

Opening Day assembly addresses challenges, plans for 2009-11

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/2173/opening-day-assembly-addresses-challenges-plans-for-2009-11/>

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh leaders identified major challenges resulting from a \$13.6 million biennial budget shortfall and shared strategies for contending with those challenges at the annual Opening Day assembly Sept. 8.

- Read Chancellor Richard H. Wells' full address, titled "The Silver Strategy: Moving UW Oshkosh Forward Strategically During Tough Times," at www.uwosh.edu/chancellor/communications.php.
- Watch a webcast of the Opening Day assembly at iTunesU: www.uwosh.edu/itunes.

Rather than make large unilateral cuts to all departments — which would dramatically reduce budgets across campus, eliminating approximately 250 positions — the Governor, Wisconsin Legislature, UW System, UW Oshkosh administration and campus governance leadership worked to create strategic alternatives, including a tuition increase of 5.5 percent over the next two years for students in households making more than \$60,000 annually; the implementation of state-mandated furlough days for employees over the course of the next two years, resulting in the 3 percent reduction in the full-time equivalent workforce; and the rescinding of the 2 percent pay-plan increase for non-represented faculty and staff.

Nevertheless, the preferred approach in dealing with the consequences of the \$13.6 million budget shortfall presents major challenges in keeping higher education affordable for all qualified students, maintaining high quality in the face of furloughs and enrollment increases, and mitigating the negative effects on employee morale caused by a reduced workforce and wages.

"If we agree that these three concerns — affordability, quality and morale — represent our three biggest challenges, then our best option would be to strategically reinvest in initiatives, both existing and new, that directly address them," said Chancellor Wells.

One example of how the University plans to contend with all three of these challenges is through the allocation of \$500,000 from the strategic initiatives and "rainy day" funds to support an innovative student-employment program that would provide students with high-impact learning and working opportunities: the Student Titan Employment Program (STEP). Students will benefit by earning money while working on unique projects and engaging in applied learning, even as University departments benefit from having student assistants.

- Read more about STEP at www.uwosh.edu/news?p=69.
- To learn how the rainy day fund was developed, see the PowerPoint presentation at www.uwosh.edu/chancellor/documents/Budget_Forum_3-31-09.ppt.

The need for cost-containing measures comes even as enrollment continues to climb above 13,000. The University expects to see approximately 400 more students than in 2008-2009.

“It is a testament to our outstanding deans, department chairs, faculty and staff that we are providing our students with more seats in classrooms despite shrinking resources,” said Provost Lane Earns. “The challenge is now to maintain quality and high-impact learning opportunities despite larger class sizes.”

- Read more about 2009-2010 enrollment stats at www.uwosh.edu/today/?p=2151.

Chancellor Wells reminded those gathered that the University’s successes are marked by the accomplishments of its talented and dedicated employees. Sixteen faculty and staff members were recognized with awards and professorships for their contributions in moving the institution’s mission forward.

- Read about the Opening Day awards recipients: www.uwosh.edu/news?p=2170.

In spite of the UW System-wide budget shortfall, UW Oshkosh is not freezing resources altogether. Job searches for an additional two-dozen faculty positions that support strategic initiatives will continue, thanks to a \$4 million, 2007-2009 biennial budget investment from the Governor and State Legislature for the Growth Agenda for Wisconsin.

“Strategic cuts and enhancements are characterized by making tough choices and tradeoffs, combining complementary activities and choosing initiatives that re-enforce one another,” Wells said.

Following the chancellor’s address, other UW Oshkosh administrators presented an overview of additional strategic initiatives for the 2009-2011 biennium designed to address affordability, quality and workload challenges:

- Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services Thomas Sonnleitner announced that the newly relocated and remodeled Campus Services Center is now open, making way for the University’s 175,000-square-foot academic center, slated to start serving students in fall 2011.
- Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Petra Roter shared an update on the construction of a new Student Success Center — formerly Elmwood Commons — which will bring student academic support services across campus to one central, convenient location.
- Roter also spoke of enduring programs that help students overcome obstacles to achieve success, including the Students at Risk Response Team (SARRT) and the Student Financial Emergency Response Team (SFERT).
- UW Oshkosh Foundation President Arthur Rathjen shared that following the success in fundraising for the new academic center, the pride.purpose.promise campaign is focusing on scholarships and funding for high-impact learning initiatives. Despite the economic recession, donors continue to step up and support students through efforts like the Student Emergency Loan Fund, he said. Read more about the campaign at www.uwosh.edu/foundation/campaign.

- Provost Earns emphasized that while some areas are facing cuts, others have been protected or held harmless, such as the Professional Productivity Fund and External Grant Expansion Fund. Still other initiatives will receive enhancements, including the University Honors Program, the International Education Program and Polk Library.

“These strategies will lessen but, of course, not eliminate the negative consequences of our challenges. Therefore, we will continue to implement new innovations while remaining steadfast in our mission to serve the knowledge needs of the people of Wisconsin’s New North and beyond,” said Wells, encouraging faculty and staff to contribute additional ideas to their administrative and governance leaders.

Other Opening Day articles

- [Early numbers show enrollment continuing to rise](#)
- [Seen on campus: Move-In Day](#)
- [2009-10 sees more than 100 new faculty, staff](#)
- [15 faculty, staff members honored Opening Day](#)
- [Opening Day Assembly addresses challenges, plans for 2009-11](#)
- [Innovative student employment program provides high-impact learning opportunities](#)
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