

# OU associate professor returns to classroom

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

As the fall semester gets underway at Oakland University, officials are negotiating a final settlement to bring some closure to what might be called the Chaudhry affair.

Associate professor G. Ransul Chaudhry was back in the classroom this fall and seeking to resume his research after being vindicated from a suspension that, besides devastating his self-esteem, came close to ending his previously unblemished career.

"A good part of my life is gone," Chaudhry told *The Chronicle* of Higher Education which featured the episode in its August edition.

"That suspension was overturned in July when an arbitrator ruled Chaudhry had done nothing wrong while studying the survivability of viruses, including HIV, in waste water. The arbitrator implied OU had mishandled the episode and ordered OU to compensate Chaudhry for losses sustained when he was suspended from his \$48,892-a-year position.

Last week — the beginning of the first full semester after his vindication — Chaudhry said the

wounds were beginning to heal. "I'm reuplifting for research grants," said the Rochester Hills resident. "And (getting) on with my career."

OU will be one step nearer closure once it negotiates a dollar amount for the compensation the arbitrator ordered. Officials from OU and its chapter of the American Association of University Professors were reportedly close last week, although no dollar amounts were mentioned.

Even when those negotiations are concluded, however, at least one major question will linger: "How will the Chaudhry affair

impact OU in the long run?" If, as some officials believe, OU is trying to make it as a prestigious institution that values both research and teaching, how would the Chaudhry affair eventually be viewed? Would the Chaudhry affair hurt the university? Or, would the scientific community view OU as more mature for having gone through the experience?

"It depends on whether or not the university learned anything," Chaudhry said last week. "It's one thing to make a mistake (as many agree his suspension was), and another thing to learn from it."

Eileen M. Bantel, executive director of the OU chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Friday said she simply doesn't know how the Chaudhry affair will impact OU in the long run. The 400 AAUP members at OU were divided on whether or not Chaudhry was ethical and professional in his handling of the research. But they were unanimous about his getting the full benefit of their labor agreement.

"Some of our members don't think Chaudhry should have won the arbitration," Bantel said Friday. "But they all believe he was entitled to due process."

As for the ultimate impact, Bantel shook her head. "Remember, we're still negotiating his compensation."

The issue would be less prickly if the arbitrator had simply ordered back pay for Chaudhry, which he did. But the arbitrator also instructed OU to consider "other benefits" as part of the compensation.

Nobody could put a price on the damage to Chaudhry's reputation, both sides acknowledge. But what about money he would have received from research grants?

A separate, but related concern is the atmosphere at and around Dodge Hall where many of OU's scientists share facilities, among other things.

Fay Hansen-Smith, an associate professor of biology who com-

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plained about Chaudhry's procedures, acknowledged some misgivings last week. However, she did not want to elaborate because of a civil suit from Chaudhry still pending against her.

But she did say her complaints stemmed from concern. She was concerned about the safety of students, faculty members and others who she claims were unaware of Chaudhry's research involving HIV, polio and other potentially hazardous materials.

Hansen-Smith is also concerned about the arbitrator's ruling. She questions whether an arbitrator — with a legal background — can or should interfere with efforts of the university's science community to monitor and protect students and faculty.

Chemistry professor Michael D. Sevilla — who initially complained about Chaudhry and whose daughter was one of the students who underwent HIV testing — last week said it would take time to assess the full impact of the Chaudhry episode.

He said some faculty members were disturbed after Chaudhry attributed the complaints against him, and his ultimate suspension to co-worker jealousy and prejudice. "But many of us saw that as a natural reaction on his part," Sevilla said.

Sevilla said he agreed with Robert A. Bender, a biologist from the University of Michigan who in the "Chronicle" article likened the Chaudhry affair to "growing pains" as OU evolves into a major university.

"But I'm not sure we needed those growing pains," Sevilla said.

Donald A. McCrimmon, OU's

director of grants, contracts and sponsored research, believes the university is ultimately stronger because of the Chaudhry affair.

"Did it hurt while we were going through it?" he asked. "Yes."

"But are we stronger for having gone through it? Definitely."

McCrimmon noted that OU now has a complete manual on handling biomedical materials — something the arbitrator faulted the university for not having in force at the time Chaudhry came under fire.

Furthermore, he said, OU now has some experience in handling allegations of scientific misconduct.

One concrete indication that OU has not suffered — at least financially — because of the Chaudhry affair is the amount of research grants the university receives.

Figures are not final, but OU has received about \$9.1 million in research grants for 1996-97, according to William W. Connelan, compared to \$8.2 million the previous year. Most of that came from federal sources that were very likely aware of the Chaudhry affair, the acting vice president of academic affairs said.

Equally encouraging, said McCrimmon, is the \$600,000 grant OU received from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. "When an institution gets a Hughes grant," he said, "it's a very good sign."

In the long run, however, McCrimmon said what happens in the next few years is more important. "What OU does in the future will matter a lot more than anything in the past, including the Chaudhry affair."

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