

Gaber gives first address

University of Toledo President Sharon Gaber gave her first State of the University Address Wednesday April 5, outlining the school's academic and athletic accomplishments, financial challenges and its plans for the future.

During the address, Gaber said she was initially faced with a multimillion-dollar shortfall and a university that had lost its footing; to address these problems, she established five goals that included raising UT's national reputation, increasing fundraising, externally funded research and enrollment.

"The changes we're making together are meant to help ensure the long-term sustainability of this university and that means putting the needs of our students first," Gaber said in her address. "Strengthening our foundation meant establishing goals and developing plans that focused on our students."

Gaber said the university has increased enrollment by 2.2 percent and retention by 3 percent within Gaber's first year. Alumni donations have doubled from less than 3 percent two years ago and total fundraising has increased by 69 percent, totaling more than \$17.2 million.

To address the financial shortfall, Gaber said a combination of spending reductions, new revenue and cost avoidance has allowed the university to reach \$50 million in savings.

"This stemmed from realigning our executive team, merging 16 colleges into 13, implementing a hiring freeze, instituting temporary holds on open positions and identifying numerous other ways to reduce our expenditures or generate revenue," Gaber said.

Even though UT is in a better financial position now than it was one year ago, the university still faces serious economic

challenges between tuition freezes and a state bill that would require public universities to help cover textbook costs over \$300, which would cost UT nearly \$14 million, Gaber said.

“The reality is that when we receive less financial support from the state, we need to find innovative ways to move forward to continue providing the same high-quality education that our students deserve – with less money,” said Gaber. “Based on feedback from faculty, staff and our students, we’re already making changes to help with expense management.”

Gaber did not go into detail about these expense changes, but she did say that further action will need to be taken to reduce costs, even with these changes.

“We have successfully increased externally funded research,” Gaber said, “This year, new competitive research awards are already 45 percent higher than the prior year. UT has more than 471 faculty and physicians who have brought in more than \$225 million of sponsored research in the past five years.” Looking to the future, Gaber said the university will roll out a 15-week semester and require second-year students to live on campus in Fall 2018. She also announced the university will have mandatory Title IX and ethics training for faculty and staff starting in July, and a new AD-HOC committee will be co-chaired by Amy Thompson and Valerie Walston.

“We are creating an AD-HOC taskforce on sexual assault awareness and prevention to compare our practices to...other universities,” Gaber said, “Student safety is a top priority, and we will continue enforcing zero tolerance of any type of abuse.”

Andrew Weisbarth, a third-year finance and sales major, said he was disappointed parking has not been addressed.

“She needs to improve on parking,” Weisbarth said. “I’m a junior living on campus, and it goes for the Greek Village too; I can’t park near my classes.”

Gaber closed by saying the state of university is strong, and it can be an even stronger.

“I think she’s done a very good job, but there is always more that can be done,” said first-year business major Tabish Phelps.