



January 21, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Happy New Year and welcome to the start of the spring 2021 semester.

The spring term begins the same week that we celebrate the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr., the 5th annual National Day of Racial Healing and the inauguration of the 46th President of the United States. Dr. King's vision for racial justice is needed now more than ever.

As we remember his legacy, I'm reminded of this quote from the famous *I Have a Dream* speech:

*"We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism."*

We must lean into our work urgently and sharpen the focus of our equity lens. Although racial equity work is challenging, we must move forward boldly and with urgency.

Let's build on our momentum from Spring Orientation Week, during which at least seven sessions featured equity as the central theme. These included topics ranging from 'creating an equity-minded syllabus' to 'implementing equity in online courses.' I am grateful for the work of the Faculty Professional Development Team and the Center for Professional Development for organizing the Orientation Week programming, and for our colleagues who shared ideas and best practices that will advance our collective understanding of equity and how to implement equity-based practices across the college.

This work will continue during the next Equity Summit, scheduled for 3 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 26. This month we will look at Strategic Enrollment Management using an equity lens. Check Oakton Matters for registration information.

Our latest enrollment data shows a 14% decline in headcount this spring compared to spring 2020. Our credit hour enrollment is down about 12.5%.

The Covid pandemic has most severely impacted enrollments at community colleges and highlights the disparate impact of the Covid pandemic on first-generation and students of color — which are the students who often enroll at community colleges. Our data reflects the largest decline is among Latinx students. We need to identify what role we can play in attracting and supporting these students at Oakton.

These numbers are a sobering reminder of our need to engage with students in every way possible, both inside the classroom and out. We must find ways to foster the relationship-rich environment that I spoke about during the Virtual Spring Kickoff — allowing us to deliver the Oakton Experience by helping students enter, navigate, grow and transition along their path.

We'll also address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion this afternoon (Thursday, Jan. 21, 3:30 p.m.), during a *Critical Conversations* session hosted by the Center for Campus Inclusion and Diversity. ([Register here](#))

This discussion will focus on moving forward following the attack that took place on the Capitol on Jan. 6, recognizing that members of our community have different reactions, thoughts and feelings following this moment in our nation's history. Through courageous conversations like this, we draw from each other's experiences and viewpoints and grow individually and as an institution. As we engage thoughtfully with those with differing perspectives we are reminded that our words matter. Sometimes, the intent of our words, or actions, do not always match their impact. It is only through meaningful dialogue that we are given the opportunity to understand the impact of our words and actions.

Given that words matter, I'd like to remind you of the [Bias-free Content Guidelines](#) available in the College Relations and Equity channels of the myOakon portal. These guidelines will help shape the language we use in our content, ensuring it aligns with our mission, vision and values and is inclusive to all members of our community.

In living out our equity work, we must also ensure that we are intentionally aligning our resources with our equity commitment. If you have attended the budget kickoff meetings this semester, you are aware of the equity-based budgeting process that we will be implementing for the first time — ensuring that we are living our equity commitment through resource allocation.

During our Spring Kickoff, we recognized faculty and staff for their outstanding contributions throughout the past year.

Congratulations once again to this year's faculty and staff award recipients, including:

- Megan Klein, Ray Hartstein Excellence in Teaching Award, full-time faculty
- Jennifer Dadvivas Hong, Ray Hartstein Excellence in Teaching Award, part-time faculty
- Anna Shipulina, Staff Excellence Award
- Stephanie Herrera, Living Diversity Award

Thank you also to this month's lifesavers, who were recognized by their colleagues and students for making a difference and helping to create a meaningful Oakton Experience.

Wendy Adele-Marie  
Olabisi Adenekan  
Mario Borha  
Steve Brody  
Nicci Cisarik  
Jay Cohen  
Justin Corbett  
Jennifer Dadvivas Hong  
Rick DiMaio  
Princess Escudero  
Tracy Fulce  
Greg Hamill  
Nathan Harpaz  
Stephanie Herrera  
Mary Johannesen-Schmidt  
Megan Klein  
Nadine Mitchell-Poyser  
Christine Paciero  
Mark Palmsiano  
Kritika Pershad  
Stella Pillay  
Sam Pudi  
Jennifer Reeb  
Carlos Rodriguez  
Anna Shipulina  
Bob Sompolski  
Kari Susens  
Andrew Sutter  
Nini Tella  
Aleda Thompson

Alexandra Ware  
Val Westphal  
Beth Wrobel  
Deb Wyeth  
Xia Yiu

I'll close this month's Leadership Update by sharing the powerful words of Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman's inaugural poem, *The Hill We Climb*:

*"There is always light if only we are brave enough to see it and brave enough to be it."*

Let's continue to be brave in our equity work — seeing the light and being the light as we live out our mission to educate, empower and transform the lives of members of our community.

Best wishes for a wonderful spring semester,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joi', with a stylized, cursive font.

Joi