



May 2022 Leadership Update

Dear Colleagues,

We've reached the end of another academic year, one filled with ups and downs, challenges and accomplishments. The end of the academic year brings lots of transitions and is often bittersweet. We celebrate students transitioning to their desired next step, as well as colleagues who are moving on to a new chapter after years of service to Oakton, including those who are retiring. These moments are bittersweet for me as I will miss the connections with students and colleagues who have made a difference in my life and in our community.

Many of you joined us at our commencement ceremony earlier this month. It was such a treat to finally gather in person and share in our graduates' joy as they celebrated with family and friends. The words of both of this year's commencement speakers — high school equivalency graduate Joel Beltran, and Associate of Arts completer Brecel Limon — were inspiring. The following words from Brecel nicely encapsulate the perseverance I saw on display from this year's graduates and continue to see from all of our students.

"If we put in the work and dedicate time, we can achieve anything that we put our minds to. We will not achieve anything if we just sit idly. We need to work and build something of ourselves to become someone that we can be proud of. Nothing is wasted as long as you have the right mentality." — Brecel Limon

And as much as I treasured our previous on-campus commencement ceremonies, the Rosemont Theatre afforded an incredible venue and atmosphere worthy of this milestone. Thank you to the commencement committee for leading the work of creating this inspiring event.

We've had plenty of other recent opportunities to celebrate our students, colleagues and institutional success. Just yesterday, we celebrated the 41 Early College Students who completed their Basic Nurse Assistant Training (BNAT) credential. This certification qualifies students to work as a nurse's assistant and is the first step toward entering Oakton's Registered Nursing Program and other health career programs.

Congratulations also to the first two cohorts of the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) effective online teaching practices credential program. Our students will surely benefit from the newfound skills and inclusive practices of the 61 faculty members (both full and part-time) who completed this intensive 25-week, evidence-based course. And of course, we need to celebrate the incredible run of our baseball team! This weekend, they'll head to the NJCAA World Series in Greenville, Tennessee, for the fourth consecutive year. They punched their ticket by defeating Owens Community College in two consecutive games last Friday. Congratulations and best of luck to head coach Bill Fratto and the entire team.

Many of you attended Staff Day last week, which allowed you to step away from daily routines, build deeper connections with colleagues and familiarize yourself with our campuses and the resources available to you. Thank you to Center for Professional Development Senior Manager Mindy Finnigan and the Staff Professional Development Team for organizing these opportunities. Check this week's Oakton Matters for links to recorded sessions and a post-Staff Day survey.

As we take a moment to reflect on all we've accomplished throughout the past year, we must continue to examine ways to support students in achieving their goals and dreams. At this week's Board meeting, our student spotlight, Alejandro, poignantly shared his journey at Oakton — with a particular focus on the people at Oakton who connected him to resources, gave him hope, a sense of belonging and the support he needed to continue his path, especially in the face of challenge.

This is the Oakton Experience we are called to deliver for **every one** of our students. Following Alejandro's testimonial, VP for Administrative Affairs, Edwin Chandrasekar (along with colleagues Joe Scifo and Prashant Shinde) presented the FY23 Budget. Our FY23 budget is a values-driven, equity-impact budget, allocating resources to provide the kind of Oakton Experience that students like Alejandro expect from us.

Also, at this week's Board of Trustees meeting, the Board approved the administrative appointments of Ms. Ella Whitehead, who will transition from her role as Manager of Career and Transfer Services to a new role as the Assistant Director of Enrollment for Equity Outreach, and Mr. Roberto Valadez will serve as the Interim Director of Admission and Enrollment. He will replace Director of Admission and Enrollment, Michele Miller-Bown, who will retire June 30. Together, Ella and Roberto will continue to lead our efforts to bring an equity lens to our outreach and admission efforts, creating pathways that lead to economic and social mobility for residents of our district.

The Board also accepted the retirement of Dr. Cheryl Warmann (who will not retire until next April), and the retirement of faculty member John Stryker, who joins the list of faculty and staff retiring this summer. We thank all of our retirees for their contributions to the college and our students.

There are so many people who helped much of the work I described above to move forward. While it would be nearly impossible to name them all, I would like to recognize this month's Lifesavers and their exceptional contributions.

Syed Alavi	Stephanie Herrera	Javier Padilla Jr.
Marc Battista	Jesse Ivory	Juletta Patrick
Svetlana Bayer	Mary Johannesen-Schmidt	Arbella Pera
Tina Beins	Amanda Johnson	Beverly Projansky
Tania Boisson Sainvilier	Leah Kittner	Matthew Robitaille
J Byrd	Rich Koerner	Espy Salgado-Rodriguez
Dan Cunningham	Tamara Laws	Laura Sewell
Beth DiGiacinto	Mike Loveday	Poleen Shamoon
Brianna Ergostolo	Nikol Maleeva-Ivancheva	Carrie Stoddard
Princess Escudero	Ela Moskovich	Peggy Swedroe
Tina Fakhrid-Deen	Dale Navigato	Jon Turnbull
Mindy Finnigan	Cindy Nijmeh	Cary Turner
Krissie Harris	Laura Norwack	Rich Van Hees

Barbara Vazquez
Jillian Verstrate

Evan Williamson
Sheila Zabin

I can't conclude this month's Leadership Update, without addressing the recent acts of violence taking place in our country. The images from this week's massacre in Uvalde, Texas, and last week's racially motivated murders in Buffalo, NY are horrifying. And closer to home the three nooses found hanging from trees between Haven Middle and Kingsley Elementary schools in Evanston are profoundly disturbing. These acts of violence cannot deter us, but rather compel us to reaffirm our commitment to creating stronger and more just communities. Communities where every individual feels the sense of connection and belonging that Alejandro spoke of on Tuesday night, where students who are struggling get the help and support they need so that their pain doesn't result in acts of violence. That is what we can create together at Oakton — we change lives and create just and thriving communities.

Thank you for being an important part of that work and enjoy a much-deserved long holiday weekend.

In community,

