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University Presidential Update- January 2024

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From: President Comerford <PresidentComerford@otterbein.edu>

Sent: Wednesday, January 10, 2024 8:33 AM

Subject: Campus Update from President Comerford

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back! I had a little fun with it on [Instagram](#), but it's also true – winter break is a little long. I'm ready to be back and I hope you are too!

A few updates as we start a new term:

Moves

I have noted before that we are working to reduce our campus footprint, especially in houses. We still have a number of offices in houses, which can lead to faculty/staff disconnection, accessibility and visibility issues.

With the new year, we have vacated Howard House (across from Roush) and moved our friends from Marketing & Communication into Roush Hall. Check out their new digs in the lower level. You may also notice a new small computer lab on the first floor of Roush (where the Roost Express used to be) that replaces the larger lab that had been in the IT offices.

We are also consolidating some faculty offices in Roush and Towers to ensure departments are close together. These moves will occur over the summer.

Moving offices is slow work, so expect more information over the next few years. Relevant people are being engaged as we go.

Kasich Institute

In an update a while back, I mentioned the idea of working with former Governor Kasich on a project that would enhance our society and democracy. I'm pleased to report we are working on a Center that would be dedicated to the advancement of character development and critical thinking. It would be for our students, but have a much larger audience. It would be non-partisan and feature an annual signature lecture, a forum demonstrating how to disagree without being disagreeable, and a website and supporting materials into the wider region.

We are beginning to form a steering committee, seek foundation and other funding, and engage with faculty and staff with programs likely to link to this work. More to come as this

hopefully takes shape, but I am excited to have another opportunity to raise Otterbein's profile as a force for social good.

Innovation Fund Projects

As you know, we've invested in a number of projects over the past few years designed to generate a return, most often through enrollment. I wanted to give you a brief update on where each one stands:

Esports Team – We are pleased to welcome our new coach, Nevin Horne, who just started. He has already begun recruitment, with 144 applicants expressing interest in the team. We're also finalizing plans to make an "arena" for Esports. We have state funding for the Point that can be applied to the project.

Women's Wrestling Team – We promoted Brent Rastetter to serve as Director of Wrestling, overseeing the strategic direction of both the men's and women's programs. We hired an Associate Head Coach for Women's Wrestling, Chris Kline, who will run the day-to-day operations for the women's team. Being only the 3rd OAC school to add a women's program, we're seeing strong interest with over 25% of all Senior women wrestlers in the state of Ohio having already visited campus this fall/winter. Coach Kline's first prospect camp this past weekend brought in 37 more women to campus, three of whom have already verbally committed to attend Otterbein next fall.

BSN Recruiter – Erin Cameron joined the team in September and has hit the ground running. Students interested in Nursing can now tour the labs and meet with an advisor any day of the week. And Erin has visited 7 fairs and high schools. Applications for Nursing are up 25% at this point over last year.

Equestrian Team Rider Recruiter – Alex Cernelich has taken this part-time role and has visited 4 equine events across the region. Applications for the Equine majors are up 58%, but that is only a partial measurement of early impact. We've also seen an uptick of 12% in interest in the Equine Team from all majors.

Retention Success Coach – This was among the first Innovation Fund proposals approved two years ago. We hired Ky Crook into the role, and saw retention increase in the target population from 53% to 61% this past fall. Given that success, Senate recommended funding the project for a second year (this year) and we hired an additional coach, Elwopp Hall, to work on the Success Coaching Team. They, along with Cornell Lewis, are working with around 85 first year students this fall.

Marching Band Associate Director – The search for this new full-time role dedicated to recruiting band members to Otterbein yielded several strong candidates, but we were unable

to secure a hire this cycle. The proposal may be considered again in the next round in innovation funding.

STEM External Liaison – Woodie Colley joined us in September and has hosted 2 campus visits and make 8 visits to specialty high school science programs and events. Applications to STEM programs are up 16.6% and our targeted programs are up too – Physics (22%), Chemistry (23%) and Environmental Science (5%).

I would note, finally, that our applications are strong this cycle – up 14% overall. That’s encouraging, but we know students are applying to more schools than ever. It will be converting them to actual enrolled students through personal outreach that will truly make the difference.

Facilities

You may have seen the sad news that Patrick Siconolfi has left Otterbein. This is a critical time in Facilities with the Campus Center project, sustainability energy projects, and staff union negotiations on-going.

A search has been launched and we already have strong candidates.

The Assistant Directors (Gary Johnson, Jim Smith, Loren Stone) will be taking on some additional project leadership and Michael Greitzer will be on-campus several days a week to offer interim leadership. Michael is Antioch’s University Director for Real Estate and Strategic Initiatives. While not a “shared service,” this is another example of our ability to leverage the resources of the Coalition.

Otterbein READY Day

Finally, the Planning Committee (which is charged with the University calendar, among other things) is considering a change for the 2025/26 year. The idea is to add an “Otterbein READY Day” focused on career connection and development. We would have different tracks for different class years – for example, major exploration for first years and mock interviews for seniors. Alumni would return to campus to share their career paths. We would have soft-skill development in receptions, etiquette meals, and other settings.

This would be a day mid-week where regular classes would not occur. It would not be a “day off” for students, faculty or staff. The goal would be to ensure every class, club, sport, etc. integrates the day’s learning opportunities into their requirements.

The goal here is student career readiness, but also making Otterbein more distinctive. The READY program will guarantee applied learning that will help students achieve their career goals. This day of focus would be part of how we make that happen.

If you have question or comments, feel free to connect with Leah Schuh or Jen Bechtold, or contact your Planning Committee representative.

Welcome back to another great semester! Go Cards!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Comerford".

John Comerford, Ph.D.
President

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