MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In the past few weeks, OU has faced a number of challenges, none more serious than an intentional racist incident that left our students and employees concerned that there is still much to do together to ensure a welcoming and safe environment on our campuses. I can assure you that my resolve to address racism and disrespect is strong. We are formulating focused measures that examine and address our commitment as Sooners to create a caring and supportive environment free of racism and bigotry for all students and employees.

Resolve is a word that I have used frequently since Janet and I returned to our university to serve its students, faculty and staff as well as the state of Oklahoma. I am resolved: to hold tuition flat in the near term so that our university is accessible to all qualified students; to pay competitively to attract and retain distinguished professional and academic leaders; to double research that then drives the economy of our state; and to make OU Medicine the provider of choice in Oklahoma. I derive my resolve from my love of the University and from our students who aspire to greatness.

There has been significant progress in the past several months and I want to update you on our road map for the University’s next years:

Accessibility

OU attracts some of the brightest students in Oklahoma and the nation. But we have also created barriers that I want to remove for Oklahoma citizens who desire to attend college to improve their lives and contribute to our state’s economy. **I’m pleased to report that OU did not increase tuition in the 2018-19 academic year and we are scheduled to hold fees flat for the upcoming academic year.**

Competitive Compensation

Talented students are drawn to faculty who are leaders in their field and outstanding teachers. Our Norman faculty had not had an across-the-board increase in wages since 2014. Using similar research universities as our market benchmark comparison, Norman faculty were being paid 92 percent of the market benchmark average. **We are making competitive wages for all our faculty and staff at all campuses a high priority. I am pleased to share that our first step was implementing raises for Norman faculty effective in January 1, 2019.**

Doubling Research to Drive the Economy of Our State

We need to revitalize our research efforts at all campuses. Properly executed, this research effort could become the growth engine of our state. OU already has national recognition for weather and storm research. Other areas prime for investment and growth include energy, aeronautical engineering and information technology. We have set an aggressive target of doubling research in the next five years. **With that emphasis since I came to the University, we have experienced an 8.5 percent growth in research awards and contracts compared to the same period last year.**
Making OU Medicine the Provider of Choice in Oklahoma

OU Medicine is already one of the largest providers of health care in Oklahoma. Staffed by leading researchers, clinicians and faculty, the question is how can we do an even better job of serving the state and contribute to raising the health levels of Oklahomans. We’ve already made progress. The OU Stephenson Cancer Center was awarded the National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation this last summer, recognizing it as being in the top 2 percent of providers nationwide. How fortunate we are to have this Center in our state. Harold Hamm Diabetes Center just hired a world-renowned scientist as its director. Jed Friedman, Ph.D., will lead our mission to create a research and treatment center for diabetes, a disease that plagues our state and the nation.

How do we commit the resources to achieve these important goals? The University’s finances have been strained in recent years with debt at a per-student ratio higher than most public universities. Building initiatives also strained resources. Our state has reduced its support for higher education following a nationwide trend — but we can create our own “self-help” to spark our initiatives. Our diligent staff has already found more than $30 million in operational savings that do not affect the classroom and offer us maneuverability to make progress on research and competitive salaries. Our work continues on this front. We will maintain the momentum and find additional efficiencies.

We want to create investable ideas for our civic leaders to support. We want to show that OU is part of the solution to growing Oklahoma’s economy by creating businesses and providing talented, high-tech employees. And, we want to be excellent stewards of the money our state leaders and our supporters entrust to us.

Many have asked me how they can help or offered thoughtful advice and encouragement. I am sincerely grateful for those gestures of support. Others have asked what future fundraising priorities will be. My answer is simple – scholarships for students, stipends for graduate students, and endowments for our best and brightest faculty and new hires. We will focus on “human capital” now, as we have done much great work in the recent past on creating an exceptional educational environment.

We are first and foremost focused on our students’ success. We have ambitions to become leaders in research. We want to expand the reach of Oklahoma’s best physicians — those who not only spend time in the clinic but also in the classroom and the lab. We want to make a great education available to those across our state. We will quickly resolve our financial issues through self-help and prove we are strong stewards of students’ tuition and fees, and taxpayer and donor dollars. You can also be assured that my administration and our faculty will steadfastly remain committed to creating a culture and attitude of respect for each and every person who joins our university community. I have seen first-hand the pain associated with racist acts. It has doubled my resolve to address conditions that foster these attitudes. I am also proud of our students who stood together in the face of these incidents, spoke out against racism and created #BetterTogether to affect change. Our students want more, and I am determined to respond.

Winning is part of the OU tradition. Winning fairly and being champions — whether it’s in the classroom, on the athletic field, or in our attitudes — will continue to be who we are and what I am resolved to create. I hope you will join me for the next chapter in OU’s storied tradition of greatness.

James L. Gallogly
President