

(Dec. 12, 2011)

Chillicothe Gazette

Measuring the real value of higher education in this region

We have adopted the phrase "Gateway to Your Promise" to describe the value of the Ohio University-Chillicothe educational experience. You might have noticed area billboards with that message. However, more than just a catchphrase or marketing slogan, these four words capture the essence of higher education in making a difference in people's lives.

On the Chillicothe campus, with its unique mission as a regional campus, this phrase represents what we are all about. As with any enterprise, what really matters is how people are impacted, and that certainly is true when it comes to higher education. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Chillicothe campus to offer the type of higher educational experience that makes a meaningful difference in the lives of area residents.

The first step in this process involves the campus' access mission, which is the "gateway" of this entire proposition. At OU-C, we are committed to ensuring area residents are able to pursue a quality education at an affordable price. As a commuter campus, OU-C is uniquely structured so that we are able to contain costs and help to ensure that tuition does not become an insurmountable burden.

We also look to make college education accessible through a personable approach. Through OU-C's "Open House Friday" initiative, prospective students can learn about the college admission process and the academic offerings of our campus in a relaxed and friendly setting. Further, students from this region can find their comfort level on the Chillicothe campus. Most of our students are from this region, and we enroll a roughly equal mix of traditional students and more veteran learners, so students rarely feel as if they are alone when facing the challenge of pursuing a college education.

Fulfilling the "promise" part of the message involves intangible and tangible benefits. For example, attending college offers the opportunity for exposure to academic and cultural offerings that expand students' horizons and challenge them to look at their world from a different perspective. Also, obtaining a college degree allows individuals to follow career paths that match their interests and passions so they are eager to go to work each day. And, we want them to be able to pursue their career in this region, if they so choose. Therefore, we strive to align our academic

offerings with emerging career fields found in the South Central Ohio region.

Statistics spell out the more tangible proof of the benefit of a college education. Information from the U.S. Census Bureau points out that individuals with college degrees earn more and face lower unemployment rates than others. A recent report indicates that individuals with a high school diploma, on average, earn \$1.2 million in lifetime wages, compared to \$2.1 million for individuals with bachelor's degrees and \$2.5 million for those holding master's degrees. Further, the average unemployment rate in 2010 for individuals with high school diplomas was 10.3 percent, compared to 7 percent for individuals with an associate degree, 5.4 percent for those holding bachelor's degrees and 4 percent for employees with master's degrees.

By several measurements, the "Gateway to Your Promise" represents a path to opportunity that underscores the Chillicothe campus' mission.

Tuck is the interim dean of Ohio University-Chillicothe.

