Overview of the
Higher Learning Commission Comprehensive Evaluation Visit for Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Oakton Community College
September 25-26, 2017

Table of Contents

Introduction: An Opportunity to Tell Oakton's Story

The Higher Learning Commission conducts comprehensive evaluations of higher education institutions that affirm that the institution continues to meet the Criteria for Accreditation, pursues institutional improvement, and complies with requirements set by the U.S. Department of Education. The comprehensive evaluation includes:

- Submission and review of an Assurance Argument and Evidence File that demonstrate compliance with HLC's Criteria for Accreditation
- Federal Compliance Program review that demonstrates compliance with Title IV financial aid program and U.S. Department of Education responsibilities
- Quality Initiative Report that discusses Oakton's Student Success Team and Achieving the Dream initiative
- Student opinion survey that gives students an opportunity to participate in the evaluation process
- On-site peer review visit

This self-study and comprehensive evaluation is required for student access to federal grants and loans. It also gives value to an Oakton credential as it is awarded by an accredited institution. We welcome the comprehensive evaluation process as an opportunity to tell Oakton's story—to share the value of an Oakton education, the accomplishments of our students and employees, and what we're working together to improve.

The College submitted all of the components for the comprehensive evaluation at the end of August, 2017. We are preparing for the HLC site team visit from September 25th to 26th, 2017.

Your Contributions to a Positive Accreditation Outcome

You can contribute to a positive accreditation outcome in many ways:
1. Review Oakton's mission, vision, and values statement
2. Read Oakton's assurance argument
3. Become familiar with Oakton's strategic planning priorities and processes
4. When possible, participate in the comprehensive evaluation visit

Possible Questions the Team May Ask:

The following lists provide examples of the types of questions review teams are likely to ask. These lists are not exhaustive, and you should expect the team to ask additional general and Oakton-specific questions. Please answer all questions candidly and thoughtfully. Oakton's assurance argument identifies and discusses Oakton's strengths and challenges, and the evaluation team will be aware of these. Your interactions with the evaluation team will reinforce our findings and provide strong evidence that we meet the Criteria for Accreditation.

Questions for Everyone
1. What do you know about accreditation?
2. What do you know about the Higher Learning Commission?
3. Have you seen or read Oakton's assurance argument?
4. How would you describe Oakton's mission? Do you know where you would find the official statement?
5. How does your department contribute to Oakton's mission?
6. How do you contribute to the college's mission?
7. What are the college's current strategic planning priorities?
8. What are Oakton's greatest strengths?
9. What are the biggest challenges facing Oakton? How about challenges specific to your department?
10. What makes Oakton unique in your state and among institutions of higher education in general?
11. How would you describe the campus climate for diversity?
12. What is it like to work at Oakton? How is morale on campus?
13. Describe any campus processes that could be improved or made more efficient.
14. What kind of changes are taking place at Oakton? Do you see these as positive or not?

Questions for Faculty
1. What are the characteristics of an Oakton education?
2. What is your department's vision for the future? How does this relate to the college's vision?
3. Can you describe the tenure and promotion process? What is your impression of the process?
4. Talk about shared governance and how faculty participate in decision-making at different levels of the college.

5. How would you describe the relationship between faculty and administration? What works and what needs improvement?
6. Describe the relationship between Oakton's divisions. What collaborations currently exist?
7. What resources are available to support faculty (e.g., library, internal grants, external grant support, faculty development, travel, etc.)? Are these sufficient in meeting faculty needs?
8. Is your department actively involved in assessing student learning? How has your department used its assessment findings? What evidence do you have that students achieve your program's intended learning outcomes?
9. What is the purpose of Oakton's general education program? In what ways does the program achieve its goals for students? How could it be improved?
10. For some common faculty issues (workload, salary, sabbatical leaves, etc.), what works well and what needs to be improved?
11. What is the role of faculty in ensuring academic quality?
12. Does your department offer courses or programs via distance education? If so, how does the department ensure the quality of the curriculum regardless of how or where it is delivered?

Questions for Staff

1. How does your department support the academic mission of the college?
2. What is it like to be a staff member at Oakton?
3. What opportunities do you have for professional development? Are staff members treated equitably in their access to these opportunities?
4. How are staff evaluated at Oakton? What is your impression of the evaluation process?
5. How are staff involved in campus decision-making processes? Do you think that staff have sufficient input into decisions that affect them?
6. How would you describe the relationship between staff and administration? What works and what could be improved?
7. What are some important benefits about working at Oakton? What do you like best about your job? What would you change if you could?
8. How do units across the college work collaboratively? What works well and what could be improved?
9. Do you feel that the work you do is valued by administration? Faculty? Other staff members? Students?
10. How does your department contribute to student learning and development? How does your department assess or evaluate effectiveness?

Questions for Trustees

1. In what ways is the Board of Trustees empowered to fulfill its responsibilities?
2. In what ways are Board members independent? How is this independence reflected in Board decisions?
3. How does the Board function independently of institutional leaders? What are board members' relationships with institutional leaders?
4. How does the Board advocate for the institution, especially in situations where there are competing interests?

5. How does the Board ensure that decisions are in the best interests of the institution and its constituents?
6. What are some of the most significant decisions made by the Board in the past ten years?
7. What actions has the Board taken to ensure institutional and Board adherence to the highest standards of integrity?
8. What actions has the Board taken to protect constituent and public interests in the institution?
9. How does the Board oversee institutional operations? How does it assure itself of the relationship of those operations to the institution's mission?
10. How has the Board enhanced the institution's ability to fulfill its mission? How has it assisted in generating the resources needed to sustain and improve the institution?
11. In which institutional activities is the Board involved?
12. How knowledgeable and informed are Board members (individually and collectively) regarding (a) the institution's mission, goals, and programs, (b) institution's leaders' activities regarding institutional mission and goals, (c) institutional activities, events, and developments, (d) current issues affecting the institution?
13. How sufficiently are new members oriented to the institution, institutional developments, and issues, as well as to their duties and responsibilities?

Executive Summary

Criterion One: Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

Excerpts from Assurance Argument

Oakton Community College provides a clear purpose for the college's work and focuses institutional operations through its collaboratively developed mission, stated as follows:

Oakton is the community's college. By providing access to quality education throughout a lifetime, we empower and transform our students in the diverse communities we serve.

This mission provides a clear purpose for the college's work by valuing Oakton's identity as a community college and its accountability to the community, appreciating the diversity of Oakton students and the communities it serves, recognizing the transformative power of the education that Oakton provides, and focusing day-to-day operations on providing access to quality education.

The new mission, vision, and values statements maintain Oakton's core purpose as the community's college but distills the language into more concise statements, explicitly states an appreciation for diversity and a commitment to equity in student outcomes, and highlights a focus on students as the primary value for the college's day-to-day operations.

Strengths
- Clear purpose for the college's work through a collaboratively developed mission
- Publicly articulated mission
- Mission honors diversity as a primary strength
- Strong commitment to the public good

Evidence
- Over 600 students and employees participated in the 2017 process to revise the college's mission, vision, and values statement.
- Special areas of study contribute to the transformative qualities of an Oakton education, such as academic concentrations in Great Books, Global Studies, Jewish Studies, Environmental Studies, Peace & Social Justice, and Women & Gender Studies.
- Over thirty extra- and co-curricular programs fulfill the college mission by providing empowering and transformative learning experiences outside of the classroom.
- The high quality education provided by Oakton is enhanced by student support services that supplement instructional experiences and support academic success, such as the Learning Center, Library, Access & Disability Resource Center, Advising Services, Career Services, and Counseling Services.

- Oakton's mission statement is articulated publicly to both internal and external constituents through the college's website, college catalog, student handbook, and College documents and publications, including the Annual Budget Report, the Annual President's Report, the Board of Trustees agenda books, and the five-year strategic plan
- Oakton's mission explicitly articulates the college's commitment to embracing the diversity of the Oakton community, as evidenced by the Equity Matters strategic commitment, Diversity Council, Anti-Racism Team, TRIO, the LGBTQ working group, Andale, Access and Disability Resource Center, Human Resources Training Specialist, and General Education Learning Outcomes that explicitly reference cultural diversity, engagement, and appreciation
- Oakton has a strong culture of commitment to the public good, as evidenced by programming offered by the Alliance for Lifelong Learning in adult education, continuing education, and workforce training, and partnerships with local high schools
- Oakton fulfills its mission by engaging with its various external constituencies and communities of interest as evidenced by service learning opportunities, Habitat for Humanity, Futures, Science Olympiad, Black Teen Summit, Siguele, Diversibility, Fulbright Hays Groups Project Abroad Grant, Day of Service, Empty Bowls, and commitment to sustainable initiatives

Strategic Opportunities
- Increasing awareness of the new mission, vision, and values statement
- Building institution-wide commitment to equity
- Reflecting increasing diversity of the district
- Fulfilling the college's mission amidst declining financial support from the State of Illinois

Criterion Two: Ethical and Responsible Conduct
The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

Excerpts from Assurance Argument

Operating with integrity and maintaining ethical and responsible conduct in its operations is fundamental to Oakton Community College's mission, vision, and values. The college's values statement includes commitments to:

- Exercise RESPONSIBILITY through accountability to each other, our community, and the environment
- Uphold INTEGRITY through a commitment to trust, transparency, and honesty by all members of the Oakton community

Oakton Community College establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior. The College maintains a high standard of institutional integrity across all divisions of the campus including its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff. These standards are documented in the institution's policy and procedure documents which are available to all parties mentioned above. The role of the governing board of trustees is to ensure the financial stability and overall integrity of the institution and make decisions in the best interests of the institution.

Strengths
- Integrity is fundamental to the mission
- The College is presented clearly to students and the public
- The Board of Trustees is responsive to the needs of students, employees, and community members
- Freedom of expression and pursuit of truth are highly valued

Evidence
- In 2015, Oakton was recognized for meeting all Illinois Community College Board standards, which establish broad guidelines for ethical conduct in finance, academic, and personnel functions
- The Board of Trustees has established policies governing the operation and use of the college and its facilities, and changes to these policies require a board vote in an open board meeting
- The College has enumerated ethics policies for all of its employee classifications.
- Oakton provides access to public records in accordance with the Illinois Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and to date has remained fully compliant.
- The Office of Business & Financial Services maintains consistent and transparent financial processes, which include publishing annual budgets and audit reports that are available on the Oakton website
- Oakton has multiple policies and procedures in place to ensure quality and integrity in academic functions, including student academic integrity, faculty participation in curriculum development, and procedures for making teaching assignments that illustrate fairness and transparency

- The Board of Trustees members are not compensated for serving on the Board and must comply with policy that indicates their ethical responsibility to govern the College
- Freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning are highly valued and supported in professional development activities, such as sabbatical research projects and faculty fellows projects
- Oakton has a student academic integrity policy and code of academic conduct, and the College employs a Coordinator for Student Rights that assists with reporting and resolving violations

Strategic Opportunities
- Maintaining commitment to shared governance
- Actively seeking engagement and input that inform decision-making
- Harnessing social media and other methods to increase community knowledge
- Connecting student success to student integrity and responsibility

Criterion Three: Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support
The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered

Excerpts from Assurance Argument
The degree programs at Oakton reflect the teaching and learning mission of an institution of higher education that is committed to student success.

Oakton's degree programs are the product of an established evaluative process that ensures course subject matter is current and that program completion requires levels of student performance appropriate to awarded degrees and certificates. Oakton adheres to both external and internal processes to ensure the appropriate level and currency of curricular offerings and performance by students.

Oakton's mission statement describes a college that offers an enriched educational environment through opportunities inside and outside of the classroom that "empower and transform our students." Similarly, the vision statement casts a preferred future in which the educational experience is "student-centered," "known for academic rigor and high standards," "relies on innovation and collaboration with community partners," "committed to diversity, cultural competence, and achieving equity in student outcomes," and where "students learn to think critically, solve problems, and to be ethical global citizens who shape the world." The vision describes an enriched educational environment where academic and co-curricular opportunities collectively shape the learning experience.

Strengths
- Degree programs reflect teaching and learning mission
- Faculty and staff are effective at providing high quality programs and services
- Ample infrastructure and resources are available to support teaching and learning
- Enriched educational environment inside and outside of the classroom

Evidence
- Oakton's internal process for curriculum approval aligns with ICCB administrative rules and Illinois Articulation Agreement (IAI) requirements for course approval
- All career and technical education programs have an advisory committee that provides feedback on the curriculum from an industry perspective, and many adjunct faculty are employed in their teaching field
- Oakton has several articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities throughout Illinois
- In order to maintain high academic standards in online and hybrid instruction, Oakton has developed and implemented procedures that create a robust quality control program for online courses, such as the Oakton Online Rubric
- Oakton and the high schools convene an annual meeting between Oakton program/department chairs and faculty to discuss course content, pedagogy, and calibration of grading standards for dual credit courses.

- General education outcomes are aligned with specific degree and certificate programs and academic concentrations, and they are validated by faculty in each discipline at least once every five years during the program review process
- Faculty and students pursue significant scholarship, research, and creative work, ranging from articles in law journals to novels to scientific essays.
- As a result of the undergraduate STEM research program, Oakton was named a top 10 finalist for the National Science Foundation/American Association of Community Colleges Innovation Challenge Award
- To bolster the college's focus on student success, Oakton joined Achieving the Dream in 2013, which is dedicated to helping community colleges improve the academic performance and graduation rates of their students, especially students of color and low-income students
- Student Affairs offers a range of important services, including academic advising, assessment and testing services, career services, financial aid, veteran services, and disability support services
- Oakton's co-curricular programs provide significant contributions to students' educational experiences, including an expedition to North Dakota to study oil pipeline protests in 2016 and the "Ban the Bottle" campaign to ban the sale of single-use plastic water bottles at the college

Strategic Opportunities
- Expanding data to document program quality
- Providing timely data to support programmatic improvements
- Expanding service learning and other transformative experiences

Criterion Four: Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

<u>Excerpts from Assurance Argument</u>

Oakton requires all instructional, academic support, and student service programs to complete program reviews on a 5-year cycle. The program review process meets the requirements of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB). These reviews ensure programs continue meeting Oakton's high quality educational standards and serve the College's overall strategic goals and mission.

Oakton's goals for student learning at the course, program, concentration, and institutional level are established by faculty with support from academic administrators.

Oakton's ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates demonstrates its commitment to educational improvement in its degree and certificate programs. In 2010, the Student Success Team was formed at Oakton to develop a student success plan and build a culture focused upon student success. This commitment to student success was largely prompted by the national focus on student engagement, persistence, and retention. Alignment with Achieving the Dream is evident in Oakton's new strategic plan as highlighted in the first commitment of improving key milestones in student success such as course success, retention, persistence and completion with a special focus on any opportunity gaps. Many of the institutional commitments are in direct alignment with the Achieving the Dream's seven capacities to create a student centered culture.

Strengths

- Comprehensive program review process
- Course, program, concentration, and institutional goals for student learning
- Broad-based engagement in assessment processes
- Ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion

Evidence

- As a result of program review, Oakton's Engineering department redesigned a "maker space" for the course, Engineering Graphics, in order to align curricula and student learning outcomes with University of Illinois at Chicago, a top transfer institution
- Each year, Oakton assesses a component of all four General Education Outcomes, which include communication, responsibility, literacy, and critical thinking
- The Biology department aligned their assessment plan with the critical thinking general education outcome, working collaboratively to create a rubric to assess critical thinking, creating assessment questions across five Biology courses, and using results to create consistent exam standards among faculty
- The Physical Therapy Department aligned course content through multiple courses to emphasize co-morbidities—a topic in a significant subsection of the National Physical Therapy exam—resulting in a 95 percent pass rate and higher than national average scores for that subsection

- Oakton's math department completely redesigned the developmental math sequence, implementing a design which allows students to work at their own pace, resulting in developmental math success rates in the 74th percentile nationally
- The Faculty Initiative on Student Persistence provides a framework of specific classroom activities which foster a connection between a faculty member and students, and students in a participating course section have a 17 percent higher fall to spring persistence rate than non-participating students

Strategic Opportunities
- Continuing to improve learning environments and support services
- Expanding co-curricular assessment of student learning
- Evaluating and "scaling up" student success initiatives

Criterion Five: Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

Excerpts from Assurance Argument

Careful stewardship by the Board of Trustees and the Oakton community has provided the College with a strong resource base that allows for continued commitment to its mission and values. Oakton maintains adequate fiscal and human resources and appropriate physical and technological infrastructure to support its operations.

Oakton Community College's Board of Trustees are keenly familiar with the institution and provide regular and consistent oversight of the college's financial, academic, and general operations. The Board of Trustees is engaged in best practices and professional development for college governance and has the information necessary to enhance governance issues. Additionally, the Board of Trustees has policies in place that promote effective leadership and collaborative processes.

Oakton's budget and resource allocation is guided by the strategic plan and aligned with the mission, vision and values statement of the college. The principles of these documents are reflected in how Oakton budgets its money, how it designs and utilizes its spaces, how it hires and supports its employees, and the time and effort allocated to various college initiatives and activities. Key alignments exist within the College's planning processes: spending requests are connected to the strategic plan, program review and evaluations are connected to planning and budget processes, infrastructure and programmatic priorities are aligned with the master plan, resources for students are aligned with the mission, and strategic planning is connected to awareness of internal and external issues.

Strengths
- Strong resource basis for continued commitment to mission
- Board of Trustees provides regular and consistent oversight of college operations
- Resource allocation is guided by the strategic plan and aligned with the mission
- Documented evidence of operational performance

Evidence
- Oakton's per credit hour tuition in FY2018 is $141.25 for residents of District 535, which places Oakton in the lower half of tuition costs among sister colleges in the Chicago area. Student fees remain modest relative to fees charged at comparable community colleges.
- Recent challenges within the State of Illinois have strained the College's financial planning, particularly in the past year when the State did not pass a budget. Yet Oakton retains its Aaa rating from Moody's, one of only four of the state's 27 community colleges rated by Moody's to achieve that level.
- In FY17, Illinois withdrew state funding for the Monetary Award Program (MAP), the scholarship funds for students with demonstrated financial need. Oakton's foundation authorized the payments of all student MAP awards for the fall semester, totaling

$225,000. The Foundation's support of MAP grants is an example of how college leadership has monitored external issues, such as the State of Illinois budget crisis, and leveraged resources in ways that are responsive to our fiscal operations and student-centered mission.

- In 2010, Oakton developed a five-year Master Plan which is substantially complete. The five major components of the plan included the construction of a new science and health careers building, the remodeling and updating of Des Plaines classrooms, the construction of an Enrollment center at the Des Plaines campus, the creation of a multifunctional Student Center to support Student Life, and numerous infrastructure projects at both campuses. The cornerstone project, the Margaret Burke Lee Science and Health Careers Center, a $40 million, LEED Gold certified facility with state-of-the-art science and health-care laboratories, opened for the spring 2015 semester. The 93,000-square-foot building celebrates the natural and artistic highlights of the Des Plaines campus and showcases the latest sustainable technologies.

- In 2011 Oakton migrated to Desire2Learn (D2L) to support online instruction. This platform, selected unanimously by a faculty committee, vastly improved the college's ability to support the demand for online learning sections.

- Board meetings include presentations from faculty, staff and administrators on key items of interest to help educate board members. In 2016 these reports included the strategic planning process, the HLC reaccreditation process, the design of the new Student Center, the diversity and affirmative action plan, the capital improvement plan, and the FY18 budget.

- Oakton has a compelling framework for insuring college wide involvement in setting academic requirements, policy and processes. Chartered by the president in 2014, the Educational Standards Review Board (ESRB) is a standing committee tasked with studying, reviewing and making recommendations on educational standards.

- The budget cycle requires the requestor to tie the budget request to the college's areas of focus, through the strategic plan, the master plan, or student success initiatives. The budget cycle allows opportunities for funding the exploration of new academic programs, and piloting non-academic programs. These "Special Funding Requests" are processed through their own templates, and have supported such changes as mandatory new student orientation, the establishment of the Andale! office to improve retention and completion of Latino students, and implementation of the Medical Assistant academic program.

- In support of the persistence work, Oakton's President requested the administrative leadership read the book, "The 4 Disciplines of Execution", which outlines strategies for achieving important strategic priorities. President Smith identified an ambitious "Wildly Important Goal" (WIG) for Oakton, to improve the college's fall-to-fall persistence rate from 45% to 54%. Each administrative area also identified departmental WIGs to support progress in persistence. For example, Academic Affairs led the Faculty Persistence Project, where a subset of faculty across the college worked to meet individually with students in the first three weeks of the term. Establishing connections between students and faculty has shown to impact persistence. The fall 2015 to fall 2016 persistence rate did increase, from 45% to 48%.

- Oakton also capitalizes on opportunities to use state and national data to study college performance. The Illinois Community College Board collects substantial data from all state colleges, and also submits data to the National Community College Benchmarking Project and the Integrated Post-Secondary Data System (IPEDS). Oakton's ATD

participation provides additional benchmarking information, and the college regularly participates in both the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE).

Strategic Opportunities
- Addressing issues of declining enrollments and state funding
- Cascading implementation of *Success Matters*
- Addressing deferred maintenance

Areas of Focus

The College has shared with HLC four areas of focus for the visit: student success, assessment of student learning, diversity and equity, and fiscal health. As the peer evaluators conduct their comprehensive evaluation, they will seek to learn more about these four areas as areas of strength and collective effort at Oakton over the past ten years. The following excerpts from the Assurance Argument document our work in these areas of focus.

Student Success

To bolster the college's focus on student success, Oakton joined Achieving the Dream in 2013. Achieving the Dream is a national community college reform network dedicated to helping community colleges improve the academic performance and graduation rates of their students, especially students of color and low-income students

Alignment with Achieving the Dream is evident in Oakton's new strategic plan as highlighted in the first commitment of improving key milestones in student success, such as course success, retention, persistence and completion, with a special focus on any opportunity gaps. Many of the institutional commitments are in direct alignment with the Achieving the Dream's seven capacities to create a student-centered culture. These capacities include:

- teaching and learning;
- engagement and communication;
- strategy and planning;
- policies and practices;
- leadership and vision;
- data and technology; and
- equity.

In 2013, the Student Success Team reviewed longitudinal cohort data on the five student success metrics, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, sex, and socioeconomic status. Based upon the data, three institutional priorities were identified. These priorities included: placement, developmental education success rates, and persistence, all areas critical for student completion.

As discussed in Core Component 3.D, data indicated that the college did not have placement information on 30 percent of its student population. As a result, a placement committee formed and established goals to decrease the number of new students without placement information and increase the number of methods and measures that can used to place students. In 2015, a new mandatory placement policy was phased in, resulting in a decrease in the student population with no placement information by 6 percent.

The charge of the developmental subcommittee was to provide recommendations to ensure that the academic readiness of all students matches the academic skills required of their coursework. Oakton's Math Department has undergone a complete redesign of the developmental math sequence. Adopting a model from the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), the

department implemented an emporium model design, in which students work at their own pace based on mastery of content, with significant one-on-one learning from classroom instructors and tutors. As a result of this redesign, Oakton is now in the 74th percentile for developmental math success rates. In English, English 094 is a developmental reading course with an objective to prepare students for the literary demands of college. Previously, this course was not mandatory. However, data revealed students who placed into and enrolled in EGL 094 had persistence rates that were twice the rates of the general college population. As a result, Oakton instituted a mandatory co-enrollment for students placing into English 094.

As stated previously, Oakton has a high transfer rate. In addition, Oakton's course retention rate is 95 percent, which is in the 94th percentile nationally. However, the college's fall-to-fall persistence rate of 45 percent is lower than peer institutions and ranks in the 11th percentile nationally. Oakton's new president, acknowledging this gap between high course retention and low persistence, brought additional focus and priority to student persistence. In her 2015 address to the college, President Smith set an institutional goal to increase persistence from 45 percent to 54 percent, which would align Oakton's persistence rate with that of its peer institutions. National data indicate that an early college connection is critical for student persistence. The college's own CCSSE data shows the majority of students did feel like a personal connection was established at their time at Oakton. Cultivating student connections became the framework for all initiatives supporting Oakton's Wildly Important Goal (WIG) of persistence.

Prior to 2015, Oakton's new-student orientation was a voluntary program that connected students to the college, introduced students to resources, provided advisors for academic planning, and created a setting for students to connect with peers. Program assessment revealed students who attended orientation had an 11 percent higher fall-to-spring persistence rate compared to those who did not attend. Based upon this data, the college instituted the mandatory new-student orientation. In fall 2015, all new, traditional-aged, and all adult, full-time students were required to attend new-student orientation. The completion of the phase-in will occur in 2017, when orientation will be required for all new students, including part-time students.

Another project supporting connection with the students is the Faculty Initiative on Student Persistence. This initiative provides a framework of specific classroom activities that foster connections between faculty members and students. Faculty members who volunteer for the project agree to incorporate four activities based on best practices of highly effective classrooms.

These activities incorporated within the first three weeks include:

- learn the names of students as quickly as possible and create community in the classroom by having students learn the names of peers;

- schedule a fifteen-minute conference with each student;

- present class requirements clearly and set high academic standards; and

- make an appropriate assignment as early as possible in order to give students early feedback.

In the fall 2016 semester, 132 faculty participated, which impacted over 1,200 students and 25

percent of Oakton course sections. The evidence of the importance and tremendous impact of faculty connection can be found in the data. Data indicate that students who were enrolled in a course section that participated in the initiative had a 17 percent higher fall-to-spring persistence rate. The impact on students of color was especially noteworthy.

Fall to Spring Persistence Rates

	Participated in the Project	Did Not Participate in the Project
Asian	80%	66%
Black	68%	55%
Latino	79%	64%
White	79%	62%
Other	81%	61%
Total	79%	62%

While all activities are beneficial, the one-on-one meeting has been described as creating a transformational classroom experience. Faculty have indicated this initiative increased their engagement with students as individuals, having a positive impact on the classroom environment, while students indicate the power in having a connection with their faculty member.

As faculty were asked to engage more directly in student success initiatives impacting their students and classroom learning environments, more professional development opportunities for faculty on persistence, retention, and/or completion were offered and integrated into existing seminars. In fall 2016, student success formed an explicit component of the full-time New Faculty Seminar and the Teaching Credential seminar offered annually. These opportunities concentrate on classroom persistence and retention as they relate to engagement and learning. Student Success Team members and other faculty success experts share updates and data, providing training during joint Division meetings and Professional Development Orientation weeks prior to the start of fall and spring semesters. Recent workshop sessions during orientation week included: "The Next Steps in Implementing the Faculty Persistence Project: Changing the Culture at OCC," "Exploring Modes of Student Success," and "Promoting Student Success While Maintaining Responsible Academics: Where are the boundaries?"

Oakton's focus on student success and engagement with students has been driven by President Smith's targeted focus on student outcomes through the All for One/One for All initiatives. After data revealed that Oakton lost five students per day, President Smith issued a challenge during the fall 2015 all-college breakfast to retain just one more student per day. To demonstrate that student success is the work of all employees and not just faculty, all employees were given a card with the name and email address of a new, at-risk student, defined as an adult student, a student with a developmental placement, and/or a student of color. Employees were encouraged to contact students at five key points in the semester to deliver encouragement, support, and information about important college deadlines and resources. The program was improved during spring 2016 to provide clearer, more targeted messages for employees to share with students. Although many employees reported few responses from students, the All for One/One for All initiatives served to increase awareness and participation in student success and the student-centered mission from faculty to finance to facilities.

Assessment of Student Learning

In response to the Higher Learning Commission's site visit of 2007, Oakton joined HLC's Assessment Academy. At that time, faculty struggled with assessment work, did not want to serve on a college-wide assessment team, and often submitted assessment plans that were routine and did not include analysis of results or ways to improve the teaching/learning process.

As a result of the academy, Oakton's Program for the Assessment of Learning (OPAL) was created. The OPAL committee is composed of a steering committee that oversees institutional assessment activities and four subcommittees, General Education, Career and Technical Education, Transfer, and the newly formed Co-Curricular Committee. The steering committee is chaired by the assistant vice president for Academic Affairs and a faculty member. Other members of the steering committee include the faculty chairs of the four subcommittees, the executive director of Research and Planning, and the vice president for Academic Affairs (ex officio). In addition, as discussed in 3B, in order to align curricular development and assessment activities, the co-chairs of the college's Curriculum Committee also serve on the OPAL committee. The twenty-four-member OPAL committee structure representing full-time faculty, part-time faculty, staff, and administrators has vastly improved communication and college engagement in assessment.

Each year, Oakton assesses a component of all four general education outcomes, which include communication, responsibility, literacy, and critical thinking. Because general education remains the responsibility of Oakton faculty and staff, it is critical that instruction of the general education outcomes occurs throughout the curriculum. As mentioned above, faculty in different disciplines may focus on content and less on the general education outcome for a particular assessment that aligns with general education. To help support instruction throughout, rubrics that define expectations and tutorials as resource materials have been developed for faculty and students. Another example that illustrates the utility of these materials can be found in the technical literacy assessment. While students may be comfortable using technology, they may not be proficient in using productivity software. Since most courses require word processing, the OPAL General Education Team sent a survey to chairs and coordinators inquiring on essential skills in word processing, and an assessment in GMetrix was created. GMetrix is software that develops a standardized test in which students need to perform a variety of actions in Microsoft Word. The assessment developed by faculty in the Computer Applications for Business Department was administered in English classes, and assessed the execution of functions such as inserting tables, applying bullets, saving files in different formats, searching, and using spell check. The average pass rate on the first assessment prior to the development of resources was 30 percent. Upon review of these results, the General Education Team worked with faculty and created 5 minute video tutorials on these and other functions in Word. In subsequent assessment cycles assessing different students in the same discipline, the tutorial was given to students prior to the assessment. This resulted in an average 30 percent increase in the pass rate in all categories. Given these results, the OPAL General Education Team has worked with specific departments to develop rubrics for the following general education outcomes: non-verbal communication, written communication, criteria for critical thinking, cultural aesthetic understanding, group

communication, and written communication. All students and faculty have access to the videos and rubrics.

The CTE programs also provide an opportunity to develop general education outcomes. In 2016, nineteen CTE departments assessed general education outcomes.

Oakton has evolved from completing assessment for mere compliance to using it to validate and improve student learning. The work of OPAL and assessment is now embedded in processes and professional development at the college. In the early assessment work, many department chairs and faculty were not confident writing plans or did not understand the utility of the work. In order to provide the necessary support, OPAL team members serve as resources to faculty and staff in the development and review of assessment plans, maintaining regular consultation hours to meet with department chairs or other responsible faculty and providing methods and rubrics. All assessment plans have associated rubrics and directions that aid in plan development. This faculty-to-faculty interaction has been critical to the acceptance of the work. Assessment is now a requirement for all new faculty, a part of faculty interviews, and integrated into faculty performance reviews and program review. The maturity of the work is evident not only in the analysis and action, but by the engagement in all departments. In 2012, 50 percent of CTE departments submitted an assessment plan, while in 2016, 90 percent completed an assessment plan. In 2016, 100 percent of the departments associated with the transfer curricula submitted an assessment plan.

Program-level assessments tend to use both direct and indirect assessment measures. Typical direct measures include: capstone experiences, clinical evaluation, licensure/certification exam results, research projects, presentations, performances, papers/projects, portfolios, local tests, and pre-tests/post-tests. Indirect measures include: student opinion surveys, alumni surveys, and student reflections on their values, attitudes and beliefs.

The Physical Therapist Assistant program aligned course content throughout multiple courses to emphasize co-morbidities, a topic represented in a significant subsection of the National Physical Therapy Exam, the national licensing exam. The department assessed this objective in all program courses. Subsequently, Oakton students had a 95 percent pass rate and a subsection score higher than the national average on the NPTE exam. This example highlights the program alignment with ongoing assessment at the course level with program-level outcomes.

Course-level assessment follows a similar process. The alignment with the Office of Research and assessment has aided departments in the selection of courses to assess. The new department enrollment report provides departments with course success rates, and many departments use this information to select a course. Math 060, Pre-algebra, is a modular math course taught in the emporium style. This course has a low success rate, and the Math Department identified module three as a stopping point for many students. As a result, the math faculty redesigned module three and allowed students more time to master the concepts. This resulted in a higher percentage of students passing the module three post-test. Oakton's commitment to student learning and success through assessment has led to the development of best assessment practices.

Diversity and Equity

Oakton Community College's mission documents explicitly articulate the college's commitment to embracing the diversity of the Oakton community and honor it as one of our college's primary strengths. The college intentionally deepens this mission to advance equity by acknowledging systemic social injustices and intentionally designing the Oakton experience to foster success for all students.

Oakton values its role as an educational institution in a multicultural society and a multicultural district. Since 2007, the percentage of students of color has increased from 31 percent to 45 percent. Oakton values diversity, inclusion, and equity because they promote academic excellence, enrich the campus environment, and prepare community members to participate in a democratic and increasingly complex, pluralistic society.

Although a commitment to diversity is included within the mission statement from 1998 to 2017, the 2017 mission statement adopted a more explicit focus on diversity and a critical analysis that extends that commitment to diversity to a commitment to equity. Critical to the understanding of the institution's mission is awareness of the community the college serves. In 2016, Oakton contracted with Northern Illinois University's Center for Governmental Studies to develop an environmental scan that identifies demographic trends and future opportunities in Oakton's district. The scan indicates that the Oakton district is becoming more diverse, and it is, therefore, imperative that the mission and programming continue to reflect this trend.

Oakton addresses its role in a multicultural society first by referring to Oakton in its mission statement opening as "the community's college;" in other words, the college's purpose is to be reflective of and belonging to the diverse communities that it serves. Second, the statement publicly says that the college fulfills its mission by "empower[ing] and transform[ing] our students in the diverse communities we serve." The college's vision statement embeds diversity within the student learning experience. Oakton desires to teach students to be "ethical global citizens who shape the world." Additionally, the commitment to diversity is also connected to the college's commitment to student success: "We are committed to diversity, cultural competence, and achieving equity in student outcomes." Two of Oakton's publicly stated values—"We embrace the diversity of the Oakton community and honor diversity as one of our college's primary strengths" and "We advance equity by acknowledging the effects of systemic social injustices and intentionally designing the Oakton experience to foster the success of all students"—articulate the importance of diversity and equity to the educational environment and to Oakton's identity as a community institution.

In addition to the mission statement, "Success Matters," the 2018-2022 strategic plan, directly addresses Oakton's role in a diverse and multicultural society. The first strategic commitment, Equity Matters, commits the college to "create an environment that supports the inclusion, engagement, and learning of all student groups through resource allocation, curriculum development, inclusive policies and procedures, and ongoing support." The objectives for this goal include developing a "more robust evidence-based examination to scrutinize institutional and societal barriers to equity and develop a college equity plan that identifies opportunities and establishes priorities to addresses these barriers" and investing in "equity-minded policies, practices, and behaviors that lead to success for all Oakton students from recruitment to goal

attainment, with particular attention to students of color, first-generation college students, low income students, students with different abilities, international students, military-connected students, adult learners, LGBTQ students, religious minorities, and undocumented students."

This strategic commitment follows Oakton's progressively increasing commitment to diversity and inclusion. Oakton committed to being an anti-bias college in the 2008-2012 strategic plan, "Change Matters," and that commitment was continued in the 2013-2017 strategic plan, "Connecting What Matters." The college created the Anti-Bias Task Force, which was tasked with implementing the anti-bias commitment of "Change Matters." One of the accomplishments was the creation of the Office of Access, Equity, and Diversity (OAED) to partner "with faculty, staff, and students to fulfill the access and equity goals and mission of the college." The OAED works closely with the Diversity Council, an ongoing college committee that addresses issues of diversity and equity on campus and works as a liaison between the Office and the broader campus community. The college's Anti-Racism Team has also continued a commitment to offer anti-racism training to all Oakton employees; participation in the training is required for membership on the Anti-Racism Team and the Diversity Council.

Having diverse voices and perspectives at various levels of the institution is essential both for reasons of equity and for providing important insight and different perspectives on Oakton's mission and goals. While Oakton has a more diverse faculty and administrative body than many peer institutions, people of color were still underrepresented as administrators, full-time faculty, and part-time faculty. For this reason, Oakton set goals to increase the representation of such groups. In 2014-2015, Oakton met its affirmative action goal in the hiring of administrators and exceeded its goal for full-time faculty. Oakton has also employed a Human Resources Training Specialist whose primary responsibility is to ensure a fair and equitable hiring process that honors the college's affirmative action goals within all searches across the college. Additionally, the Dean's Guidelines have been revised to incorporate information about the role of the Training Specialist and other measures to increase the likelihood of a deep, highly-qualified, and diverse pool of applicants for full-time faculty positions.

In addition, the college recognizes its role as an educational institution in facilitating knowledge, and understanding and communicating across diverse perspectives and cultural positions. The importance of diversity and equity is reflected in the general education learning outcomes, two of which explicitly reference cultural diversity, engagement, and appreciation. Successful completion of a Global Studies course is a requirement for earning an Associate Degree. A number of academic concentrations require that students engage with issues of diversity and systemic discrimination (e.g. Global Studies, Women & Gender Studies, Peace & Justice Studies, and Jewish Studies). A range of curricular offerings across the college also focus on diversity, and Oakton has consistently hosted a number of extracurricular events and talks that focus on these issues, such as the *Creating Justice Symposium.* Held annually in the spring and co-sponsored by a number of departments and the college's Educational Foundation, this event consistently focuses on issues of diversity and how the humanities, in particular, offer ways of comprehending and responding to issues of systemic discrimination.

Oakton's student support services also explicitly recognize the diversity of the student body along a number of identities. Oakton's TRIO program serves students from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds. Participants are required to meet at least one of the following criteria: qualify as low-income, have family taxable income for the preceding year that did not exceed 150 percent

of the poverty level, or have a documented disability and receive services from the Access and Disability Resource Center at Oakton. Through events and services that promote participation in the college experience, ¡ANDALE!, the Association to Nurture and Develop the Advancement of Latinos in Education, supports the personal, emotional, social, academic, and career development of its Latino/a/x students. ¡ANDALE! students are led by college faculty and staff and build their leadership skills by exploring existing college resources, discussing and analyzing Latino/a/x identities in current affairs, and engaging with the Oakton community.

The Anti-Racism Team is a racially diverse group of Oakton employees who are committed to shaping awareness of systemic racism within the institution and analyzing specific barriers to change, as well as fostering a college-wide commitment to dismantle institutional racism and establish an anti-racist purpose. The Anti-Racism Team's goals including institutionalizing anti-racism among employees and within the mission, cultivating and sustaining a healthy anti-racism team, affirming the importance of anti-racism in improving student achievement, and building capacity to lead an anti-racist institution.

Lastly, largely through the support of the Anti-Racism Team and the Diversity Council, Oakton continues to strive to improve the experience for all constituent groups in policy and practice. In 2016, the Diversity Council reviewed and awarded $5,000 to support projects and events and instituted the annual Living Diversity Award. Additionally, the LGBTQ working group, developed through collaboration of members from the Diversity Council and the Women & Gender Studies Committee, works to increase the visibility of support for LGBTQ members of the community.

Fiscal Health

Oakton's fiscal resources are under the supervision of the vice president for Administrative Affairs and the controller. Oakton's revenue comes from three primary sources: local property taxes (61 percent); student tuition and fees (34 percent); state government (3 percent); Oakton's operating budget for FY18 is $73.0 million on projected total revenues of $77.8 million.

Local taxes have remained relatively stable for the past ten years, in part due to a property tax extension limitation law (PTELL) in effect in Cook County since 1994, which limits the amount of increase a taxing district can impose to the rate of inflation. With one of the highest EAV rates in the state, Oakton is able to maintain the lowest property tax levy among all community colleges in the state of Illinois, and has not sought a tax increase referendum in the past ten years. Recent efforts on the part of the State of Illinois to freeze property taxes potentially could have an effect on this income source, and the Oakton board is monitoring the legislative movement in this area.

Like most community colleges in Illinois, Oakton has seen a steady decline in enrollment during the past several years, from the high rates seen during the recession. The Illinois Community Colleges Opening Enrollments Report for fall 2016 shows that Oakton's enrollment has fallen from 11,402 in fall 2012, to 9,443 in fall 2016, a drop of 4.3 percent in the last year, and a 17.2 percent drop from 2012.

In fall 2015, Oakton's tuition and fee rate was thirteenth lowest in the state, and almost 7.9 percent lower than the statewide average. This comparatively low tuition is a value of Oakton's leadership bodies and is aligned with our mission to provide access to a quality education. In response to the decline in enrollment and state funding during the past five years, and the absence of a state budget in FY2016, Oakton's board reluctantly authorized a $12-per-credit-hour increase for academic year 2016-17, with a potential maximum $13 increase per credit hour for 2017-18, depending on the state fiscal situation. This brings Oakton's per=credit=hour tuition in FY2018 to $141.25 for residents of District 535, which still places Oakton in the lower half of tuition costs among sister colleges in the Chicago area. Student fees remain modest relative to fees charged at comparable community colleges.

Recent challenges within the State of Illinois have strained the college's financial planning, particularly in the past year when the State did not pass a budget. Yet Oakton retains its AAA rating from Moody's, one of only four of the state's 27 community colleges rated by Moody's to achieve that level. For the past several years, anticipating reduced state funding, the college budgeted for less (25-50 percent lower) than expected state revenue. This prudent fiscal management has enabled the college to preserve programmatic integrity, maintain staffing levels, and continue to improve its facilities.

Oakton has implemented economy measures and contingency planning to address the declining state budget. Employee vacancies are analyzed to determine whether the position can be restructured and duties assigned elsewhere; only essential positions are replaced. Professional travel has been examined and is approved on a case-by-case basis. All departments have reduced their budgets for FY2018, and other economies are anticipated.

Oakton has been fortunate to have the financial support of the Oakton Educational Foundation, whose resources provide direct scholarships to students and fund numerous requests from faculty and staff for investments in special projects and activities. In FY17, Illinois withdrew state funding for the Monetary Award Program (MAP), the scholarship funds for students with demonstrated financial need. Oakton's foundation authorized the payments of all student MAP awards for the fall semester, totaling $225,000. The foundation's support of MAP grants is an example of how college leadership has monitored external issues, such as the State of Illinois budget crisis, and leveraged resources in ways that are responsive to our fiscal operations and student-centered mission.

The college follows a mature process for institutional budgeting. Each winter the budget office distributes a timetable for the budget process, with appropriate guidelines based on revenue expectations. The timetable establishes due dates for requests for staffing, remodeling, capital equipment, special funding/initiatives, and general operating budgets. Each department's submission must first be reviewed and approved by the applicable vice president. Requests for special funding/initiatives must address how this investment supports the college's strategic goals.

Budget data is then assembled and shared with President's Council, which makes the revisions and adjustments necessary to achieve a balanced budget. College reserves are occasionally used to support major projects, construction and other capital investments. Since tuition is a key component of Oakton's revenue, the board of trustees reviews long range budget projections

when setting college tuition rates. A public hearing on the budget is held each spring, and the final budget is presented to the board for approval in June.

Oakton establishes and maintains internal financial controls designed to protect the assets of the college and prevent loss from theft or misuse. These internal controls provide that adequate accounting data are compiled to allow for the preparation of financial statements in conformity with accounting principles set forth by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board.

External monitoring is provided by an independent auditor. Each year Oakton has an independent financial audit that evaluates the college's financial statements, contributing federal programs and the college foundation. The findings are presented to the Board of Trustees Finance Committee, which includes three board members. Subsequently the auditor presents the findings to the full board at the October board meeting, where the board reviews and approves the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) with auditor's opinion. The budget, CAFR and audit reports are published on the Oakton website.