

04-01-2025 - Office of the President

President's Perspective: Reaffirming our principles

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

To the campus community,

As a physician, I approached each medical case with the goal of identifying what is needed to heal my patients. As your university president, I find myself asking what is needed to bring healing and clarity to the challenges facing our university today.

During the COVID pandemic, we came together with urgency and purpose—guided by science, care for one another, and a deep sense of collective responsibility—to protect our campus and our surrounding community. Because of our unity and discipline, Oakland University became one of the healthiest campuses in the country.

Today, a series of external threats challenge the basic principles that define higher education in America. National headlines swirl with debates over academic freedom, the limits of free speech, and the meaning of diversity, equity and inclusion, leaving many wondering how higher education will continue to thrive in this shifting landscape.

This has led to widespread anxiety, further accentuated by the federal government's investigations of numerous universities because of alleged violations of various federal statutes and regulations. In addition, the possible closure of the Department of Education, along with serious reductions at the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institutes of Health, the Veterans Administration, and other federal agencies, all have the potential to adversely impact Oakland and our students.

In such moments, we must center ourselves by returning to our moral compass—the enduring principles that illuminate our path in these chaotic times. At Oakland, we are grounded in the right of freedom of speech, mutual respect, inclusivity, and collaboration. These aren't abstract ideals—they are the heartbeat of our institution and the foundation of our mission. As we collectively navigate these current challenges, there is no better time for unity and clarity in our role in higher education and to reaffirm our core values that serve our students and community. Therefore, at Oakland we reaffirm the following:

1. Our role in higher education is to educate our students, generate knowledge, inspire innovation, and encourage creativity. We are an engine of opportunity, providing access to students from all walks of life. We are a beacon for families who dream of a better tomorrow for their children. Our graduates have enormous upward social mobility, and they contribute greatly to the region's workforce needs. We are stewards of place—deeply embedded in our region and committed to Michigan's prosperity, vibrancy, and future.

Academic freedom is central to our mission, and decisions about faculty composition, curriculum, and pedagogy, must remain in the hands of higher education institutions if we are to preserve independent thinking, meaningful inquiry, and transformational learning. It is faculty who bring the expertise to shape the classroom learning experience for our students.

2. At Oakland, every member of our campus community should feel safe and supported; that means people of all racial, religious, socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, the LGBTQ+ community, individuals with disabilities, veterans, and others.
3. We believe that respectful dialogue and the free exchange of ideas are essential elements of the academic experience. But let us be clear: discrimination, intimidation and unlawful harassment have no place at Oakland. Our policies are designed to protect speech, but also to uphold safety, civility, and a healthy learning environment for all.

In response to new federal guidance from the Department of Education, I have asked our Strategic Response Team to conduct a careful, comprehensive review of university programs, policies, scholarships, and materials. Our goal is to ensure full legal compliance while remaining true to our principles. Where revisions are needed, they are being made quickly and thoughtfully. This is how Oakland leads—with integrity, readiness, and resolve.

Lastly, recent news reports on the detainment and deportation of international and immigrant students have caused distress for many in our community and for anyone concerned about civil liberties. Oakland also affirms its support for our international students who are in the U.S. on visas or are here as legal permanent residents. Please know that they are vital members of our campus community.

As we look ahead, let us walk forward with wisdom, strength, and shared purpose. Let us remain calm in the face of chaos. And let us remember that our shared values and principles are not only our compass — they are our strength.

With gratitude for everything you do to make Oakland the University of Choice,

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz,
M.D. President