



DEREK FERRIS '93, '02 MBA

“I always knew ONU was the place for me,”

says Derek Ferris. “My maternal grandfather was the first to come here in the 1950s. My parents and older brother graduated from ONU. I met my wife here, and we both graduated. And in 2021, our daughter graduated from ONU.”

Derek’s student days are the source of some of his best life experiences and memories. Sharing intramural sports and dorm life became the beginning of many of his lifelong friendships. He and his wife met when they were on the cheerleading squad during his senior year. They married right after he graduated. His intention was to work at ONU for one year until she graduated, but God had other plans.

When Dr. John C. Bowling became president in 1991, one of his first initiatives was to establish a fund raising department, and Derek was part of the process. After graduating in 1993 with a degree in computer science, he joined three other people on the new Development team.

Now, he has the longest tenure of any member on the current team led by Dr. Brian Allen.

Having the opportunity to work with his dad on the Development team has been a tremendous blessing for Derek. Dan Ferris took an early retirement from teaching junior high school math and was ready for a second career. He joined the team in 1994 and continues to have a strong influence on the current team, including Derek.

“Seeing the campus develop as a result of our team’s fundraising efforts over the past 29 years is so rewarding for me,” Derek says. “The University has endured and grown because of the many people who do more than their job descriptions and trust God to lead. Our faculty and staff are actively discipling students, inviting students into their homes, even sometimes providing a place to live for students who need that. Together, we are living out Christ’s purpose for ONU.”

During Derek’s years on the Development team — and especially in the last five years — he has seen God’s hand in leading more people to make

leadership level gifts to ONU. Part of his job is finding more donors who are able to give at this level, and then connecting them with the gift officers on his team. “The current Campaign for Olivet is inspiring more people to give larger gifts at a time in their lives when they can give more,” he says. “Seeing so many invest in improving the ONU experience for students inspires me daily.”

Getting away from his desk and outside of his office is one challenge Derek faces in his current position. When ONU’s mathematics department asked him to teach an undergraduate course in finite math, he accepted immediately. “I enjoy getting to know the students I’m fundraising for,” he says. “I talk with them before class and after class. Interacting in the student environment refreshes me for my work in Development.”

He also enjoys working with his hands and doing building projects at his home. One of his dreams is to cut his own lumber on the 150-acre tree farm his family owns in Michigan, and then to do building projects with that lumber. In addition, he is an avid golfer who began playing since age 10 and was also a member of the ONU golf team as a student.

Learning is important to Derek. His goal is to learn something new every day. During his first eight years of work at ONU, he continued to be a student by taking at least one class every semester.

“Through my work, I’ve learned a lot about people,” he says. “How similar we are, how unique we are, what shaped us to be the person we are, and how to value each person I meet. I value learning from different perspectives, and I appreciate the similarities and differences between people.”

Knowing he is investing in a Christian organization that is changing people’s lives is Derek’s greatest joy in serving the Lord at ONU. “It’s great to be a part of the stories of students who found the Lord at ONU,” he says. “Our team knows that what we’re doing is going to last beyond us. We are impacting students who go out and impact the world.”

Derek Ferris

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