



April 2022 Leadership Update

Colleagues,

We've survived another rough Chicago winter and we'll soon enjoy the greenery and renewal of spring on our campuses (if the weather will ever stay warm for more than a few days at a time). That would be an accomplishment in itself, if we hadn't achieved so much else this year.

This truly is one of the most special times of the year. It's extra special this year because on May 16, we'll celebrate commencement in person for the first time in three years. I'm so looking forward to honoring our students in the presence of family and friends, seeing their smiles and sharing their positive energy. This academic year, we'll award 1,850 degrees and certificates. Wow! That's 1,850 students' lives changed for the better, multiplied by the positive impact on their families and communities. And as usual, you're to thank. Under challenging circumstances, you continue to put your best foot forward, supporting our students inside and outside the classroom.

In addition to commencement, we've recently had plenty else to celebrate. Many of you attended this week's Des Plaines campus renovations dedication — which include upgrades to the cafeteria, Board Room and front entrance. These improvements mark the end of our 5-year facilities master plan, adopted in 2017. And while our physical spaces have seen a dramatic renewal, we're not done. Led by our administrative affairs and facilities teams, we're finalizing the next facilities master plan — and we'll continue to create a more welcoming and inclusive campus for our students and community to learn, grow and build relationships.

It was also great to join students, faculty and staff for the Student Leadership Celebration last week at Chateau Ritz in Niles and at the AAPI Cultural Graduation Celebration last night. Creating opportunities for students to celebrate their accomplishments and engage with one another is a huge component of the Oakton Experience we strive to create. Keep an eye out for more opportunities to celebrate with students as we wind down the semester.

This month, we also celebrated the first graduating class of the Northwestern Prison Education Program with a ceremony at Stateville Correctional Center in Joliet. This program is another example of our commitment to equity, enabling 19 incarcerated men to earn an associate degree from Oakton on their pathway to earning a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University. It is hard to describe what it felt like to be a part of this commencement ceremony. In a place often filled with hopelessness and despair, it was inspiring to hear the graduates speak of how this program has impacted their lives, giving them hope, ambition and a meaningful

connection with their classmates and the faculty and staff who support the program. Thank you to the faculty who traveled to Stateville to teach courses and the support staff who made this program possible.

Parallel to our winding down the 2021-2022 academic year, we're also preparing for our summer and fall terms. It's no secret we've experienced decreasing enrollment for several years, a trend escalated by the pandemic. I'm hopeful that a combination of new programs — including the Emory Williams Academy for Black Men — and financial incentives will allow students to begin or re-enter their educational path. The College recently received a grant through the state's Workforce Equity Initiative, allowing students who reside in qualifying areas within Evanston, Maine and Niles Townships to enroll in short-term credit programs at Oakton, tuition-free. Additionally, this year's state budget includes increased funding for Monetary Award Program (MAP) grants. Under the budget, the MAP program will also expand to cover short-term certificate programs. That's great news for our students, especially those looking to quickly upskill or re-skill and advance their careers.

Additionally, our re-designed website — which will launch internally next week — will be a welcome tool for showcasing the College and driving enrollment. And our next Strategic Plan, set to take effect on July 1, will increase our understanding of College priorities and lay out strategies for helping students achieve their goals and creating stronger communities. As always, please keep in mind that enrollment is everyone's job, and we must all continue to be ambassadors for the College. Let's prioritize intentionally connecting current and prospective students with the resources they need to successfully enroll and chart a path toward reaching their goals.

I mentioned earlier that our recent campus renovations included upgrades to our Des Plaines campus Board Room. After two years of mostly virtual board meetings, it really is nice to have a modern, technology-rich space to meet and engage the community. During this week's meeting, the Board selected its officers for the upcoming year. I'm pleased to announce that Trustee Paul Kotowski (previously Secretary) assumed the role as Chair, Dr. Wendy Yanow as Vice-Chair, and Dr. Gail Bush as Secretary for one-year terms. I am grateful for the leadership of outgoing Board Chair Martha Burns and Vice-Chair Marie Lynn Toussaint, both of whom will continue to serve as trustees. Also, congratulations to Student Trustee Akash Patel who was recently re-elected to serve a second, one-year term. At this week's Board meeting, the Board also ratified the employment agreement with the Classified Staff Association. I know this has been a long and difficult process, exacerbated by the challenges of the pandemic. I am grateful for the dedication and persistence of the negotiating teams that worked together to reach an agreement that will serve the staff, the College and our students.

This really is an exciting time at Oakton. There is so much great work happening across the College. Please, take a moment to reflect on all the good work you've accomplished, and be sure to set aside time to relax and recharge so that you can continue to be at your best, personally and professionally. We all play a part in

helping to live out our mission of empowering and transforming our students' lives through education. I can't thank you all enough — especially this month's Lifesavers — recognized by students and colleagues for their impact on creating the Oakton Experience.

May Alimboyoguen
Mel Battistoni
Svetlana Bayer
Vicki Bialek
Anne Brennan
Carlos Briones
Steve Butera
Will Crawford
Eva de la Riva López
Christine Dentamaro
Artur Dziejzicki
Rani Edassery
Princess Escudero
Julia Gray
Nizar Handzic
Krissie Harris
Lindsey Hewitt
Kristen Hren
Michelle James

Antonio Jimenez
Kamari Jordan
Kelsey Kapolnek
Megan Klein
Amanda Krause
Karin Kushino
Gaya Lasam
Andrea Lehmacher
Ileo Lott
Mike Manilov
Jeff Manson
Steve Martin
Jon McFarlane
Ozzie Mendez
Dave Nadolski
Henrietta Nigliazzo
Patrick O'Donnell
Kristine Panopio
Phil Prale

Sam Pudi
Dan Ridolfi
Julie Rosenberg
Samantha Schenk
Caroline Schwartz
Ray Shelton
Anna Shipulina
Francisco Sosa
Glenna Sprague
Rich Szustek
John Wade
Val Westphal
John Widera
Pete Wightman
Matt Wong
Christine Ynaya
Brad Young
Lynda Zenati
Kristie Zenchak

In community,

