September 29, 2008

"October is a symphony of permanence and change."
— Bonaro W. Overstreet

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome back to a new term and an exciting era for the University of Oregon. As I write, two days of a glorious sun-splashed September remain, and the brilliant autumn color changes are nearly upon us. Yesterday’s Convocation saluted our new faces and brought dogma-challenging observations from our keynote speaker Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker.

There is much to note and there are many to thank for a noteworthy summer of solid progress that has brought us to the opening of the school year. Many people regard spring as the time of renewal and regeneration. I recently have come to love the autumn for that purpose instead. The new freshman faces, the throng of brilliant young faculty members who have joined us, and the energy that emanates from the buildings and pathways of the campus announced that renewal. New provost Jim Bean has undertaken his duties unexpectedly but with great leadership and skill. Under his direction, the contours of the new academic plan for the next years are rapidly being shaped. We will engage a campus-wide process of discussion very shortly.

The news media have carried reports of the unexpectedly strong numbers of new freshman and transfer students who will call Oregon their academic home this fall. This spike in enrollment is testament to the growing power of the university’s reputation and image in the state, the region, and the world, but it has also brought unusual pressures, especially on student services and instruction in general education and lower division courses. We all need to thank those who bear this burden disproportionately and be mindful of the extra sacrifices they will continue to make to greet students warmly, to provide a quality individual educational experience, and to further the reputation of this university as a very special place in the world of higher education. Let me add my personal thanks to all who have helped plan and carry out this significant responsibility for the greater good.

The summer brought national recognition for the university. We were among the top dozen campuses noted for sustainability efforts by The Princeton Review. Our new White Stag complex in Portland has received exceptionally high ratings for its architecture, historical preservation, and sustainability, and we have received initial approval for a new power plant addition on campus that will have a near-zero carbon footprint. We are working diligently to live up to our image of ethical responsibility and, gratifyingly, have substantial evidence that we are succeeding.

I have shared my thoughts about the next steps for the university’s growth and development with the Presidential Search Committee, and it is gratifying that so many others both within and outside our campus community have taken such keen interest in our future leadership.

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An equal-opportunity, affirmative-action institution committed to cultural diversity and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act
and presidential selection process. The search committee is composed of outstanding people, and I trust that the process will result in an extraordinary new leader and an unbroken path of progress and increasing accomplishment. Our building projects, including the arena, all appear to be on schedule, our needed salary increases continue to be a priority, and Campaign Oregon has long exceeded our original goal of $600 million and will close its books in December at a number that is truly astounding. Vice President Allan Price and those who work so ably with him in University Advancement deserve our continuing gratitude for this effort. Among the many honors of recent weeks, we salute Physics Professor Davison Soper, recently announced winner of the J.J. Sakurai Prize; Biology Professor John Postlethwait, newly elected recipient of a Humboldt Research Award, and English Professor Sharon Sherman, named a fellow in the prestigious American Folklore Society. Three UO professors are finalists for the Oregon Book Award: Lauren Kessler (journalism), Steven Bender (law) and Ehud Havazelet (creative writing). The winners will be announced on Sunday, November 9, at the Portland Art Museum.

We have had a remarkably successful year in securing federal support for our programs. Despite essentially flat funding of federal research and development to U.S. universities, we reached an all-time record for support. New awards in FY08 surpassed $100 million for the first time, an increase of 30% from the year before. Our total sponsored grants and contracts surpassed $115 million, an increase of 35%. And, annual licensing revenues have increased more than 20-fold in this decade, reaching $6.8 million in FY08. These are truly outstanding accomplishments by our faculty in an increasingly competitive environment for research support. A new UO Science Council has been appointed to advise me and the senior academic leadership on emerging issues related to our scientific research enterprise, including multidisciplinary initiatives, fundraising efforts, faculty and graduate student support, infrastructure needs, and global trends.

The calendar and the increasingly shrill cries of political advertisements remind us that election day is only a few weeks ahead. The importance of national elections is always obvious, but this year’s state issues, including ballot measures with very serious implications, make the stakes exceptionally high. I urge you to register if you have not done so and to cast your vote thoughtfully. The registration cut off date is October 14.

As always I encourage you to contact me with your reactions and concerns at pres@uoregon.edu.

Welcome and warmest wishes,

Dave Frohnmayer
President