



## **November 2021 Leadership Update**

Dear Colleagues,

Over the course of the last few months, many of you have shared with me how exhausted and depleted you feel. I know that many of us are struggling to keep up with the daily challenges we face while also showing up as the best versions of ourselves at home and at work. Someone close to me shared that it feels like we are running a marathon, but we don't know what mile we are on. That analogy spoke to me. We've been "running" for 20 months. We're tired and we don't know when the "run" will be over. Along the way, we've experienced losses — of loved ones, of routines, and of colleagues who've retired or left for other opportunities. It is no wonder we are depleted.

Last month, I shared two of my daily routines with the administrative team. On most days, these small things help me to remain centered so that I can be my best self. I share them with you in the hope that they might also help you feel more energized and focused on the things that matter most in your life.

I begin each morning with a brief mindfulness exercise and make a daily intention (after my first cup of coffee, of course). This helps me to start my day in a positive way. At the dinner table, our family shares a moment of gratitude (some of the moments are comical thanks to my teenagers). On most days, these two small routines help me to manage the complexity of leading the College and being a good spouse, parent and friend.

As we acknowledge our own exhaustion, it's important we also recognize that many students also feel stretched beyond their normal limits. The next few weeks are critical for them as they prepare for final exams and then consider their next steps. Please reach out to students with whom you interact — in classrooms and in your support roles — to ensure them that they are not alone on their journey.

With spring registration fully open as of today, it's critical we help our currently enrolled students persist along their path. Let's all do our part to connect them with appropriate resources and encourage them to register early.

This spring, we will again incentivize students to prioritize investing in their Oakton education by offering a free credit class to new and returning students. Additionally, Oakton CARES Emergency Relief Funds will be available to students who incurred pandemic-related financial impacts. Our goal is to reduce financial concerns as a barrier for students as much as possible, allowing them to return or remain in the classroom. Please encourage students who express a financial need to contact our financial aid department to explore available options and resources.

This spring, we continue to expand our academic offerings by introducing new innovative programs, including the Sterile Processing Technician Certificate (late start program) and the Cannabis Cultivation Certificate.

These short-term programs will prepare students for jobs in high-demand health careers as well as the emerging cannabis industry. Plus, I'm excited for students to gain hands-on experience in our brand new cannabis cultivation lab, which is currently under construction on the lower level of the Des Plaines campus.

And while the impact of expanding academic programs will be felt immediately, our next strategic plan will help us realize our longer-term vision of creating just communities through education.

I hope last month's Learning Day helped clarify the strategic plan's Big Goals and inspired you to help us achieve those goals in your daily work.

As our Learning Day keynote speaker, Khadish Franklin of EAB, astutely observed, students throughout the country are bracing for change. When students leave Oakton and other higher education institutions, they will live and work differently than past generations.

Mr. Franklin implored us to understand our role in driving this change and preparing students for success. He noted that as we create new programs and initiatives to support students, we must properly scale them so they can be delivered effectively and ensure they are inclusive and technology-friendly.

Thank you again to our Learning Day committee for coordinating the event and bringing in expert voices from around the country to deepen our understanding of the strategic planning development and implementation process. I encourage you to visit the [Learning Day page in the myOakton portal](#) to watch (or re-watch) sessions you weren't able to attend as well as the supplemental materials.

As stretched and depleted as many of us are, I find opportunities to gather and celebrate with colleagues therapeutic and reinvigorating. I'm looking forward to the virtual Employee Recognition Day ceremony on Friday, Dec. 10, during which we'll honor colleagues celebrating milestone anniversaries. These individuals who have been with us 30, 40, and even 50 years are important links from Oakton's past to the future. I appreciate their dedication to the College and all they've done to support students and the community over the years.

Then, on Jan. 10, I invite you all to gather for our Spring Opening Day Kickoff event. Although there will be an option to attend virtually, this will be our first College-wide (mostly) 'in-person' event since the pandemic started. I look forward to colleagues sharing updates on impactful work taking place at the College and celebrating some of your recent accomplishments.

Please check Oakton Matters for more details on both the Employee Recognition and Spring Opening Day events.

We are able to welcome more people back to campus this spring because of your cooperation in complying with the statewide COVID-19 vaccination/testing mandate. To date, 95% of on-campus employees are in compliance.

Predictably, fewer credit students enrolled in face-to-face courses, 72%, are currently in compliance. Still, I appreciate the tireless work of our Student Affairs and IT staff as they navigate the monumental task of tracking compliance records and communicating with thousands of students. For the spring semester, our COVID response team and faculty leaders are developing a message regarding COVID-19 protocols to share with students via course syllabi. While this will ultimately make our campuses safer for everyone, I know this is one more task that adds to the exhaustion and depletion we're all experiencing — and I appreciate your consideration of helping us to amplify this message.

As we head toward the Thanksgiving Holiday, I thought it would be appropriate to close by expressing my gratitude to each of you for doing your very best to show up as your best selves every day so that we can support our students who are striving to be their best selves, changing

their lives through education. That includes this month's lifesavers, who have been recognized by students and colleagues for their special efforts to support students and one another.

Ragaa Abdallah  
Gabriela Ayala  
Marc Battista  
Kelly Becker  
Valeria Benson-Lira  
Tania Boisson  
Alissa Burke  
Stacy Cameron  
Edwin Chandrasekar  
Lisa Cherivtch  
Phil Cronin  
Brenda Cruz  
John Dattolo  
Eva de la Riva  
Chris Dentamaro  
Jenica Doma  
Brianna Ergastolo  
Princess Escudero  
Nefize Fejza  
Randy Felsenthal  
Mindy Finnigan  
Gloria Gallegos  
Evelia Giraldo  
Jennifer Gorszczyk  
Jeff Gossrow  
Mary Hope Griffin  
Paul Gulezian  
Camille Harrison  
Marcus Hayes  
Lindsey Hewitt  
Tom Hicks  
Bruce Hoffmann  
Peter Hudis  
Khursheed Ichhaporia  
Jesse Ivory  
Roshni Jaimon  
Jennifer Jennings  
Kelsey Kapolnek  
Kristin Keramidas  
Spencer Kimura  
Rich Koerner  
Andrea Lehmacher  
Gloria Liu  
Daryl Long  
Jaimee Machaj  
Jon McFarlane  
Grace Norte  
Teresa O'Sullivan

Kunnain Osman  
Christine Paciero  
Jhosa Pagulayan  
Kristine Panopio  
Michael Peat  
Lawrence Penar  
Rob Peterson  
Stella Pillay  
Jessica Pinedo  
Campus Police  
Rignisha Prajapati  
Laura Pristera  
Sam Pudi  
Prashant Rawal  
Mary Ringstad  
Sylvia Rosillo  
Kayla Ruchti  
Micah Rutschman  
Esperanza Salgado-Rodriguez  
Tiye Sherrod  
Prashant Shinde  
Andrew Sutter  
Aleda Thompson  
Jon Turnbull  
Manish Varma  
Barbara Vazquez  
Ruth Williams  
Matthew Wong  
Jasmyne Woodard  
Beth Wrobel  
Miny Wu

In Community,

Joi

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joi". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing initial "J" and a cursive "oi".