

OU plan gets poor marks on student issues

BY RALPH R. EGGINAW
STAFF WRITER

Something is missing from Oakland University's official strategic plan, said board of trustees chairman David Fischer and vice chairman Rex Schleybaugh Jr. — students.

The plan was given for discussion Tuesday at an all-day powwow of the OU board at the Troy Marriott Hotel.

The 28-page plan is the result of 19 months of work by 167 people, including seven board members, 72 trustees, 61 administrators and nine students.

Theoretically, the plan will be a blueprint for Oakland's future, in that whatever changes are made or programs started will be done with the aim of reaching the goals in the plan.

But there is scant mention of students in the plan, said Schleybaugh and Fischer.

Students are good

"That's something we've got to go back to the drawing board and deal with," Schleybaugh said. "(Students) are customers, and we ought to recognize that."

"Our students don't believe that we appreciate them," Fischer said, adding that perhaps we need to say to the students that they're the most important thing

we've got. I'd like to see something (in the plan) that talks about the students specifically."

Schleybaugh likewise lamented the lack of a reference to student athletics in the strategic plan.

"Is someone looking at athletics as a way to increase our reputation?" he asked. College sports, Schleybaugh said, create a sense of community within the university itself and in the surrounding area as well.

Considering the poor record of the Detroit Lions until recently, Schleybaugh said, OU might have done quite well with a decent football team.

"I identify with Rex and support him 200 percent," said trustee James Sharp Jr.

"National eminence"
Trustees also tossed around the idea of becoming one of the really prestigious universities in America.

To do so, trustees seemed to agree, the overall quality of incoming students would have to be raised.

"You can't make a 12-second, 100-yard-dash person into a 9.8-second, 100-yard-dash person," Schleybaugh said.

"That's a decision we have to make," trustee David Hildebrand said. "What sort of student do we

want to educate?"

"We currently serve a slightly better than average student," said OU President Sandra Packard. "In my view, our job is to educate the bright and able student, but not necessarily the Harvard student."

Even if OU should choose to seek out the smartest freshmen, said vice president of finance Paul Bissonette, "The high-achievement students are probably going to be beyond our reach."

Breakdown
The plan is broken down into nine sections called "strategies."

Strategy One says that OU considers "undergraduate education as central to its mission and will ensure an environment of learning excellence."

Strategy Five says "research is one of Oakland University's greatest strengths and will be encouraged, funded and aggressively supported."

Strategy Three promises students "an environment rich in human diversity with dedicated

support services, extensive non-classroom activities and outstanding instructional residential and recreational facilities."

Strategy Seven says that OU "will develop and fund areas of institutional excellence and distinction that contribute to national eminence."

Strategy Eight says OU "will create an empowered community of diverse, unified, committed and motivated employees."

Schleybaugh warned against the danger of creating an unrealistic, pie-in-the-sky strategic plan.

"What I don't want to do is create a mission statement that is doomed to failure," he said. "I don't want to lose sight of the fact that we can't manage this by mottoes and slogans. We've got to temper our strategic plan with a little reality of what we're prepared to do."

Trustee Stephan Sharp put it in analogous terms. "If you want to eat an elephant, you take one bite at a time," he said.

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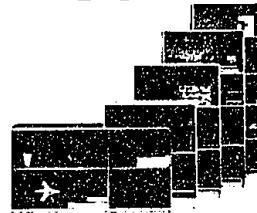
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