“Just what makes that little ol’ ant / Think he’ll move that rubber tree plant / Anyone knows an ant can’t / Move a rubber tree plant.”

This Sammy Cahn lyric, made famous by Frank Sinatra, may be long gone from the Top 40, but the “never give up” sentiment of “High Hopes” suffuses many of the stories in this sixth issue of Outlook. Determination is a requisite quality for those facing the challenges of the 21st century. There are no simple solutions to life’s complex problems, and no shortcuts to the trial-and-error that can lead to better ways of doing things. Inspiration and creativity also are important ingredients for success. The role of education, therefore, is to provide the tools and examples that can help people ride on top of, rather than be swallowed by, the rapidly changing seas of our society. As the line between teacher and student continues to blur, we must learn to learn from each other in new and exciting ways.

— The Editors
Are We Green Yet?
As de facto steward to more than 200 acres of natural woodland and prairie, Oakton's eco-credibility is sound. Find out what's new on the environmental front, from the discovery of endangered plant species to courses that address the growing category of “green collar” jobs.

Family Style
The family that studies together, graduates together. Carolyn Culpepper provided the inspiration for her two daughters to follow in her academic footsteps.

Winning Attitudes
“A nurse, a librarian, and an accountant walk into an awards ceremony...” No, it's not another shaggy dog story. Meet three real Oakton winners—Jane Malik, Carla Ferguson, and Jay Cohen.

Arab Ink
While its pages are in stark black and white, Toufic El Rassi's graphic novel exposes bigotry against Arabs and Muslims as a cultural dynamic colored in many shades.

The Write Time
June Sproat never gave up on her dream of becoming a published writer. After raising three children and enduring two years of rejection slips, she now has new dreams to pursue.

Always Room for Cello
Collaboration with other musical genres is key to the survival of classical music, says cello instructor Michelle Morales. She walks the walk as well, playing with Kanye West and performing at the Grammy Awards with the Foo Fighters.

Discovering Meaning
The development of critical thinking for a new era ideally shares the analysis of classic works with important works from other cultures. The Great Books Program finds students and teachers working together to mine life’s meaning from literature.

Another Look
From hotel housekeeper to one of the nation’s most exclusive graduate programs for art historians, Cheryl-Lynn May’s journey offers the proof of perseverance.
Are We Green Yet?
FOUR DECADES after the first official Earth Day, consciousness of the world’s burgeoning climate crises continues to grow, fueled in part by the 2006 documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, presented by former Vice President Al Gore. Today, it is virtually impossible to escape the media’s preoccupation with all things “green,” from ideas and products designed to help people “reduce, reuse, and recycle,” to corporate efforts to offset carbon emissions and develop “sustainable” business models.

Oakton certainly is no “Johnny-come-lately” to the eco-movement. In 2004, a $30,000 Leader Award grant from petroleum giant BP allowed the College to preserve and document hundreds of native plants and flowers found on its grounds, including four endangered species: awnless graceful sedge and brome hummock sedge; dwarf raspberry; and squaw root (*Conopholis americana*). A dozen years earlier, a small group of students and employees liberated a 200-year-old oak tree from buckthorn bondage, a tradition that continues today with “controlled burns” and volunteer work days. Campus groups have long championed the diverse views of environmental speakers including Michael Brown (*The Toxic Cloud: The Poisoning of America’s Air*), Norman Myers (*GAIA: An Atlas of Planet Management*) and Peter Burtchell (*The Cousteau Society*).

In spring 2008, the College joined with the City of Des Plaines and other partners to host a regional Green Business Conference, featuring eco-experts from government, education, and business, and a keynote by Lt. Governor Pat Quinn. From car pooling to clean water, Quinn’s office and Web site, standingupforillinois.org, promote numerous green initiatives, including the Illinois Sustainable University Compact, an outline of best practices signed by Oakton and dozens of other colleges.

Another ongoing activity organized by the Ecology Club at Oakton involves the planting of hundreds of new trees and shrubs. Volunteer workers already have planted bald cypress, black chokeberries, and 50 other varieties in a new arboretum along the Des Plaines campus retention pond. “We’ve tripled the number of native tree and shrub varieties,” said Alan Kroeger, president of the Ecology Club, who also was a driving force in the creation of a butterfly garden on campus. “The new plantings will help prevent soil erosion and runoff, and allow environmental science students to become more proficient in identification and research.”

Kroeger partnered with the Educational Foundation as well to develop an “Adopt-a-Tree” program, encouraging donors to contribute to the College’s natural beauty through the gift of a serviceberry, persimmon, river birch, paw paw, or chickasaw plum tree. Continued
This strong connection to nature comes, well, naturally. Located on 174 acres between the Des Plaines River and a Cook County forest preserve, the Des Plaines campus is home to a variety of wildlife. The grounds are masterfully maintained by Ken Schaefer, an artist and naturalist known for sharing his encyclopedic knowledge of Oakton’s flora and fauna. In 2007, Schaefer’s work was published by *Chicago Wilderness* magazine and exhibited by the Notebaert Nature Museum.

The Skokie campus offers a more urban setting, yet the new Art, Science, and Technology Pavilion tangibly reflects Oakton’s commitment to environmental responsibility. A $75,000 grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Fuel Foundation allowed for the incorporation of building materials that reduce heat transfer; occupancy sensors for lighting and temperature control; bamboo flooring; and low flow technologies to reduce water consumption.

So, what comes next in “the greening of Oakton?”

“Faculty members are now being encouraged to develop classes, career programs, degree concentrations, and community activities related to the environment,” says Ron Thomas, professor of management and business and a member of the new Green Committee, a panel formed to support the ambitious aims of the College’s new strategic plan.

Among the first disciplines to reflect this new category of “green collar” jobs are management, which adds Introduction to Green Business and Green Policy, Law, and Government Relations to its fall 2008 schedule; and facilities management and engineering, which is awaiting approval of a program to offer geothermal certification. Courses in green building technology and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) compliance also are being developed.

“A tremendous potential exists for Oakton to be a leader in energy management education, from geoxchange systems to solar and wind alternatives,” says Chad Ganger, professor and chair of facilities management and engineering. “We have a river and a small lake on campus, either of which might be used to reduce carbon emissions and energy costs. If we can actually do it here, we’ll be more successful in teaching others.”

The Alliance for Lifelong Learning also develops programs on both local and global environmental issues for continuing education students, with partners that include the Notebaert Nature Museum, Chicago Academy of Sciences, The Nature Conservancy, Natural History Exploration Guild, and Adler Planetarium.

Jeff Moro, senior systems administrator and adjunct faculty member, received a modest grant to study the possible benefits of solar power at Oakton. Moro, who also serves as advisor to the student club, ULTRA (Universal Laboratory for Technical Resource Alternatives), plans to monitor small photovoltaic units for hard data regarding the number of sunlight hours and watts produced at each campus.

“Our payback may be entirely different, or even nonexistent. This project will give us some real numbers about the economic viability of solar power at Oakton.”

The Green Committee also explores, through informal “Green Bag” luncheons and other scheduled forums, various initiatives supported by the District 535 Board of Trustees, Thomas added. Over the next five years, the Board has approved a list of environmental action items for the College including: increased use of renewable energy sources; reduction in water usage (at least 15 percent); increase in recycled waste (at least 15 percent); increased use of non-toxic cleaning products; LEED certification for new construction; and promotion of alternative fuels and transportation (for example, a newly-purchased van uses E85 fuel).

“Changing minds ultimately is the job of an educational institution,” says Trustee Joan DiLeonardi, who is active in the Chicago Botanic Garden’s efforts to monitor endangered species.

“Oakton has been entrusted with an incredible natural treasure, and it is vitally important that we use this resource to give others a greater understanding of how the environment continues to change.”
IN 1995, when Carolyn Culpepper made the decision to go back to school, she was working full time doing customer service and secretarial work. Some evenings she would walk from her job at Rand McNally to her class on Oakton’s Skokie campus. Even though she was a single parent with three kids, going to school at the end of the workday was never a chore. She had enjoyed a passion for learning all of her life.

“It felt great!” she says. “I was always taking a class here or there, somewhere. I never thought of not going to school. Even when I had children I never stopped.” At that time her youngest child was nine years old, so Carolyn worked on her degree at her own pace, most often taking one class at a time. “I had a family to take care of, and I didn’t want to take on more than I could carry.”

Since she had teenagers at home, she had no problem relating to the younger students in class.

“I fit right in,” she says. “We would talk about homework, or what we were doing at home, or juggling work and class assignments. They were working, too.”

Carolyn changed jobs and decided to major in computer office technology since that would be most useful in her work. As she slowly added more classes towards her degree, her children teased Carolyn about her long-term college career. “Mom, are you ever going to stop?”

“I like school!” she told them.

But her children caught her enthusiasm. Henry, the eldest, studied at Oakton before transferring to Alabama A&M. Latrice wavered between two competing interests after high school: to work with young children, or to become a hairstylist. “You can always be a hairstylist,” Carolyn told her. “But first you get a two-year degree.” Once Latrice started classes in Oakton’s Early Education Childhood program, she became hooked on working with kids.

Tiffany, the youngest, had no fears about starting college. She’d become familiar with Oakton’s campus long before her first day.

“I knew where everything was,”

graduate from college—just one year ahead of her daughters.

“My dream was getting a degree,” Carolyn says. “And to let my children know that it doesn’t matter how old you are, if you want to do something, you can do it.”

Even now that she has her degree, Carolyn has no plans to stop studying. She’s considering graduate school in social work or teaching. Her daughters are contemplating graduate school as well.

“It’s not like it was easy all the time,” Carolyn says, looking back. “But it was just something I wanted to do. I just had to find a balance.”

What helped her to stay focused and find that delicate balance? Carolyn credits the academic advising and tutoring she received in Oakton’s TRiO office. The staff encouraged her and gave her the support she needed. “If you need help, they’re there,” she says.

“I admired Carolyn’s spirit and perseverance to pursue a degree,” says Robin Remich, one of Carolyn’s main supporters in the TRiO office. “It came full circle when all three received degrees together. I’m sure that Latrice and Tiffany would not have taken the steps toward their education if they hadn’t been able to follow in the steps of their mom.”

“I used to work as a secretary in the counseling department at Evanston High School,” Carolyn says. “I would encourage the young ones who didn’t know what they wanted to do. I’d tell them, ‘You can always go to Oakton because you can feel your way. You will get the help you need. Try it out!’ And then I’d say, ‘Guess what! I’m going there!’”
THREE OAKTON FACULTY members are living proof of Carnegie’s oft-repeated maxim: Jay Cohen, chair and professor of accounting; Jane Malik, assistant professor of library services; and Carla Ferguson, assistant professor of nursing, have all been rewarded for following their passions.

Cohen is the recipient of the 2008 Outstanding Educator Award, presented by the Illinois CPA Society. The Outstanding Educator Award recognizes those at institutions of higher leaning who excel in leadership and teaching, and who have made continuous and outstanding contributions to accounting education in Illinois.

“I love teaching, and being recognized by my peers for something I’m passionate about is quite an honor,” says Cohen.

The Oak Park resident started as an associate professor of accounting at Oakton in 2002 and was promoted to professor and department chair in 2005. Cohen also serves as a facilitator for faculty development workshops.

“I feel very lucky to work in such a wonderful environment,” he says, adding that his passion largely stems from interactions with students.

“Students can’t fall asleep in my class because they’re too busy,” Cohen says with a smile. “I engage students with real world information, such as having them build the income statements of Fortune 500 companies. I find from experience it’s much better to have the students learn from doing rather than from watching.”

Founded in 1903, the ICPAS is a professional membership organization dedicated to enhancing the value of the CPA profession. With more than 22,700 members, it is the fifth largest state CPA society in the nation. Cohen was recognized at the group’s annual banquet in Chicago.

Malik also was recognized by her peers. The winner of the 2008 North Suburban Library System (NSLS)
public, school, and special libraries in north suburban Cook, Kane, Lake, and McHenry counties.

Ferguson, another award winner, received a $10,000 Nurse Educator Fellowship from the Illinois Board of Higher Education in December. She follows in the footsteps of Margaret Gas, associate professor of nursing at Oakton, who was the initial recipient of the award in 2006.

Ferguson started as a nursing instructor at Oakton in 2002 and was promoted to assistant professor of nursing in 2003. She was one of two Illinois nursing faculty from a community college to receive the award. The Illinois Board of Higher Education distributes a total of 15 fellowships each year to ensure the retention of well-qualified nursing faculty at institutions of higher learning that award nursing degrees.

“I've been a nurse for 20 years and I knew early in my life that's what I wanted to do,” says the Park Ridge resident. “I love the nursing profession because it's never dull. It's a job where I'm always thinking on my feet. To me, helping patients is so rewarding.”

Ferguson also takes great pride in educating the next generation of nurses. “I get tremendous satisfaction in seeing students’ excitement when they learn something new,” says Ferguson, who earned her master’s degree from Rush University and bachelor’s degree from Loyola University Chicago. “Their enthusiasm brings me back to the joy I felt when I was a student. I feel like I'm making a difference when I see that.”

In addition to their inner drive and passion for their vocation, the trio agrees that Oakton’s environment also paves the way for their success. “Being surrounded by excellence brings out the best in you,” says Ferguson.

Academic Library Staff Member of the Year, Malik was acknowledged for her professional achievements at the NSLS annual awards banquet.

“I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would win,” says Malik, who is responsible for purchasing books for both campus libraries. “When I learned I was nominated I almost fell out of my chair.”

Malik, who joined Oakton in 1997 and became a full-time employee in 2005, admitted she enjoyed hearing her name announced as an award recipient. “It was fun to be cheered by my family and colleagues who were sitting with me at the banquet,” she says while displaying the engraved crystal book she won that evening. “It’s been an extra special year for me. First I got tenure, and then I received this outstanding award.”

The award is presented for exceptional contributions to the NSLS and its member libraries. The NSLS is an organization of more than 650 academic, resident. “I love the nursing profession because it's never dull. It's a job where I'm always thinking on my feet. To me, helping patients is so rewarding.”

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Above, from left: Carla Ferguson, Jay Cohen, and Jane Malik.
IT’S A BIRD ... IT’S A PLANE ...

it’s Arab in America, a graphic novel by Toufic El Rassi!

While failing to include the super power exploits of a being from another galaxy, El Rassi’s ambitious literary debut illustrates a more realistic social dynamic—the prejudice and discrimination faced by Arabs and Muslims in American society.

“Almost all of it is autobiographical,” says El Rassi, who was born in Beirut and immigrated to Chicago with his family in 1979. “There’s no ‘traditional’ plot. It’s more of an episodic look at my life, intertwined with cultural observations of Arab and U.S. relations.”

El Rassi said the graphic novel is a perfect vehicle for conveying his message that discrimination should not be tolerated in society.

“Comics always have been and are still a large part of my life,” says El Rassi. “To me, comics are like comfort food. You have a bad day, you read a comic book, and things seem better. That’s something that’s always stayed with me.”

The 30-year-old history and political science instructor became hooked on the comic book adventures of Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man when he was in seventh grade. He began collecting, and now owns hundreds of works in the genre.

“Seeing my work in the graphic novel section of Borders or Barnes and Noble is a crazy concept,” adds the author, who celebrated the newly-minted Free Comic Book Day with a signing at Evil Squirrel Comics in Chicago. “This is so emotional and surreal for me. It’s uncharted territory. The reaction from readers has been overwhelmingly positive. I’ve received e-mails from people all over the world who have read my book, including Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Indonesia.”

Published by Last Gasp, an independent San Francisco-based company, Arab in America even captured the attention of The Wall Street Journal. The business news daily featured El Rassi’s graphic novel in a weekend edition shortly after its publication.

El Rassi gained the inspiration to pen his 118-page tale shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

“I was at a fundraiser at a mosque and a mother said how her children were ashamed of their Arabic ethnicity,” he recalls. “Her story of how her family felt ostracized really resonated with me. We shouldn’t be afraid of our heritage.”

From start to finish, the process of completing his graphic novel took nearly four years. El Rassi did all the art work by hand, instead of relying on any assistance from a computer program.

“That was by principle,” he says. “I’m not opposed to using technology, but I felt that would have made it less personal. Since this is an autobiographical work, it’s crucial to make it as personal as possible.”

While he’s proud of Arab in America, El Rassi admits that his graphic novel is aimed at mature readers. Throughout his life, he says there have been occasions when he has been taunted by others—including being labeled as a terrorist—simply because of his race. His book is unflinching in its portrayal of the racial animosity endured by himself and other Arabs and Muslims. “There are some adult situations,” he warns.

Though he’s finished with his graphic novel, El Rassi still carries a sketch pad to record his creative impulses.

“To be honest, I wasn’t expecting anything when I started working on Arab in America,” he says. “I was going to draw one way or another. The point of art is to share it with someone. For it to be interesting, to resonate with people, it has to be honest. The catch is that you have to reveal a lot about yourself—and that can be scary.”
A FUNNY THING HAPPENED to June Sproat on the way to fulfilling her dream of becoming an author.

“Life got in the way,” says Sproat, who married and had children after graduating in 1991 with a degree in fiction writing from Columbia College.

“Having a family changes your perspective. For me, writing a book was always a personal goal, not a career goal.”

Sproat, a technical specialist in the Office of Registration and Records at Oakton, put her literary aspirations on hold to devote time to her career and to raising three children with her husband Mark. As her children became older, however, Sproat began to realize that writing a novel was within her grasp.

“Getting published was something I never gave up on,” she says. “My family had to take priority. However, when your children grow up they start needing you less and less. Finally, it was just time for me to do something that I’ve always wanted to do.”

Her goal was achieved with the publication of Ordinary Me, by Wild Rose Press. The 157-page work of “young adult fiction” follows the narrative of a high school student named Kate Sterns who, after performing a heroic act, finds herself part of the “in crowd,” and learns that being popular may not be all it’s cracked up to be.

As a youth, Sproat’s ambition to become a writer was fueled by reading the acclaimed novels of Judy Blume. Nationally recognized for her contributions to young adult literature, Blume’s many books have been translated into 20 languages.

“Her characters are usually adolescent girls facing problems who are able to overcome adversity,” says Sproat. “I remember always feeling good after reading her books.”

Like her favorite author, Sproat also has the opportunity to have a positive influence on young adults.

“About three years ago, I was in a book store in search of young adult novels for one of my daughters,” recalls Sproat. “I wanted to find a book that optimistically dealt with issues facing high school students. I couldn’t find one, so I wrote one myself.”

Years removed from high school, Sproat nevertheless said it was easy to write from the point of view of a conflicted sophomore.

“Certain things stay with you from your earlier days,” she says. “For my book, I just put myself in a mode to think about what I would have done in certain situations. However, the characters in the book are not me, so I was also able to take bits and pieces from other people I knew to make them react like I wanted them to.”

Thanks to an understanding husband and children who gave her the solitude she needed to put her thoughts on paper, Sproat took eight months to develop a first draft. She also made constant revisions on the advice of others.

“I joined the Chicago-North chapter of the Romance Writers of America, which helps writers by offering critiques,” says Sproat. “It’s a fabulous group. You bring in pages of your work and do a verbal read of it. Then you get feedback from 20 people. While intimidating, the experience was extremely beneficial. I wouldn’t have been published without their help.”

After several rewrites, Sproat began the arduous task of sending her manuscripts to publishers, confident that ultimately it would find an audience.

“While it took me two years, I just never gave up,” she says. “Some people get rejections and then stop trying. I knew the worst thing someone could say was ‘no’."

Sproat doesn’t plan on stopping with just one literary triumph. Her next young adult book is nearly completed, and features new characters and new situations.

“Now that I’ve gone through the experience once, my expectations for myself are higher,” she says.
A WOMAN FROM YouTube was on the phone, swearing Michelle Morales to secrecy.

“Don’t tell anyone about this yet,” Michele Flannery, music community manager for the popular Internet video portal, explained to Morales. “We won’t be announcing the winners until tomorrow. Get ready to hear from the media.”

The following day, the Logan Square resident found herself on the phone with the Chicago Sun-Times, WKQX-FM, and other pop culture chroniclers, all clamoring to know how she felt about winning the opportunity to play with rock superstars, the Foo Fighters, at the 2008 Grammy Awards.

“Within a few days I was leaving for Los Angeles, so there wasn’t a lot of time to get nervous or anything,” says Morales, who joined the Oakton music faculty to teach cello only a few weeks earlier. As it was, the classically-trained cellist waited until the last minute to enter the “My Grammy Moment” contest, which placed 15 winners on stage to accompany the Foo Fighters in a performance of “The Pretender.”

“The mother of one of my students read about it in an article,” says Morales. “You never know about some of these contests, but it seemed pretty legit. I listened to the song over and over again, to develop some kind of musical concept beyond the main theme. Then we set up the video camera and shot four takes.”

For the next few weeks, Morales waged a viral online campaign to get friends and family to vote for her video entry. She was particularly energized by the comments posted by young cellists who said they found inspiration in her fiery performance. Then the call from Flannery set a whirlwind of activity in motion.

“The first day in L.A., we only rehearsed with [Led Zeppelin’s] John Paul Jones,” said Morales. “The music was so well arranged, and everything meshed. Dave Grohl showed up on his motorcycle at the end of the day to meet us. We rehearsed with the band the second day, and the energy level was really high. We ran through the song eight or nine times, but most of that was for the TV production crew.”

After the Grammy telecast, Morales said, the real party began.

“Dave was so happy, he asked all of us if we wanted to go to the Sony/BMG party, the one hosted by Clive Davis,” she said. “I think his assistant freaked out at having to get the whole orchestra into the party, but it was very casual. I talked with Josh Groban and Natalie Cole. John Mayer had a bodyguard, so we didn’t get to talk to him.”

Morales is no stranger to celebrity. While living in Arizona, where she earned a bachelor’s degree at Arizona State University, she studied for seven years with Laurie Selby of the Phoenix Symphony, and played with hip hop innovator Kanye West on his “Touch the Sky” tour.

“Kanye travels with a violinist who conducts a different string quartet in every city,” she explains. “We had an hour to sight read the music and learn some choreography.”

Choreography? For a cellist?

“Oh you know,” she laughs, “swinging the bow around in the drama.”

After relocating to Chicago to attend DePaul University, where she earned a master’s degree in cello performance, Morales began exploring a variety of musical opportunities. In addition to her busy teaching schedule, she performs with Dick Prall, a local singer-songwriter, and Anomie, a classical ensemble devoted to new works. She and boyfriend Miles Benjamin also perform together as The Loneliest Monk.

“Classical players are learning that we can actually make money if we just let go of ourselves and learn to collaborate,” says Morales, who recorded with Miles’ other band, All Things Lucid, just one week after “meeting” him on MySpace.

“That’s how we’re going to keep classical music going.”
Meaning

ABOLOQASEM FERDOWSI. Naguib Mahfouz. Rabindranath Tagore. Though these names may cause some tongues to twist, all are authors featured in the Great Books Program at Oakton. One of five such community college programs nationwide, Great Books at Oakton incorporates hidden classics from various cultures in addition to Shakespeare, Dante, Plato, and other familiar writers.

While distinguished only by the letter “G” in course numbers, Great Books courses offer an experience unlike that found in most college classrooms. The discussions are lively, the class size is intimate—and the professor is really listening.

“This is not a traditional lecture class,” says Helen (Lyn) Ward Page, professor and program coordinator. “Students and faculty are discovering and learning together.”

Great Books classes have three features that distinguish them from other courses. The first is the obvious emphasis on great books. Fifty percent of the material covered in the class must qualify as works that are timeless, continue to have an impact on society, and are found on the authors list of the Great Books Foundation. The second is a theme that can be applied to the featured class readings. Previous course topics have included “courage,” “desire,” “morality,” and “the individual vs. the community.”

The third is a pedagogical method known as shared inquiry.

“Shared inquiry ideally involves students and faculty interpreting the material together to create meaning,” says Page. This teaching and learning style fosters a discussion between students and faculty. The instructor provides background information vital to the students’ complete comprehension of the material, and raises questions that have no definite answer. Based on the text, several answers may be correct. The seminar-style course challenges students to interpret meanings based on facts.

The interactive format is fueled by the class size; there is a limit of 25 students for each Great Books course, often leading to spirited discussions.

“The disagreements are fun,” says Victoria Zavin, a Great Books student. “We are all racing to find examples in the text that support or refute different ideas. It’s like a competition.”

Students also find they can better retain the subject matter presented through this method of learning.

“For these courses, you put in more work, but it is worth it,” says Donald Kleppin, another student. “The information sticks because of all the discussion that takes place. It’s a lot more effective than just studying the material over and over.”

In spring 2008, students of Great Books were invited to the Annual Great Books Student Symposium at Wilbur Wright College—one of the five U.S. community colleges with a Great Books Program. Students had the opportunity to share their analysis of a given work and discuss their ideas with peers from other schools.

“The symposium was excellent,” says participant Lindsay Donovan. “I am not a public speaker, so the experience was horribly wonderful. Despite the public speaking, I would love to do it again.”

A grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) allowed Oakton to establish the Great Books Program in 2004. The College retained the program despite the end of grant funding in 2006.

“Oakton has been very committed to carrying out the program,” says Page. “We are fortunate to have the right students, great administrative support, and interested and flexible faculty.”

The Great Books Program launched with just five course sections, three faculty members, and two disciplines in the spring of 2005. Three years later, a typical semester boasts 26 sections over five disciplines, with 14 participating faculty members.

With Great Books courses in English, history, humanities, philosophy, and political science, the value of these courses cannot be overlooked.

“We are learning to analyze the works, and that is something we can take with us,” says Donovan. “No matter what you end up doing, analysis is important. Being able to use that skill helps you become a more developed person.”

Page also sees the skills gained in this class as tools for life.

“The students’ ability to understand different materials and think abstractly can grow a great deal in these courses, and that is the ultimate goal: to have citizens being able to think for themselves.”
BY THE TIME she graduated with high honors and a near-perfect grade point average, Oakton graduate Cheryl-Lynn May (“Museum Quality,” *Outlook*, Vol. 4, No. 1) already had been named a Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Scholar. Facing competition from nearly 700 other U.S. community colleges students, May emerged as one of only 38 selected for the esteemed scholarship, worth $30,000, which allowed her to continue her studies as an art history major at Lake Forest College.

May continues to be recognized for her academic achievements. In 2008, she received another Jack Kent Cooke Foundation scholarship—the $50,000 Continuing Scholar Graduate Award. She also was one of eight Fellows accepted into the exclusive Winterthur Program in American Material Culture at the University of Delaware. More than 70 students applied for the scarce openings.

“This is an extremely competitive program, the top program in my field,” she explains. “Many people apply more than once before they are accepted. We’ll be going to London as part of an English landscape design course. And with full access to the Winterthur Museum, I’ll be allowed to handle all of the objects in the collection.”

Amazingly, May started her journey with little confidence in her ability to succeed in college. She persevered and conquered a variety of family and personal challenges, including childhood asthma. This condition caused May to miss so many days of high school that she eventually earned her diploma through an accredited correspondence school. Before starting at Oakton, she worked as a hotel housekeeper.

“So many life-shaping experiences have helped me to expand the depth and breadth of myself and my academic journey,” May wrote in her first essay for the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. “I feel as though I was given the paintbrushes to compose myself.”

Community service also remains important to May as she continues to pursue her academic goals, which include earning a Ph.D. She volunteers for the Wilmette Historical Museum, National MS Society, Holocaust Memorial Foundation, and the American Cancer Society. In addition, she has joined Oakton’s acclaimed VITA literacy program, to help non-native speakers improve their language skills.

“While I was being interviewed for the Winterthur Program, one of the members of the admissions committee took me aside to ask how I had made it to this point, since I was the only person from a community college,” says May. “I told him about Oakton, and he commented that it was clearly an exemplary institution dedicated to students.

“I couldn’t agree more.”
Margaret Burroughs, founder of the DuSable Museum of African American History, was a special visitor to Convergence: Jewish and African American Artists in Depression-era Chicago, an exhibition at the Koehnline Museum of Art. Convergence included not only Burroughs’ art work but also a portrait of her painted by Shoshanna (inset), one of the exhibition’s featured Jewish artists. Burroughs’ visit yielded an unexpected and precious gift to Oakton’s permanent art collection: a series of 20 linocuts (a form of printmaking that utilizes linoleum instead of wood blocks) she created in the 1990s featuring Malcolm X, Sojourner Truth, Mahalia Jackson, and scenes of African American life.