive the Otterbein family is (around the world!) and how far our reputation for quality has spread.

Enrollment

Spring registrations for degree-seeking undergraduates are looking solid, up about 68 (3%) above last year for a total of 2,258. Graduate enrollment is still taking shape, but there is concern. We have 16 fewer new students registered at this point (down 29%) and 65 (25%) fewer returning students. I have asked Provost & Sr. VP Wendy Sherman Heckler, Dean of the Graduate School Barb Schaffner, and others to review our graduate programs and form plans to reverse our downward trend.

Fall undergraduate applications are positive, with 1,853 at this point. That's 180 more than last year, with 111 of that increase related to Theater and Dance. Admits are up by 60 (total of 1,086).

Budget

Planning for the 2020-21 capital budget is underway. Possible projects will be shared soon and reviewed by the Budget Committee. We are planning to hold funds back to ensure work on the possible dining hall project is possible. There is no decision on that yet, but we are engaging an architect to make a more complete plan for a dining hall and revised Campus Center renovation for us to consider. There will be several design charrettes and other opportunities for input.

The current year's operating budget has been brought back to its planned deficit of \$2.4 million. Changes included savings from the 1% cut-back discussed in July, planned position reductions and open position savings, projected Health Benefit savings, and additional targeted cut-backs in contracted services. No doubt, these changes (and continued elimination of some vacant positions) involve tough choices for many areas of campus. Future year budgets are still being worked on and will likely include conservative and optimistic projections. We will hope for the best, but also have a plan to reduce expenditures if necessary.

Finally, we have been thinking about Tuition Transparency for the next incoming class. This year's new students were promised a tuition increase of no more than \$600 per year for their four years. Our

proposal is to maintain that promise for the first three years of next fall's new students and commit to no more than \$800 in tuition increases in their final year. We would hope to keep any increase lower, but also need to preserve some flexibility.

Food Service

We had a slow start this school year, with a new provider (Parkhurst) inheriting few returning staff and a variety of equipment issues. They have done an admirable job of staffing up (90 staff now, compared to just 12 left from the last provider) and partnering with Facilities to get everything operational.

Of course, just as things were starting to go smoothly we had a problem – we lost hot water in the building in the middle of a health inspection. Thanks to that and some staff training issues, we have to be inspected again at a later date. I am confident we have solved the issues and will not have a continuing problem.

Academic Affairs Reorganization

There are a number of changes under consideration for Academic Affairs. Without going into detail, the ideas include:

- Merging the CTL Director role with the AVPAA/Dean of University Programs and creating a new Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs.
- Eliminating the Schools/Deans model in favor of empowering Department Chairs and implementing Division Coordinators (faculty with some reassignment from teaching to lead the interface with enrollment and fund raising activities).
- Merging some academic departments to achieve greater parity in department size.

Note that all these concepts are budget-neutral.

It will come as no surprise that these ideas have generated a lot of conversation. Discussion is good, and reasonable people can certainly disagree about structures, resources, and time. I will communicate some additional thoughts to faculty directly, but wanted everyone to be aware of the discussion.

As always, I appreciate all that you are doing for our students!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Comerford', written in a cursive style.

John Comerford, Ph.D.
President