



To the Oakwood Family,

April 20, 2020 is a day that will go down in history at Oakwood University because of a unanimous vote taken by the Oakwood University Board of Trustees. But the story leading to the vote began much earlier—in August of 2019, when in a meeting of the Oakwood University President’s Council, we members were kneeling in prayer and agonizing over the many students who could not return to complete their Oakwood education because they could not financially clear.

Upon completing our prayer season, as we were being reseated, I felt an overwhelming impression of the Holy Spirit to ask a question that I had never asked our leaders before. In having to watch so many students burdened with financial clearance anxiety, I asked the group, “What if we were willing to step out in radical, revolutionary faith, in total dependence, and ask God to use us to create an Oakwood in which no student was ever turned away due to a lack of finance?” The quiet response tearful response from the members of President’s Council was a relieved “Yes” and “Amen!” Our working name for the effort was the “No Student Turned Away” Taskforce. The group of 5 worked steadily, but quietly—Colwick, Wilson, David Richardson, Sabrina Cotton, and David Knight. The group asked Prudence Pollard to serve as chair. Their first formal meeting was Sept 10, 2019. The spent 9 months in careful and prayerful research on trends in higher education and the socio-economic status of our principal populations, analyzing barriers to completion, and planning for how families can bridge the gaps in financing their education. And the biggest driver, was the Biblical imperative “And ALL thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children.” Isaiah 54:13. (See the link to the Rationale that I provided upon request by the committee).

On April 19 the completed proposed plan was presented to 7 subcommittees of the Oakwood University Board. It was voted unanimously by each group. The reaction by then Board Chair, Elder Dan Jackson, North American Division President, was felt by all, “Once again, Oakwood University is looking into the future and moving its institution accordingly. Once again, this institution is not waiting—it is being proactive.” And our new Chairman of the Board, Dr. G. Alexander Bryant, Executive Secretary of the NAD, who chaired the Student services subcommittee, where the plan was first vetted, said, “In my 20 years of chairing this committee, this is the most important thing we have ever voted. We have built building, and made other decisions, but nothing equals this. Families have been waiting for this. It is revolutionary, not just for Oakwood, but for all of Adventist education. It will have an impact not only on this generation but for generations to come.” Many Oakwood Board of Trustee Members expressed similar sentiments.

I am honored and excited to announce the new Oakwood University Career Advancement & Readiness Education Program, also referred to as the C.A.R.E. Program. The OU C.A.R.E. work internship program was developed to remove financial anxiety from the process of earning an Oakwood degree and to answer the age-old question, “How will I pay for college?” Beginning with our Fall 2020 first-time

freshmen cohort, we want to provide a cleared financial path to degree completion for all students that choosing an Oakwood University education. We launch the pilot program in August of 2020.

As participants in the OU C.A.R.E. program, students will qualify for a matching scholarship to the federal minimum wage. This bonus will allow new students and their families to focus on their studies and not their finances. Imagine the relief of students and their families in knowing that they will not have the overwhelming burden of high student loan debt after graduation. The C.A.R.E. program is engineered to help students graduate in four years with 66% less debt than the average student. This ensures they will be ready to start their first jobs, enter graduate studies, or step into entrepreneurship opportunities with with a low to no debt financial obligation. Graduation will truly be a celebration. Believe. Belong. BeHere at Oakwood University!

For more details about the OU C.A.R.E. Program visit www2.oakwood.edu/care or call _____?

Leslie N. Pollard, Ph.D., D.Min, MBA

President, Oakwood University

[Link]

“No Student Turned Away!” (OU C.A.R.E)

1. Philosophy: the origins of a God-centered education existed from creation [Education, chapters 1-3]. What is clear as we read scripture is the inescapable conclusion that a God-centered education is built into our creation nature and impulses. “In the beginning, God . . . “ sounds the reason for which Christian education exists--to acquaint our students with our origins and to orient students to their destiny. We came from God and ultimately will go back to Him. Without a God-first education, the lives of students will inevitably devolve into patterns diminish their eternal value and blind them to the God-appointed destiny. The calling of Oakwood University is to guarantee that every student desiring of a biblically-based education is welcomed into Oakwood. Our determination is that cost must not, will not, and cannot be a barrier.

2. But why do we take this position? Could we not simply hold that the God-centered education offered by Oakwood should be left to the vicissitudes of market forces? Could we not take the capitalist position that an Oakwood education is not meant for those among us “who simply cannot afford it”? We say no! The imperative of a “God first” Seventh-day Adventist education was intended to be available to all of our constituencies (Isa 54:13 “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the ‘peace of thy children”). The position of the university is that, a biblically-based education is a transformational requirement, especially given the state of our world and where we stand in the stream of prophetic time. By combining education with the principles of redemption, we are redeeming the disciplines that inform student careers and lifestyles. The biblical foundation that undergirds our formation of students is intended to complement the work begun in the process of salvation and continued in the development of a God-first education. We believe that the divine

blueprint that was laid out in the Bible and the Spirit of prophecy is the best and most effective way to shape young people for service in this life, and for preparation for the life to come. Development follows deliverance. Thus, we hold that the requirement for SDA education to be accessible to all our constituencies is an end-time necessity and it is a covenantal responsibility. It is incumbent upon us as an institution to find ways to engage families in our enterprise called Oakwood. And if God wills it, God will fulfill it!

3. But why do we take this position? Why do we place the responsibility upon the institution to find a way to become an inclusive and accessible institution? This takes us to the cost structure of our Oakwood University education. For four straight years we did not raise tuition. We consciously attempted to remain the lowest tuition based institution of higher education in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition in North America. But, that commitment notwithstanding, there is a reality that we must face because it impacts our constituencies in disproportionate ways. We must recognize that the constituencies we are honored to serve experience median household incomes that affect their ability to access our Oakwood education. The recognition of income disparities and their adverse impact on accessing a private education must be recognized as a factor families face when considering our University.

But not only are we concerned about household incomes we're also concerned about the increasing evidence of student loan debt and its adverse impact upon the futures of our Oakwood students. One has only to search recent headlines, to read the alarming statistics on the impact of student loan debt on graduating seniors and their families. And barring miraculous interventions by generous philanthropists like Mr. Robert Smith, who recently, out of his generosity paid the student loan debt of Morehouse students, institutions must come to grips with their cost structures and find ways to deliver their educational experience as a low-to-no-debt benefit.

4. Thus we find it urgent, that in an age where more and more conversation about the relevance of higher education, and its affordability is taking place, that Oakwood take a position in favor of creating a low to no debt trajectory for our Oakwood students and families! We believe that it is possible to so package an Oakwood education that will minimize the debt load of students. Every year, we are managing our student loan default rate, in order to protect the futures of our students, and to shield the institution from the sanctions of the US Department of Education. Trends in SDA higher education indicate that students are turning away from our institutions in NAD.

Students and their families must be re-evangelized toward Seventh-day Adventist education. Never have the stakes been higher. While we cannot fix everything, we can step out into radical faith and affirm, that if the Kingdom is sought first, everything else will be added to us (Matt 6:33). Thus, we at Oakwood haltingly, but fearlessly, step out in the faith that believes that God will provide for our institution, as we provide for his children. May God help us and we strive to help families access this God-given gift of a christian education at Oakwood University.

Leslie Pollard, President, Oakwood University

September 10, 2019