

March 2008

## Highlights from the Ohio College Association Presidents' Forum

### NOCHE's Executive Director Stresses the Need to Recognize the Role of Private Colleges in Ohio Higher Education

At the invitation of NOCHE member and OCA President John O'Donnell of Stark State College of Technology, I had the privilege of attending the OCA's Presidents' Forum this week in Columbus. The forum featured a dinner presentation by Chancellor Eric Fingerhut and panel presentations on politics and the Chancellor's forthcoming plan for the University System of Ohio.

As a panelist, I highlighted the positive momentum at the state level as helpful to NOCHE's mission to promote higher education and its importance in talent development. I expressed the opinion that **the Chancellor has a challenge with respect to the role of private colleges and universities in his plan**, however, and he has not really articulated what that role might be. I also noted that the Chancellor's experience as a former legislator makes him an ideal advocate for higher education before the General Assembly since he understands its priorities and demands for accountability. However, we all have to recognize the urgent need to advocate for higher education across the wider public. Much of that public is still disbelieving with respect to the value of higher education, and those doubters are constituents of the legislators themselves who do the voting. **This advocacy mission is an effort which NOCHE is well positioned to advance.**

- Ann Womer Benjamin



### Summary of Chancellor Fingerhut's Remarks to OCA

**The Chancellor** reviewed some of his accomplishments this past year, then noted that in lobbying on the next biennial budget, he intends to go to the legislature and **tell legislators what higher education is accomplishing for them**, and then request funding to support those ongoing initiatives.

This approach is positive and should be a welcome change for the legislature. According to Ms. Womer Benjamin, during her eight years on the House Finance and Appropriations Committee the Board of Regents did not have such an articulate and politically knowledgeable spokesperson. Further, higher education usually came with hands extended without a clear explanation of what it proposed to deliver for the dollars. Consequently, higher education's message was often lost in the budget request.

On the subject of the strategic plan for the University System of

Ohio, the Chancellor said that his overall primary goal is to **raise the educational attainment level of Ohio's work force** to close the gap between Ohio and other states. He noted that to accomplish this Ohio must **graduate more people, keep those graduates in Ohio, and attract talent from outside Ohio as well**. He emphatically stated that higher education can and must impact retention and attraction even though presidents do not readily see retention as part of their responsibility.

The Chancellor said that with respect to the **quality** of education, he expects *faculties* to be the guarantors of quality.

The outline of the strategic plan (to be issued March 31, 2008) can be accessed through a link on the Board of Regents' web site at <http://regents.ohio.gov>.

## OCA's Political Postmortem

Private, public and community institution association representatives **Todd Jones**, **Bruce Johnson**, and **Stephanie Franz**, respectively, provided insight on the political climates in Columbus and Washington during the Wednesday morning session:

### Todd Jones

#### President, Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio

Mr. Jones described the progress of the federal Higher Education Act still under consideration in Congress, the more positive treatment of private institutions in Ohio since last fall, and the Service Employees International Union's national campaign to enact sick pay proposals (including an incremental calculation of sick time).

### Stephanie Franz

#### Deputy Director, Ohio Association of Community Colleges

Ms. Franz noted the appointment on March 13 of the association's new president, Ron Abrams, who is currently president of North Central State College. Ms. Franz also said that undoubtedly the 230,000 new college students, which the Governor has set as a ten-year goal, will most likely be served initially through the community college system, and many such students will be adult learners with risk factors for whom additional resources will be required. She is concerned that the state budget will not meet these needs.

### Bruce Johnson

#### President, Inter-University Council

Mr. Johnson discussed his association's close working relationship with the Chancellor (the Chancellor and Mr. Johnson served together in the Ohio Senate) and applauded the Chancellor's credo that higher education is the economic engine for Ohio. He did note implementation issues with administration programs such as "Seniors to Sophomores" but looks forward to continuing to work with the Chancellor when the strategic plan for the University System of Ohio is issued.

The IUC is taking up an issue identified in the **Northeast Ohio Universities Collaboration and Innovation Study Commission Report** as a potential cost-saver, that of construction reform. In particular, IUC is pursuing legislative revision of the multiple prime contractor requirement. Mr. Johnson also warned that he expects the new Governor's honeymoon period may be coming to a close, and anticipates a more partisan division between Republicans and Democrats through the balance of the year. This partisanship is common in a legislative election year.

## OCA's Review of the Chancellor's Remarks

A second panel assessed the Chancellor's remarks of the previous evening. Among panel members was NOCHE member **Tom Chema**, President of Hiram, who observed that the Chancellor is intent on seizing a window of opportunity to institute reforms in higher education in Ohio over the next several years. Mr. Chema expressed the hope that the Chancellor and the Governor would recognize more clearly that **private institutions can be partners with public institutions** (such partnerships exist in Northeast Ohio). He also expressed concern that the Chancellor's reference to reviewing "incentives" in higher education signals a possible intention to unravel Choice Grants.



Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education  
1422 Euclid Avenue, Suite 840  
Cleveland, OH 44115  
Phone: (216) 420-9200  
Fax: (216) 420-9292

[www.nоче.org](http://www.nоче.org)