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### 2014 Letter to the Campus on Official Census Reports

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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September 23, 2014

Dear Members of the Otterbein Community,

Last Monday, September 15, was our Census Day. We now have the official enrollment figures for 2014-2015. I have attached the Census Report for your review. Tomorrow, September 24, the campus community is invited to attend an informal Town Hall Meeting in Riley Auditorium from 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. The primary purpose of the session is to discuss the Census Report -- trends, challenges, successes -- as well as present an opportunity to engage with Cabinet members about topics of interest to the university community. The suggestion for this format emerged in one of the “Join the Conversation” coffees last year. The idea was to encourage more dialogue, more informal exchange, more opportunities for explanation and understanding, and less focus on formal presentations. Cabinet members will provide a few brief highlights of the results of the Census Report and its impact, as well as discuss the work that they are doing in preparation for the Board of Trustees meeting in late October. Please review the attached Census Report prior to the meeting and come prepared with questions for Cabinet members.

#### **Official Census Results**

Final count for the entering freshman class was 562, a decrease of just 9 students from Fall 2013. Given the significant decline we experienced in the number of applications received, this is very good news. The freshman class has a significantly higher enrollment of men (238, 42%) than Otterbein has seen for the last several years, as well as more students of color (90, 16%) and students from Columbus City Schools (27 compared to 6 in 2013.) The Admissions team and all faculty and staff who participated in the recruitment process deserve our congratulations for bringing in the class. The entering class also includes 65 transfer students, compared to last year's 73, and 34 adult students, compared to 53 for Fall 2013.

Overall undergraduate enrollment total headcount is 2,343, a decline of 136 students from last year's undergraduate headcount of 2,479. This drop in undergraduate enrollment can be attributed to many factors: more students graduating in 4 years or less, a decrease in persistence rates from sophomore to junior year, fewer high school students taking Otterbein classes, and the continued decline in Adult enrollment (a decrease of 48 students in the adult population). Graduate enrollment is up slightly this fall with a total of 449, compared to 440 last year. Overall headcount stands at 2,792, a net loss of 127 students from Fall Semester 2013. First year retention improved for the third year in a row, climbing 1% to 77.4% (our goal is 82% by 2020); however, we did see a decline in persistence from second to third year of 1.7%.

Based on the decrease in our applicant pool, we had anticipated a decline of up to 100 full-time undergraduates (the actual decline in full-time undergraduates according to our census was 71). Because of the expected decline in enrollment, in consultation with the Total Compensation Committee and the Budget Committee, we prepared a conservative budget last spring and presented it to the Board of Trustees in May. The budget reductions that were absorbed by units across campus included both one-time and base reductions.

Now that we have the official census numbers, the Budget Office and Institutional Research are working together to determine the financial impact of the enrollment decline and the mix of full-time and part-time students and financial aid in affecting planning for both the current academic year as well as FY 2016. The final budget for this fiscal year and an initial framework for Fiscal Year 2016 will be presented to the Board of Trustees at their meeting in October.

As Vice President for Enrollment Management Jefferson Blackburn-Smith shared last year at University Summits and in the Institutional Updates, the decline in high school graduates in Ohio and throughout the Midwest is certainly a factor contributing to enrollment challenges at our institution. High school graduation numbers are at their lowest point since the 1970s. Both public and private institutions have ramped up recruitment efforts, restructured financial awards, announced tuition reductions, adopted guaranteed tuition plans, and so on, to position them to meet their enrollment targets. We are clearly seeing the impact of the increasingly competitive environment and declining numbers in the size of our entering classes. The Ohio private universities shared enrollment data this week; of the 22 members (of 49) that shared, 59% had smaller freshman classes than 2013 and 72% missed their original Freshman enrollment goal.

The State of Ohio has been singled out in some reports as one of the most challenging environments for higher education institutions because of the combination of the declining number of high school graduates along with the diverse array of higher education options for students. We have many excellent independent undergraduate institutions, 24 two-year and technical colleges, and 13 public universities.

The demographic challenge of declining graduates is combined with increasing scrutiny and cynicism in the media regarding the value of a college degree, and specifically the value of an undergraduate liberal arts degree. The bond rating agency, Moody's, continues to issue a negative outlook for higher education primarily tied to enrollment declines, affordability concerns and poor revenue diversification.

In addition, we are experiencing increasing pressure from families searching for the most affordable pathway to a college degree. Their goals often focus on identifying the lowest cost education rather than assessing the relative quality of education.

As we move forward with implementing our strategic plan and soliciting support for our comprehensive campaign, I would ask all members of our community to communicate the value of an Otterbein education clearly and frequently. We must also demonstrate that value in our day-to-day interactions with current and prospective students and parents as we begin the recruitment cycle for 2015-2016. In addition, we will continue to build on our success in attracting a more diverse full-time undergraduate student population, expanding our partnerships to increase the number of international students, and re-thinking our adult degree-completion program.

As we continue to work toward establishing a sustainable model for Otterbein, which will ultimately help us achieve our vision, it is important for all of us to understand the challenges we are facing. I am confident that we will come together as a model community not only to overcome those challenges but to build a strong and vibrant future. Thank you for all that you continue to do for our beloved Otterbein.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Kathy A. Krendl". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy A. Krendl  
President