

MIAMI UNIVERSITY



James Lentini is leaving to become provost and a senior vice president at Oakland University in Michigan.

## Outgoing dean raised bar for arts

Professor Elizabeth Mullenix named interim dean.

By Bob Ratterman  
Contributing Writer

OXFORD — James Lentini jokes that he is not geographically challenged, but he is becoming an expert on places which that are not where they seem to be.

He is leaving Miami, in Ohio, to take a job at Oakland, in Michigan, starting July 8. "I'm becoming an expert on places with names associated with other locations," he said. "It's unusual. Oakland is in Michigan. I told them in the interview at Oakland that I'm at Miami, but it's not in Florida."

He heads to Oakland University in Rochester, Mich., as senior vice president for academic affairs and provost, leaving Miami as dean of the School of Creative Arts. While leaving a position as dean of creative arts to one of provost, he takes a step away into a more administrative position, but one he calls "the natural next progression" as a college administrator.

"I was not looking for the job. I got a phone call in April and was asked about it," he said. "Four other candidates were on the list. Then, things kept progressing. It's the next step in leadership."

At Oakland, the provost has oversight responsibility for the College of Arts and Sciences and the Schools of Education and Human Services, Business Administration, Engineering and Computer Science, Nursing, Health Sciences and the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine.

While his new job will take him a little farther away from a regular involvement with his music, he said he intends to keep at it, recalling former Miami Provost Ronald Crutcher, who was a musician. He still practiced every day and performed occasionally.

"It's one step further (away), but I know it can be done. I know I will have to be more selective, but I hope to keep the connection," he said.

Elizabeth (Liz) Mullenix, professor of theater at Miami, has been named interim dean of the School of Creative Arts, effective Monday, July 8. Mullenix has served as chair of the Department of Theatre at Miami since her arrival in 2006.

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# Lentini put department on the map

## Dean

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Mullenix writes about Antebellum culture/theater, theater cross-dressing, performance and politics during the Civil War, first wave feminism, and gender/feminist theory and has published articles and book reviews in various journals.

Prior to coming to Miami, Mullenix received a doctorate at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana and afterward taught theater history, dramatic literature and theory for 11 years at Illinois State University, where she also served as the associate chair of the School of Theatre and the associate dean for the College of Fine Arts.

Lentini came to Miami in 2007. His time in Oxford has seen major changes in the department, as well as major steps toward a goal of giving the university more visibility nationally. "When I came to Miami, I was told to think big. We did things like the Carnegie Hall performance," he said. That performance in New York last fall saw 417 students in choral and instrumental groups performing on Carnegie's hallowed stage. The marching band appeared in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in 2011 and in the presidential inauguration parade last January. That latter trip was put together on short notice, but Lentini said he was proud of the accomplishment.

"We were shown live on C-SPAN and had a picture in USA Today," he said.

Lentini is a music composer and leaves several works as part of his legacy at Miami. He composed an arrangement of Miami's alma mater, which was performed for the first time when Miami's music students played at Carnegie Hall.

He composed a work called "The Trees of Miami," a piece written in honor of the university's bicentennial in 2009. It

is based on a poem by Percy MacKaye, who was an artist-in-residence at Miami in the 1920s, the first poet to hold that position at any college in the country. Lentini merged the poem with Miami history in creating the musical work.

"It was fun looking at the history of Miami," he said.

A big part of Lentini's time as dean at Miami was a name change of the School of Fine Arts to its current School of Creative Arts.

"When I got here, they were considering a name change. Fine arts has a different connotation to people. They think painting and it extends to theater and dance," said Lentini, noting that architecture was added to the school as was an interactive media studies major. "We tried to have the arts connect with about everything on campus. I really see this taking off."

Lentini said he called Miami President David Hodge in 2011 to discuss the concept of the Year of the Arts, with the idea of taking the arts out to all students. The president was "thrilled" with the idea, he said.

"In an era when middle schools are cutting art and high schools are cutting music, Miami is sending a signal the arts are important," Lentini said.

President Hodge praised Lentini's efforts in a statement released recently after the dean's departure was announced.

"Jim raised the expectations and success of the School of Creative Arts," Hodge said. "He was the one who had the vision for the Year of the Arts, a vision that he pursued vigorously and to great effect. He will be greatly missed. We wish him well in his new position."

Lentini and his wife, Dana, have three children: Luke, 17; and Noah, 15; both students at Talawanda High School, and a daughter, Evalina, 7.

The Lentinis are a musical family and appeared together in a performance titled "Born to Sing" at the Oxford Community Arts Center last July at the request of the center's director, Caroline Crowell.

Lentini's wife, Dana, teaches vocal music at the arts center.