



March 2022 Leadership Update

Dear Colleagues,

I hope many of you had the opportunity to relax and recharge last week during spring break — and perhaps even enjoyed some spring(ish)-like weather. I am actually on vacation right now, traveling with Rachel for a mom/daughter trip that has been postponed for several years because of Covid. I am looking forward to spending time with Rachel surrounded by the beauty of Sedona and the Grand Canyon. I am sure that David and Noah will have adventures of their own while we are away!

There's so much loss and uncertainty in our world. It's important to pause, unplug and connect with those we love. I hope that you are each finding ways to do that for yourselves so that we can show up as our best selves not only at Oakton but in our personal lives as well.

Many of us continue to struggle with the unfolding events surrounding the Russian invasion of Ukraine — which in addition to upending the lives of millions of Ukrainian citizens, also threatens our democratic ideals and raises concerns about global destabilization. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to ESL instructor Svetlana Boulavina and Distinguished Professor of Political Science George Lungu, who led a community discussion earlier this month to help us deepen our collective understanding of the ongoing war.

This month, we also pass the second anniversary of the pandemic's onset, which has created immense loss and profoundly impacted our daily lives. I encourage you to participate in the [Wellness Center's Covid Remembrance event](#) as we pause and reflect on the last two years and the losses we've experienced as well as the perspectives we have gained.

This week, we loosened our masking requirements in many campus spaces — a change that coincides with recently adjusted guidance from the CDC and local health officials. This signals a return to normalcy for some but is less welcomed by others. Let's continue to treat one another with kindness and compassion, recognizing our different levels of comfort with the new guidance. Our COVID Response Team continues to meet regularly and will adjust safety protocols as needed.

Aside from these ongoing, global issues that continue to impact each of us — it's also an exciting time for the Oakton Community. There are just a few more weeks left in the spring semester — and I'm extremely proud of the many ways you support students as they work toward their Big Goals.

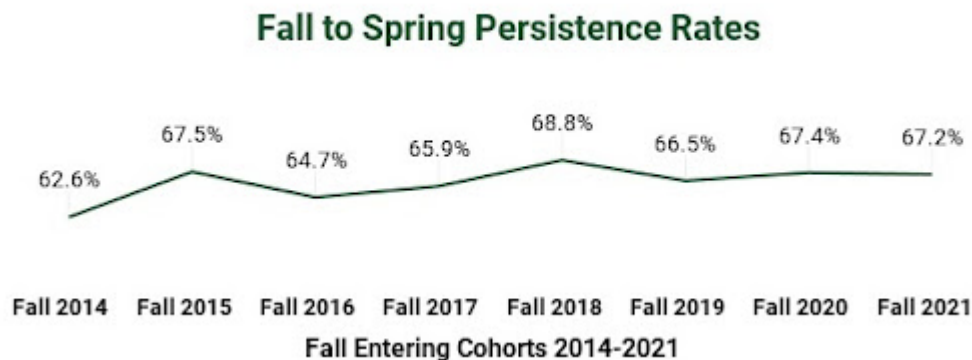
It's hard to believe it's been three years since we've held an in-person commencement ceremony. I'm so excited for this year's commencement, set for May 16 at the Rosemont Theater. I look forward to joining many of you to celebrate our students' success and accomplishments in the presence of their families and friends. I mentioned how proud I am of the ways we've supported our students. If it's possible, I'm even prouder of our

students themselves. They've continued along their academic paths under less than ideal circumstances created by the pandemic and other issues in their personal lives. I know our commencement planning team is coordinating what will be a very joyous occasion for all!

As we prepare to celebrate students who are completing their program this semester, we're also supporting students who are continuing their journey at Oakton. Summer priority registration for current students is currently underway and full registration opens this Thursday, March 24.

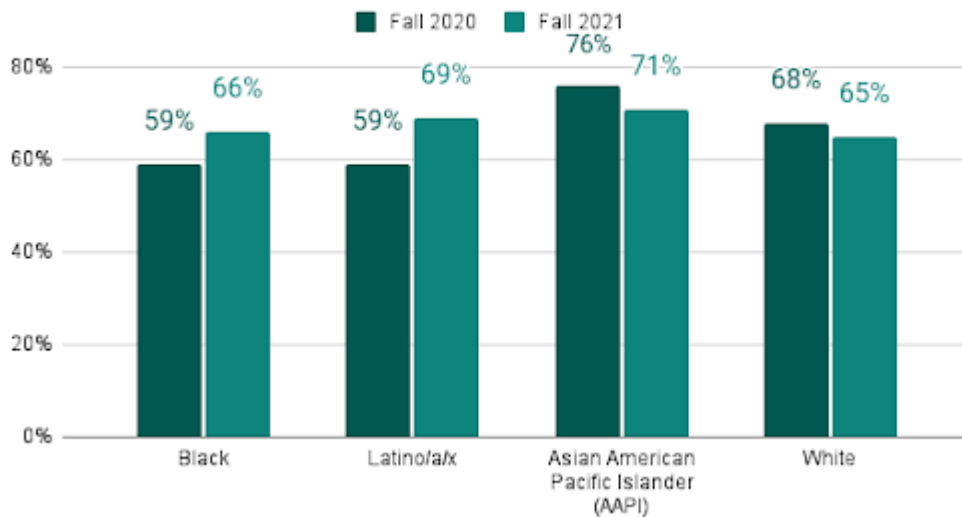
By now, it's no secret that we have experienced significant enrollment decreases during the pandemic. As we consider strategies to reverse this trend and help more students reach their educational and professional goals — I must emphasize the importance of not only attracting new students but also retaining our currently enrolled students.

As displayed in the chart below, this year's fall to spring overall persistence rate is 67.2%. That is within the range of the past several years' persistence rates but is down slightly from our peak fall to spring persistence rate set with the fall 2018 cohort. fall-to-spring persistence is a lead measure for fall-to-fall persistence – another lead indicator of completion (a lagging measure).



While the data shows there is more work ahead to improve persistence, I am encouraged by increased fall-to-spring persistence rates among students from historically minoritized backgrounds. The chart below shows year-over-year increases in fall-to-spring persistence rates for both Black and Latino/a/x students. I've spoken at length about our intentional efforts to improve equity through strategies in our Equity plan, like the Persistence Project, Equity-minded syllabus work, and the B.L.A.C.K. Student Success, iANDALE! And COMPASS programs.

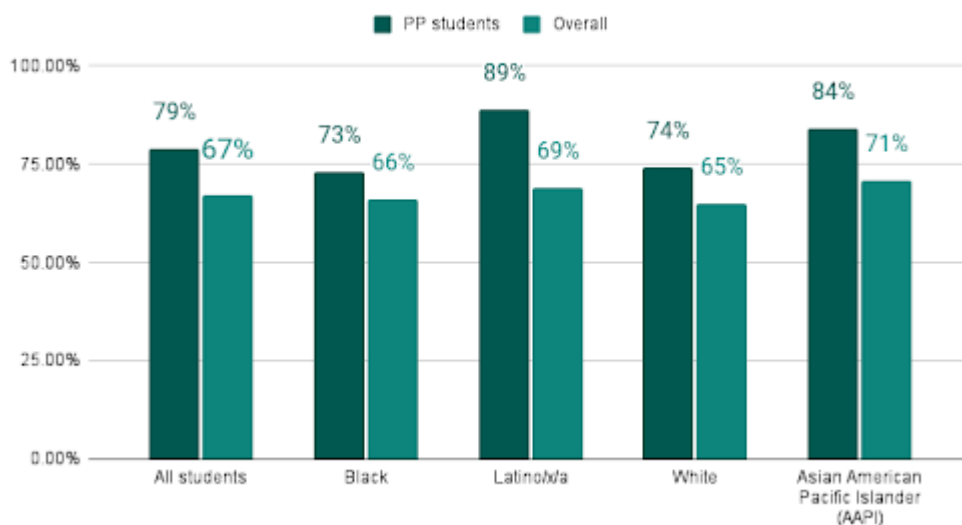
Fall to Spring Persistence Rates by Race/Ethnicity



Once again, the data from the Faculty Persistence Project demonstrate that students who are enrolled in persistence project sections persist term to term and year to year at much higher rates than those not enrolled in these sections.

This year's fall-to-spring persistence rate for Persistence Project Students is 78.8% — nearly 12 percentage points higher than the overall fall-to-spring rates, and the positive impact is even more significant for minoritized students. I am grateful to the faculty who continue to invest their time, energy and heart into this effort. It clearly makes a difference, increasing students' sense of belonging, connection and persistence toward their goals. Although we can't directly control student enrollment and persistence, we can control the ways we support our students — and the persistence project work is clearly a high-impact practice with demonstrated equity impact.

Persistence Project - Fall to spring persistence rates



I'm confident as we continue to move from equity talk to equity walk, we will see improved equitable outcomes for students. It requires each of us to engage in this effort.

Please join me, the Office of Institutional Research, and faculty members Dr. Eva de La Riva López and Kristen Hren at our next Equity Summit on Wednesday, March 30, at 3 p.m., during which they will share the work they are doing related to the Equity-minded syllabus and course success. Check tomorrow's (March 23) Oakton Matters for a link to join. We also continue to develop and implement new programs, such as the Emory Williams Academy for Black Men, which will launch this fall. Leaders of the Academy are currently holding recruitment events for our first cohort of scholars. Please encourage individuals from within your circles to attend an upcoming [information session](#) to learn how the Emory Williams Academy can help them reach their goals.

I am grateful to all of the individuals leading this vital work that will continue to improve equity at Oakton and ultimately create stronger communities. This includes many of this month's Lifesavers, recognized by their peers and students for their outstanding efforts:

Syed Alavi
Anthony Siriscevich Jr.
Ioana Ardelean
Dear Aunaetitrakul
Mel Battistoni
Michelle Blum
Mario Borha
Svetlana Boulavina
Anne Brennan
Jeff Cabay
Phil Cronin
Jennifer Crowley
Amy Donash
Steve Fix
Margaret Gas
October Gunawan
Martinique Hallerduff
Colette Hands
Scott Johnson
Carrie Kelly
Karin Kushino
Gloria Liu
George Lungu
Paula Luszc
Bakahia Madison-Reed
Carrie Martorana
Kristin McCartney
Patricia Muffoletto
Patrick O'Donnell
Kunnain Osman
Arbella Pera
Rob Peterson
Stella Pillay
Kevin Purtell
Lee Resurreccion
Sylvia Rosillo
Rebecca Sedam

Laura Sewell
Vinita Shah
Poleen Shamoon
Jennifer Spencer
Danielle Terry
Lei Wang
Tara Wesselink
Val Westphal
Kristin Wirth
Rebecca Wojcicki
Miny Wu

As I wrap up this month's Leadership Update, I'd like to highlight a few of the ongoing projects that will help us live out our mission, vision and values.

We are nearing the launch of our redesigned public website (www.oakton.edu). The new site, which will be primarily geared to serve as Oakton's front door for prospective students and community members, will feature re-organized, easier-to-navigate content and a modernized design. Check last week's Oakton Matters for information regarding the site's shared governance framework, which will help us keep the site's content up-to-date and relevant. The new website will launch internally May 1, and will be unveiled publicly June 1.

Additionally, Oakton's next Strategic Plan is nearing completion and is on track for board approval in June. Thanks to everyone who attended recent Strategic Planning open houses to offer your input on how the Plan's Big Ideas will help support our bold vision of creating just communities through education. We have been actively engaging external stakeholders as well through focus groups and surveys to ensure that our plan resonates with the communities we serve.

Finally, work continues to progress on the College's brand refresh and name change, which will align with the College's evolving vision and goals. Earlier this month, many of you met with the leaders of ADV Market Research & Consulting, whom we've retained to provide guidance and help us define and achieve our name change and rebranding goals and objectives. As you prepare to order branded materials, letterhead, etc., please be mindful that our logo will soon change and remember to only order quantities needed for the 2022 calendar year. Our Brand Refresh Leadership Team continues to meet regularly as well — and I look forward to sharing more soon about how you can get involved and help support this transition.

I know there is a lot happening right now at Oakton, and I appreciate your dedication to supporting one another and our students as we strive to achieve our mission of transforming students' lives through education.

In community,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Jri', is located at the bottom left of the page.