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### University Presidential Update- April 2023

Academic Affairs

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## Campus Update from President Comerford

### President Comerford <PresidentComerford@otterbein.edu>

Fri 1/27/2023 11:25 AM

Dear Colleagues,

Well, that's one way to start the semester - without heat! My thanks to everyone for wearing a sweater and dealing with cool buildings. My special thanks to student affairs staff who spent the weekend ensuring residential students had what they needed. And my very special thanks to a facilities crew that have been working long hours to identify the problem, shut down and restart the plant, find temporary solutions, and now make a permanent fix! We are lucky - truly lucky - to have such a dedicated crew!

Of course, there is always a lot going on so here are some other updates:

#### Enrollment

With less than a week to our census reporting date, we have 1,962 degree seeking undergraduates enrolled this spring, about 40 fewer than we were anticipating. It seems the retention of what we could call the "COVID classes" that started in 2020 and 2021 continues to be off pace. The good news is that new students from this past fall had a much more normal fall-to-spring return rate of 95%.

Add to this, 242 graduate students and 69 non-degree seeking students and we have 2,273 total students this term.

This time of year, we also start to get some idea of how next fall might look. The application pool looks to be slightly smaller than last year (3,123 vs. 3,245). The same goes for admitted students (2,368 vs. 2,391). It is very early for deposits, which are also similar (54 vs. 71). The numbers are closer to where we were in early 2021 (we enrolled a larger class in '21 than '22) when we had 3,240 applicants, 2,307 admits and 56 deposits.

Last year was a smaller class than we wanted, so it all comes down to yield and whether our new initiatives will work. We already know that one has not. Our partnership with Red Cedar International has not resulted in more international applications. We will instead seek to establish more direct pipelines in future years, like our 3+2 program with the Shanghai Publishing and Printing College.

The other two initiatives ought to still have impact. We are just sending out the first financial aid packages. Students eligible for both Pell and OCOG grants will see their full need for tuition met without loans. We expect this more generous offer will see a return of lower income and first generation students we have been missing in the last few classes. Also, many students will find an additional housing grant. Hopefully this will encourage a return to residence halls. We have seen much more lost revenue in room and board than tuition over the past few years. Plus, I suspect more commuting students has negatively impacted retention.

#### System

Separate newsletters go out with details about our work with Antioch, so I will not repeat all of that information here. We are excited to be partnering with Ologie, a Columbus-based brand and marketing firm, on a process to identify the name of the new System and establish the System brand architecture.

We have just submitted our application to the Higher Learning Commission for the Change of Control necessary to create the jointly managed system. My great thanks to Katherine Reichley, Wendy Sherman-Heckler, Susan Bolt, Jefferson Blackburn-Smith, Bridget Newell, and many others who have spent countless hours compiling all the information for the report and additional due diligence materials. It has been a real

team effort with our friends at Antioch!

I would also note that we continue to see more of our faculty and staff engaging with Antioch faculty and staff. And the results are always positive and impressive. We are truly excited about many of the ideas coming out of discussions about adult programs in Psychology, Education, Business, Nursing, and Health & Sport Sciences. One thing has become clear - there are simply too many opportunities to chase them all simultaneously. So, we expect a multi-year phasing of movement of Otterbein grad programs to the system and launch of new programs and locations.

### COVID

The work of the Protect the Nest group has continued, led now by Beth Kidwell. They have remained in touch with Franklin County Public Health for guidance. The tone from these experts has shifted over the past few months - COVID is no longer their primary concern. A difficult flu season and Columbus measles outbreak are much higher on the list. COVID can be managed by individuals making good decisions about vaccination and boosters, isolation if ill, and mask wearing if there are special concerns.

This is all to say that changes to campus COVID protocols are being considered. Our commitment is to stay within the experts' guidelines. Watch for more information soon as we work through how to shift to a more permanent approach to COVID.

### Merit Pay

I am pleased to say that meaningful progress is being made in creating processes for merit pay. The faculty had a subcommittee come up with a proposal whereby faculty's regular performance reviews would place them into one of three categories. Faculty meeting basic expectations (the vast majority) would receive an increase, a limited number of faculty who are going above-and-beyond would be eligible for an additional increase, and those faculty not meeting basic expectations would not receive an increase.

Of course, it's more complicated than that and I am truly grateful to the working group for creating what seems to be an equitable, thoughtful, and inclusive process. The faculty and still working through the proposal, so nothing is final.

I'd also like to thank Molly Miller who has been working with a staff group on a new annual evaluation process for staff that can drive compensation decisions. Much more to come on this front!

### Final Thought

As part of the HLC process to create the system, we had to report out on all of Otterbein's accomplishments since our last accreditation review in 2015. Wendy took the lead and among other things had the unenviable task to rereading all my updates for the past five years! Her conclusion? Holy cow - we've done a lot!

A compensation study and equity increases, a new faculty pay scale, program review and discontinuance, a new program review process, a presidential debate and visits from Arnold Schwarzenegger to Captain America, recovering from a cyber attack, an entire COVID response and recovery plan, a new strategic plan and process, the establishment of an innovation fund and its first projects, new programs from a Masters in Athletic Training to Otterbein READY/Every Student Will, phase one of renovating our Campus Center, stable and even increased fundraising during an uncertain period, refinancing of all university bonds, a new budget forecasting model...I could keep going, but you get the point.

It has been a lot. It may make you tired (it does me!), but I hope it makes you proud too. We have accomplished so much together and I'm convinced we're just getting warmed up!

Sincerely,



John Comerford, Ph.D.  
President



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