ACADEMIC OFFERINGS ENHANCED FOR NEW SCHOOL YEAR AT OHIO STATE

COLUMBUS -- Enhancements to academic offerings and student services continue to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience at The Ohio State University, and they are producing measurable results.

Freshman and upperclass enrollment and retention rates are expected to increase this academic year, and university officials intend for better service to translate into stronger graduation rates, as well.

"We have a number of plans for this year to help students succeed," said Martha Garland, vice provost for undergraduate studies. Plans range from improving students' electronic access to promoting civic responsibility.

In the age of the Internet, connectivity is key, Garland noted. As a result, student access to the Internet and the availability of electronic resources for a variety of university student services continue to improve.

A project titled ResNet gives every student in every residence hall room access to high-speed Internet service. The university expects to complete the wiring of all residence hall rooms during autumn quarter, supporting approximately 8,200 students.

Off-campus access includes Road Runner, a high-speed direct connection between Time-Warner's cable network and the university's network, and HomeNet, a service providing limited dial-in modem access primarily for e-mail. The university also has reached an agreement with IBM to offer its international dial-in Internet service by autumn quarter.

A new initiative named in honor of the late Ruth Mount will encourage students -- undergraduates first, and graduate students
later -- to develop talents "outside the classroom as well as in to become fully effective, engaged citizens," Garland said. The initiative will feature retreats, workshops, speakers, residence hall programming, faculty brown-bags and service opportunities.

The program is supported by the Ruth Weimer Mount Leadership Initiatives Fund, created with memorial gifts from students, colleagues, friends and family. Mount, former associate dean of women, director of women's housing and first dean of students at Ohio State, had a long legacy of service to the university extending from the time she joined the staff in 1953 until her death in the summer of 1997.

"This initiative will encourage students to become people who make a difference -- people who have important civic responsibilities, who are good team leaders at the corporate and community level, people who actually do become leaders nationally and internationally," Garland said.

Living-learning opportunities are being expanded in residence halls as part of efforts to "use the residence halls quite aggressively to support the academic climate," Garland said.

For example, this year four floors of Park Hall will be dedicated to students who are undecided about their major. As part of the program, students will be enrolled in the same English class, and a discussion section will meet in the residence hall. Resident advisers and University College faculty also will work together to develop thematic programs that reinforce each other. One career exploration program planned is a "Parade of Champions," featuring visits by professionals in a variety of fields.

As part of other existing living-learning opportunities, two residence halls are devoted to students majoring in agricultural courses, one is reserved for engineering students and an international residence hall combines American students with international student roommates.

For the first time this year, officials plan to implement an outreach program to students who indicate they may have special needs related to academics, financial aid or college adjustment. Tutors, financial aid staff members, counselors and residence
hall personnel are being coordinated to initiate the program during autumn quarter.

"It's extending a hand to say we're here to be helpful," said James Mager, assistant vice president for enrollment management.

Added Garland, "The middle of the quarter can be a lonely moment. If the university reaches out and says it cares, it makes a big difference."

Other initiatives include reorganizing some academic advising structures to integrate University College more with degree-granting colleges, and systematic changes to the Student Information System. Such changes will increase the services delivered over the Web, such as providing password-protected electronic records of scheduling and financial aid information.

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