



February 2022 Leadership Update

Dear Colleagues,

Tomorrow (Friday, Feb. 18) marks one month since the start of the spring semester, but we've already been through — and accomplished — so much. We supported students through a temporary transition to remote learning, then welcomed them back to our campuses in the largest numbers since before the pandemic. That's on top of all the big projects underway that will help us better serve our students and communities in the short and long terms. These include the College brand refresh and name change, website redesign, facilities master plan refresh and strategic plan development. It's a lot!

We've also had opportunities to come together, in-person and virtually, to recognize, celebrate and honor the contributions of Black Americans during Black History Month. Thank you to the leaders of our B.L.A.C.K. Student Success Program, Black Student Union, Office of Student Life and Campus Inclusion, Athletics, the Library, the Center for Promoting STEM, Sustainability Club and the Koehline Museum for organizing a wide range of events. I want to give special thanks to Equity Coordinator for B.L.A.C.K. Student Success, Danielle Terry, and Black Student Union President, Edward Byrd, who accepted a Black History Month proclamation from Des Plaines Mayor Andrew Goczkowski at the Des Plaines City Council meeting earlier this month. The community is taking notice of our efforts to advance racial equity.

I'm proud of work taking place throughout the College — at all levels — to advance our anti-racism work and create a more equitable environment for all. At Tuesday night's monthly Board of Trustees meeting, the Board approved and adopted an official anti-racism statement, which reads as follows:

"Oakton is an anti-racist, inclusive, transparent institution; invested in and accountable to the communities we serve. We are committed to transforming all curricula, policies, structures and practices to dismantle and eliminate racism and other forms of oppression so all members of our community thrive. Through reflection, empowerment, and accountability to anti-racist people of color, we model the socially just and equitable transformation that we want to see in the world."

Thank you to members of the Anti-Racism Team for drafting this statement that establishes a vision to guide our racial equity work. This work has never been more important as we continue to witness acts of violence against minoritized communities, including the recent series of bomb threats targeting historically Black colleges and universities, acts of violence against the Asian American community,

and a recent hostage situation at a synagogue in Texas. These incidents add to the trauma experienced by minoritized communities. Of course, not all acts of racism are so overt. Many come in the form of microaggressions, which can be equally painful and traumatizing, making it hard for students and colleagues of color to experience Oakton as the anti-racist institution that we are striving to become. We will continue to work together to raise awareness, build skills to address microaggressions, and engage in healing dialogue. The racial healing circles offered through the CPD in partnership with the YWCA Equity Institute is one resource for racial healing. A new dispute resolution service coordinated by the Office of Access, Equity and Diversity (launching in March) will be another resource as we continue to build capacity to address issues of bias at Oakton.

At Tuesday's Board meeting, the Board also approved naming the forthcoming Oakton Academy for Black Men in honor of former Trustee Emory Williams. Mr. Williams' service to Oakton capped a four-decade career in public education, during which he worked tirelessly to create equitable educational opportunities for students. He was an early champion of prioritizing equity and racial justice at Oakton and laid the foundation for much of the work we are engaged in now. The first cohort of Emory Williams Academy scholars will be enrolled in the fall 2022 semester.

Tuesday's Board meeting also included a report focused on two important areas of equity work. The Advancing Racial Justice in Student Learning and Success Initiative team provided an overview of their work to bring a racial equity lens to generic course syllabi. Also, Dear Aunaetrakul, senior manager, AANAPISI, COMPASS, elevated the voice and experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander students, deepening our collective understanding of what it means to be an AANAPISI designated institution.

As many are aware, Oakton continues to experience considerable change, including campus renovations, evolving curriculum and programs, and of course, new colleagues. I'd like to welcome three recently hired administrators who will play critical roles in guiding us forward and helping us fulfill our mission of empowering and transforming students. Please join me in welcoming:

LeVon McAllister, Director of Campus Technologies
David Kendrick, Director of Online Curriculum and Instruction, and
David Hittenmiller, Assistant Financial Controller

I also want to congratulate the following faculty members who, upon approval by the Board of Trustees on Tuesday night, will be granted tenure at the end of the spring 2022 term. Most of their time at Oakton has been during these challenging Covid times, so we are especially proud of their commitment to their teaching and the success of our students.

Jeffrey Cabay, Instructor of Engineering
Jessica Pinedo, Assistant Professor of English/ESL
Ji-Hyae Park, Associate Professor of English

Keenan Andrews, Associate Professor of Business
Martinique Hallerduff, Associate Professor of Library
Nefize Fejza, Instructor of Nursing
Patrick O'Donnell, Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Teresa Kirwan, Instructor of Nursing, and
Valeria Benson-Lira, Assistant Professor of EAS/GEG

Thanks also to this month's lifesavers, who've gone above and beyond to support students and colleagues during what has been an incredibly busy start to the spring semester.

Steve Aguilar	Muliani Hartono	Kathy Roberson
May Alimboyoguen	Marcus Hayes	Erick Rohn
Keenan Andrews	Tom Hicks	Julie Rosenberg
Kelly Becker	Sandy Huffman	Espy Salgado-
Valeria Benson-Lira	Jennifer Jennings	Rodriguez
Michelle Blum	Amanda Johnson	Caroline Schwartz
George Bueno	Teresa Kirwan	Joe Scifo
Carol Burns	Jim Kowols	Laura Sewell
Jeffrey Cabay	Renee Kozimor	Manisha Shah
Debbie Christie	Maja Lamik	Anna Sowinska
Jennifer Crowley	Steve Martin	June Sproat
Brenda Cruz	Caitlin Melzer	Danielle Terry
Leana Cuellar	Gabrielle O'Connor	Faina Vilks
Nefize Fejza	Patrick O'Donnell	Cheryl Warmann
Stephen Finney	Kunnain Osman	Susan Werth
Michelle Foley	Kristine Panopio	Val Westphal
Julia Gray	Ji-Hyae Park	Ruth Williams
Al Grippe	Valerie Parrilli	Rebecca Wojcicki
Martinique Hallerduff	Jessica Pinedo	Phillip Young
Joe Hanafee	Rignesha Prajapati	

I'll close this month's Leadership Update by asking you to consider contributing to the Oakton Educational Foundation during the Employee Giving Campaign, taking place now through March 4. The Foundation has been a tremendous partner in supporting student success, especially during the pandemic. The Foundation also supports Oakton employees during times of need through the Employee Emergency Fund 35. The Employee Emergency Fund allows us to ease the burden of financial hardship for colleagues with emergency financial needs including funeral expenses for the unexpected loss of loved ones, medical bills and other expenses. As part of this year's Employee Giving Campaign, I made a contribution to the Employee Emergency Fund in honor of you – our Oakton employees for the many ways you all support the College and our students. The Employee Emergency Fund 35 is in need of replenishment. If you are able, I encourage you to consider joining me in making a contribution so that we can continue to assist colleagues who find themselves in need. Visit the Employee Giving Page in the myOakton portal for more information about giving through payroll deduction, or by check or credit card.

As I mentioned at the top of this month's message, we've already been through a lot this semester. I have no doubt the challenges will keep coming, both expected and unexpected. But I have all the confidence that you will continue meeting those challenges with the same grace and flexibility that you've shown throughout (and before) the pandemic, creating a better Oakton for all.

In community,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Jri'.