

01-27-2026 - Office of the President

Reflections on Recent Events in Minnesota

January 27, 2026

Dear students, faculty, and staff,

Earlier in my career, I spent five years at the University of Minnesota (UMN) as a pediatric resident and faculty member. Both at the university and in the Twin Cities, I experienced a community that warmly welcomed people from many backgrounds and proudly embraced its rich tapestry of cultural differences. Those are all values at the heart of higher education.

Against that backdrop, I have been deeply troubled by recent events in Minnesota, where in the past month two American citizens were fatally shot during encounters with federal immigration agents. I mourn this tragic loss of life. I am also heartbroken to read of families who are now afraid to leave their homes, of children who fear going to school, and of patients who are hesitant to seek medical care.

Yesterday, I participated in a UMN online community gathering, where the traumatized university community came together to grieve the death of one of their alums, Alex Pretti. They spoke passionately about this man who had dedicated his life and career to the well-being of others as an ICU nurse. That same spirit carried through the event as community members supported one another with love, dignity and compassion. In addition, I communicated with Dr. Rebecca Cunningham, president of the University of Minnesota, to let her know that we at Oakland are holding them in our thoughts during this difficult time.

Although the recent killings occurred in Minnesota, violence and fear are not confined to any one place. Moments like this are a crucible of democracy, where we must ask ourselves: Is this the America we know and want to be?

As president, I believe I have a moral responsibility to speak out, judiciously and selectively, when [hate and violence](#) threaten our way of life. To be sure, public universities like Oakland are not partisan. But we are values-based institutions, committed to sustaining democracy through responsible citizenship and the ethical treatment of all people.

The nation's universities have long been pillars of democracy, advancing the belief that educated citizens are essential to our survival as a free people. We prepare informed and engaged citizens equipped to uphold fundamental democratic values such as the rule of law, pluralism and human dignity. That makes higher education one of the key leaders in safeguarding the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

What does this all mean for Oakland?

In this challenging national moment, I believe each of us should reflect on our own civic engagement and advocacy. That may include thoughtfully discussing in the classroom and the workplace what is transpiring in Minnesota and elsewhere. It may mean contacting your elected representatives and making your voice heard. It could include supporting a charitable cause or community organization. Or it might mean protesting, which is a valuable form of expression, so

long as it remains nonviolent and follows our university's [time, place and manner requirements](#).

I recognize that witnessing such acts of violence can have a profound impact on many of us. So, no matter how you choose to engage, please know the university is here to support you. I encourage you to visit our [student services webpage](#) to learn more about our health and safety resources, including the [OU Counseling Center](#), which is available to all students, staff and faculty.

In the days and months ahead, let us ground ourselves in our core values — from integrity, respect and compassion to curiosity, inclusivity and collaboration. By doing so, Oakland can serve as a beacon of hope, demonstrating how a university community can live up to and help advance the nation's highest ideals.

Sincerely,

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.
President

Oakland University
Office of the President