

Outlook

Oakton Community College Vol. 11, 2013



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Connecting What Matters, Oakton’s new strategic plan adopted last year, affirms an invigorated commitment to teaching and learning—and reinforces the vital links between achieving and connecting. One of the plan’s overarching goals, *Connected Communities*, spells out the priorities of connecting students with the Oakton community, connecting the curriculum with student goals and the ever-changing demands of the workplace, and connecting employees with one another. This issue of *Outlook* vividly captures some examples of those connections—from two embattled women who have transformed their lives, to two innovative academic concentrations, to the “Great Flood of 2013” that united the campus community. As the words of Herman Melville tell us, “We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us . . . and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects.”

—The Editors

Oakton Community College

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Founded in 1969, Oakton Community College (District 535) includes Maine, Evanston, New Trier, Niles, and Northfield Townships and serves the residents of Des Plaines, Evanston, Glencoe, Glenview, Golf, Kenilworth, Lincolnwood, Morton Grove, Niles, Northbrook, Northfield, Park Ridge, Skokie, Wilmette, and Winnetka.

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Cover: Students and staff celebrate **One Billion Rising**—a global event to end violence against women.

Opposite page: Oakton’s production of *Smash* tells the story of Sidney Trefusis (Peter Aivra), a millionaire socialist determined to overthrow the government—until a lovelorn rabble rouser throws a wrench into his plans.

2 Calling all Alumni

Oakton alumni have lifelong ties to the College—but haven't always found an easy way to get involved. Now, a new alumni program is creating opportunities to re-connect and stay engaged.

4 Publishing with a Passion

Instructors John Rizzo and Ann Gadzikowski share their respective passions in two new books: one thrills readers with romance on an operatic scale, while another sheds light on effectively teaching the youngest gifted students.

6 Deepening the Tradition of Academic Excellence

Through special academic concentrations and activities, students can dig deep into a wide range of subjects—including Women's and Gender Studies and Oakton's newest initiative: Jewish Studies.

9 ¡ANDA!E! Let's Get Moving!

As the College's Latino population continues to grow, ¡ANDA!E! at Oakton uses advocates, mentors, and even tostadas to provide the support this group needs to "get moving" toward a degree or certificate.

10 Whatever it Takes

Students Marie Fleurima and Angel Pearson are working steadily toward careers in nursing, and the extraordinary hurdles they have faced along the way—from homelessness to kidnapping—have only strengthened their determination to succeed.

11 Water, Water, Everywhere: The Great Flood of 2013

In April, Oakton's Des Plaines campus experienced the worst flooding in its history. With access roads impassable and parking lots under water, faculty and staff worked to reopen the doors and wrap up the academic year.

12 Another Look

Seven years ago, *Outlook* took an in-depth look at Oakton's STEM program, which recently had received its second National Science Foundation grant. Today, the Center for Promoting STEM is a national model.



Alumni

Calling all



Jenny Javzan Gantumur and Alfred Hegyes display their Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility ribbons at Oakton's May commencement.





FOR MANY PEOPLE, graduating from college marks a watershed experience—and often instills a lifelong connection with an alma mater. Oakton alumna Ann Tennes, a member of the College’s Board of Trustees and director of marketing and communications for the Village of Skokie, Illinois, stands out as a prime example.

“I came to Oakton as a single mother, and the experience literally changed my life,” she notes. “I met my husband in my journalism class, made good friends, and received an affordable, high quality education. I ran for a Board seat because I wanted to make a lasting contribution to a place that played such a pivotal role in my own success—and the success of so many others.”

Tennes’ sense of commitment resonates with thousands of students who have passed through Oakton’s doors. But for many years, the College did not offer a formal way for alumni to remain connected. Now a new Alumni Relations Program offers the opportunity for Oakton graduates to stay involved.

“Full-fledged community college alumni programs are still relatively unusual,” explains Elena Couto (above, standing), manager of development and alumni relations. “Only recently have two-year institutions begun to realize the extent to

which former students value their time on campus. While most continue their education at a four-year college or university, they never forget that the roots of their success stem from places like Oakton. In so many cases, the community college experience enables students to discover who they are and who they can become. So the loyalty remains.”

Arriving at Oakton in fall 2012, Couto hit the ground running and quickly identified an impressive roster of former students already involved with the College. But what did Oakton’s larger alumni community really want and need? To find out, Couto assembled an *ad hoc* Alumni Advisory Committee comprising faculty, staff, student volunteers, and alumni to develop an online survey asking a range of questions about the activities and services that would interest former students.

To spread the word about the survey, volunteers gathered at the Des Plaines campus early in April for a three-night “Alum-a-thon,” reaching out to more than 250 alumni by phone. Among the callers was 89-year-old retired nurse Leona Davis, who came to Oakton as an adult to fulfill her dream of building on her high school education. “Staying connected to the College through the years truly has enriched my life,” she notes. “In fact,

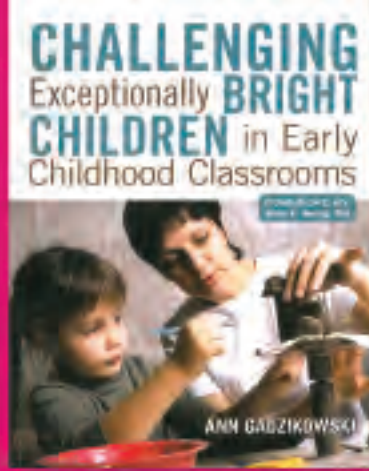
I was president of the former Alumni Association back in the 1990s—so I’m excited to play a role in shaping the new alumni initiative.”

With survey results in hand, Committee members—Davis among them—will begin fleshing out the program this summer. However, a few outreach activities already are underway, including a monthly electronic newsletter that shares alumni success stories and news with former Oaktonites.

And, during the 2013 Commencement, nearly all graduates sported green ribbons, indicating their participation in the Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility. Alumni Relations introduced this national program to foster ongoing ties to the College. Pledge-takers promise to behave ethically and responsibly in their future academic, professional, and personal lives—carrying the principles they learned at Oakton into the world.

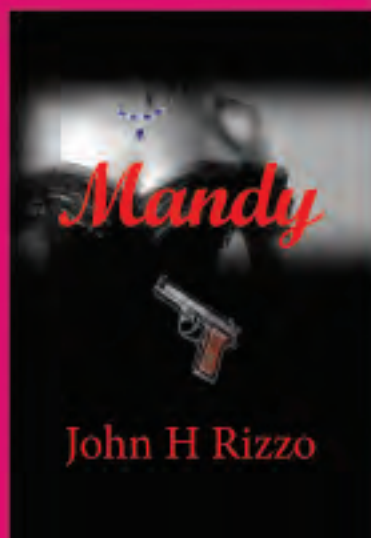
Couto also is forming an Alumni Council that will serve as a sounding board for Alumni Relations and help to develop a variety of programs and events. “The sky’s the limit!” says Couto, adding, “I’m eager to hear from any alum who would like to join. Together we can do great things for Oakton.”





Publishing with a *Passion*

Oakton's adjunct faculty members bring a wealth of real-world skills and knowledge into the classroom. When they're not teaching, many instructors work full time at thriving careers, run businesses, conduct research, perform, consult, volunteer, paint—and write. Such a rich array of experience benefits Oakton students in every area of study. Since the 1990s, instructors Ann Gadzikowski and John Rizzo have served the College in very different disciplines. And this year, both published books born out of their expertise and passion.



Challenging Exceptionally Bright Children in Early Childhood Classrooms

Ann Gadzikowski, Instructor of Early Childhood Education

“EDUCATORS SPEND a great deal of time focusing on underachieving students—and rightly so,” says Ann Gadzikowski, who teaches a number of online courses required for Oakton’s Early Childhood Education Administration Certificate. “However, keeping exceptionally bright children engaged and excited about learning also can be a challenge.”

As early childhood coordinator for Northwestern University’s Center for Talent Development (CTD), Gadzikowski is certainly in a position to know. She spends her days managing Leapfrog, a rigorous academic program designed for Pre-K through Grade 3 children who have strong math and/or verbal abilities.

With a master’s degree in child development from Chicago’s Erikson Institute for Advanced Study, Gadzikowski has more than 20 years experience as a teacher and director of early childhood programs. The author of teaching guides, classroom readers, and textbooks, as well as stories and articles in professional journals and children’s magazines, she has been sharing her expertise with Oakton students since 1993, teaching such courses as *Legal Aspects of Early Childhood Administration* and *Marketing and PR for the Early Childhood Program Director*.

But her work at CTD, which she joined in 2009, made her think. “We have early childhood education experts and gifted education experts. The term ‘gifted’ doesn’t really come into play until about 4th grade; nonetheless, early childhood professionals still need to meet the needs of gifted students. Likewise, teachers of gifted learners need a better understanding of how to work effectively with very young children.”

Challenging Exceptionally Bright Children in Early Childhood Classrooms “straddles the gap,” as Gadzikowski puts

it, mapping out ways educators can create a rich learning environment in which exceptionally bright pre-school students can thrive. The book outlines how to assess and identify such children, and offers a range of strategies for teaching early readers, advanced mathematicians, and young scientists.

Challenging Exceptionally Bright Children also explores how children learn from each other. “We can offer multiple learning levels within one activity,” Gadzikowski explains. “For example, a kindergarten boy obsessed with trains may be bored by a simple ‘train lesson’ in class because he already is far ahead of his peers. But the youngsters could head out to the sandbox and build train *tunnels*. That little boy can share his expertise with classmates, and may learn something from a little girl who just happens to be a tunnel building expert.”

“Teachers must engage exceptionally bright children as early as possible,” she continues. “These are the years in which children learn to love—or loathe—school; very young gifted students can quickly lose interest when the curriculum lags behind their learning level. And that experience can create negative attitudes that linger right up through high school.”

Mandy

John Rizzo, Instructor of Humanities

IN THE ARIZONA DESERT, a man and woman lie dead on the sand. Are they lovers? Sworn enemies? What tortured tale lies behind their fate? With such a lurid opening scene, readers will be tempted to spend a sleepless night tearing through John Rizzo’s latest novel, *Mandy*.

This story really begins in the early 1960s, when Rizzo played violin and viola for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson as part of the United States Air Force (USAF) Strolling Strings. Stationed in Washington, D.C., he hobnobbed frequently with the Singing Sergeants, the official chorus of the USAF. “Those guys really knew how to have a good time,” Rizzo recalls. “But the records they

played were a little different. Our party music was opera, and I was hooked.”

Opera has remained Rizzo’s passion. A salesman and entrepreneur by trade, he joined Oakton’s Alliance for Lifelong Learning in 1999 to teach opera appreciation classes, and then moved over to the credit side of the College in 2001. Now, Rizzo—who earned a master’s degree in theater at the University of Illinois—teaches everything from *Introduction to Musical Theater* to *Western Culture and the Arts: Renaissance-1945*. When he’s not in the classroom, he and his wife, Janice, operate The Italian Opera Company of Chicago, which provides live opera performances for parties and gatherings throughout the area.

Opera and Rizzo’s love of history have seeped into another part of his life as well. “I’ve been writing magazine stories for 25 years,” he says, “but about two years ago, I decided to take a crack at a novel.”

Using Aeschylus’ tragedy *Agamemnon* as a jumping-off point, Rizzo penned *Augie*, the tale of a small-time Chicago hustler who yearns to be a player in the dark netherworld, to the detriment of his wife, daughter, and everyone around him. *The Dean*, a murder mystery inspired by Verdi’s *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and *Mandy*, loosely based on Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut*, followed in quick succession. By turns a romance, thriller, and suspenseful mystery, *Mandy* revolves around the title character’s dilemma: should she follow her head or her heart?

Mandy’s rich, older lover can offer her every luxury she desires—but her heart belongs to a struggling Internet entrepreneur. No spoilers here, but Rizzo’s fast-moving page turner will keep readers pinned to their seats until the last paragraph.

“If people told me five years ago that I’d be writing novels, I would have said they were crazy,” confesses Rizzo, who already is hard at work on his fourth masterpiece. “I do have to credit my wife with the initial push, but I enjoyed it so much, I decided I wanted to keep going!”



Deepening the Tradition of Academic Excellence

Since opening its doors in 1969, Oakton Community College has created a reputation for its innovative spirit and the variety of educational options afforded to students. Now two concentrations—Women's and Gender Studies and Jewish Studies—are putting Oakton on the national map for offering curricula typically reserved for four-year colleges and universities.



Women's and Gender Studies

ON VALENTINE'S DAY 2013 more than 200 members of the Oakton community gathered in the Des Plaines campus lobby. On cue, music filled the air and they began to dance, raising their arms and moving their feet to the beat, joining millions of others around the world for One Billion Rising, the largest global action in history to end violence against women and girls. Sponsored at Oakton by Women's and Gender Studies (WGS), the name serves as a reminder that one in three women on the planet will be raped or beaten in her lifetime.

WGS enjoys a reputation for consciousness-raising. Launched in 2007, the curriculum evolved from the College's long history of women's programming. "For many years, Oakton hosted a very successful series of community workshops and conferences," notes WGS coordinator Kathleen Carot, professor of humanities, speech, and theater. "But we wanted to develop an academic concentration that would round out these events and encourage student participation."

Guided by an advisory committee comprising full- and part-time faculty, staff, and administrators, WGS at Oakton has become a model for similar initiatives at other community colleges. Open to men and women, the 15-credit-hour concentration takes an interdisciplinary approach to the subject, with a strong slant toward social justice. Offerings include a range of anthropology, literature, humanities, philosophy, English, and even psychology courses that view the material through a gender-based lens—from *World Mythologies* and *Psychology of Personal Growth to Gender, Identity, and Literature*. To earn the concentration, students must complete the three-credit *Introduction to Women's Studies* and their electives—but they also must go a step further.

"All WGS concentration students complete an Action Project—an endeavor that brings their learning to life," explains Carot. "Classroom instruction is a great starting point, but ultimately our goal is *praxis*: putting theory into practice."

Over the years, students have organized "Take Back the Night" rallies, coordinated art museum tours that focus on women artists, and designed a unit on contemporary women artists still used in Oakton's *Women and Creativity* course.

"I came to college without any prior knowledge of Women's and Gender Studies," says second-year student Kristin Nicholson, who is completing courses toward her WGS concentration. "In high school history books, I did notice how women received short shrift. At Oakton, I was drawn to WGS through an honors seminar, *Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*, that opened my mind to the stories of women told by women—something the history books never covered. Through WGS courses, I hear the voices of women who have been silenced since the beginning of time."

Much of the action in WGS occurs outside the classroom. Women artists from around the country submit pieces for an annual juried art exhibition, co-sponsored by WGS and Oakton's Koehnline Museum of Art. Each year, hundreds of art lovers, community members, and students turn out for the opening reception. Themes are provocative and thought-provoking. In 2012, for example, more than 80 artists reflected on the upcoming national elections and their own relationship to politics in *The Personal is Political: The Transformative Power of Women's Art*. A call for entries is underway for *Bodies by Design: Modification, Coercion, and Resistance*, which opens October 3, 2013.

WGS sponsors films, lectures, and workshops throughout the fall and spring semesters; and every other year, a day-long conference takes an in-depth look

at a gender-related topic. In March 2013, *Futuristic Feminists: Visionary Perspectives Across the Disciplines* featured award-winning spoken word poet and activist Kelly Zen-Yield Tsai (below) and presentations focusing on diverse topics



such as future directions of sex, gender, and health research; film noir and femme fatales; and feminist science fiction—as well as a lively student panel discussion on *The*

War on Women: The End of Men.

"Even during our non-conference years we don't slow down," Carot admits. "Instead, we celebrate Women's History Month in March." In 2012, WGS hosted a talk by nationally-known feminist Amy Richards, author of *Manifesta: Young Women* and co-founder of the Third Wave Foundation, an organization for young feminist activists. Other activities included performances of Chicago playwright Tanya Saracho's *Kita y Fernanda* (opposite page); a lecture on the life and work of radical activist Rosa Luxemburg; the Clothesline Project—a display of shirts with messages and illustrations designed by violence survivors or those who love them—and more.

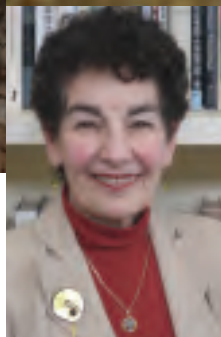
"When we introduced the Women's and Gender Studies concentration, students often resisted the ideas and concepts we presented," recalls Carot. "Six years later, I see a real surge of awareness in my classes about gender and sexuality as a source of oppression. That's why WGS is so critical: we open our students' eyes so that they can take action."

continued



I'm the Chair, Carol Luc





Jewish Studies

FROM ITS ORIGINS on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea nearly 3,000 years ago to the present day, Judaism has made a profound impact on history and the world. Now students and community members can gain a unique perspective on this ancient culture through Jewish Studies at Oakton.

Launched in fall 2012, the Jewish Studies concentration marks the first of its kind among community colleges in Illinois—and is one of a handful of similar initiatives in the United States. “Jewish Studies programs are fairly common at four-year colleges and universities,” notes Wendy Maier-Sarti, professor of history and coordinator of Jewish Studies. “We hope Oakton’s curriculum will set the standard for community colleges.”

Jewish Studies at Oakton offers a plethora of programming for students and the community at large. Through an 18-credit-hour concentration, students can delve into the subject from a liberal arts, humanist perspective. In addition, the College offers a series of free lectures and film screenings that shed light on Jewish culture, history, literature, and more.

“I’ve been fascinated by Holocaust history and Jewish culture since I read Corrie Ten Boom’s *The Hiding Place* as a

child,” Maier-Sarti explains. As a student at Roosevelt University, she conducted research on nurses who worked in the Nazi camp system, and then

earned a Northwestern University Fellowship for a 2001 summer institute on the Holocaust and Jewish civilization. “When I came to Oakton in 2002, I quickly developed a *History of the Holocaust* course,” she notes, “but expanding to a full Jewish Studies concentration was on my agenda from the start—especially because of the College’s deep connection to Skokie, home to one of the country’s largest communities of Holocaust survivors.”

In one short year, Jewish Studies has enjoyed enormous popularity. To complete the concentration, students must take *Introduction to Jewish Studies* and *History of the Holocaust*, and then select from a wide range of electives to earn the remaining 12 credits. But making the choice isn’t easy. First-year course offerings included *Hebrew, Jewish Art from Antiquity to Modern Israel, Jewish Literature*, and *History of Ancient Hebrews*.

Five students are close to completing their Jewish Studies concentrations. First-year Oakton student Sarah Herriges comments, “We can watch shows about Jewish history and World War II on the History Channel, but it’s just not the same as the

in-depth perspective received in class.”

Supplementing the course offerings, public lectures featuring local and national experts punctuate the academic year. Last fall, the Spertus Institute’s Ellen LeVee, Ph.D., (below, left) launched the series with *Reason vs. Revelation: A Jewish Alternative*. Phyllis Lassner, professor at Northwestern University’s Crown Family Center for Jewish Studies shared tales of the *Kindertransport*, and Zev Garber, Ph.D., professor emeritus and chair of Jewish Studies at Los Angeles Valley College, explored *The Jewish Jesus*.

Other highlights included *Monsters and Superheroes: The Jewish Golem Myth in Interwar Film and Art* and the *Jews of Africa*. The year wrapped up with a screening of *Orchestra of Exiles*, the story of celebrated violinist Bronislaw Huberman, who rescued hundreds of Jewish musicians and their families from the Nazis by founding what would become the Israeli Philharmonic.

Stephanie Cleveland, an Oakton alumna who continued her education by earning a master’s degree in history at Roosevelt University, tries to catch every event. “I’m a big fan. While I was attending Oakton, I took *History of the Holocaust*, and that class inspired me to enroll in graduate school.”

Now heading into its second year, Jewish Studies at Oakton is maintaining its momentum. In an effort to expand student access, a new elective, *Contemporary Jewish Identity*, will be available in the evening next fall—and Maier-Sarti hopes to offer a course at Skokie’s Holocaust Museum. In October, Bruce Kraig, Ph.D., professor emeritus of history and humanities at Roosevelt University and founding president of Culinary Historians of Chicago, will lecture on 20th-century Jewish Food ... and the history of the hot dog!

“I’m thrilled that our first year exceeded every expectation,” enthuses Maier-Sarti. “Truly, the study of Jewish history brings value to everyone—because it is the study of humanity.”





Let's get moving!

FOR 10 YEARS, Carol Bustamante, professor and coordinator of developmental English, has seen the number of Latino students in her classes rise. That's no accident. Latinos now comprise about 12 percent of Oakton's student body—up from five percent in 2007. In fact, between the 2011 and 2012 academic years alone, the Latino population on campus jumped 15 percent. While still outnumbered by other ethnicities, Latinos remain the fastest-growing segment of the Oakton community.

This rapid increase made Bustamante uneasy. "I worried that these students might not have the resources they need to succeed at the College. So, I gathered more than 30 Latino faculty, staff, and administrators and asked for their help. Together, we created a comprehensive program to support our Latino students, and, with a generous grant from the Oakton Community College Educational Foundation, launched ¡ANDALE! at Oakton!"

¡ANDALE! (Association for Nourishing and Developing the Advancement of Latinos in Education) translates to "hurry up" or "get moving"—an acronym that captures perfectly the program's purpose: to help Latino students move successfully toward a degree or certificate.

The initiative builds on Oakton's extensive efforts to recruit Latino students by offering Spanish-language information sessions on campus and in the local high schools, activities targeting undocumented immigrants, and the day-long ¡Síguele! event each March. Loosely translated as "follow your dreams," ¡Síguele! recently attracted more than 100 Latino high school students who learned about Oakton's admission process, financial aid, and college life.

But once these students enroll, they need to feel connected, comfortable, and positive about the college experience. ¡ANDALE! kicked off last September with an irresistible lure: free tostadas, Mexican hot chocolate, and churros—accompanied by lively music and a video of high-profile Latinos. To further promote the program, Bustamante tapped 10 students to serve as "advocates," charged with spreading the word and bringing friends along to ¡ANDALE! events.

During its freshman year, ¡ANDALE! ramped up quickly. Six workshops tackled topics ranging from "How to Read a Textbook" to "How to Apply for a Scholarship." A seminar for Latino parents gave moms and dads the chance to ask questions about their child's education. In February, 20 students traveled to

downtown Chicago for the three-day United States Hispanic Leadership Institute, where they heard from renowned Latino corporate and civic professionals. Finally, during an April Latino Summit at the College, nationally-known motivational speaker Andres Lara—The Cuban Guy—spoke to more than 50 students and parents. For Marcial Portillo, who arrived from Venezuela last November, ¡ANDALE! made a significant difference. "I'm so new to this country and to Oakton, and I needed some way to build a social network," he says. Through the program, Portillo, who plans to be an engineer, made new friends and even helped tutor another Latino student. "No question—¡ANDALE! helped me adapt to this environment much more quickly than I expected!" he commented.

Next year, ¡ANDALE! will find a permanent home in Oakton's Office of Access, Equity, and Diversity. "We're really excited about further strengthening the program's offerings," notes Michael Anthony, Ed.D., the College's assistant vice president of access, equity, and diversity. "Student success is always front and center, and ¡ANDALE! can help us meet that goal—not only for serving Latino students, but other student populations as well.





Whatever It Takes

Although their roads have been rocky at times, Marie Fleurima and Angel Pearson have triumphed over obstacles along the way and are on course for successful and meaningful careers in nursing.

FIVE YEARS AGO, the day before Mardi Gras, Marie Fleurima (above) was on her way to enjoy music and dancing in the streets of Pétion-Ville, a hillside suburb just east of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, when she was abducted by a group of men who knew her uncle in the United States could afford to pay a ransom for her release. Now living in Skokie with the uncle who rescued her, Fleurima remains in the U.S. on Temporary Protection Status. Daily fighting for asylum, she continues to improve her English and take the prerequisites she needs to enroll in Oakton's nursing program.

"My mother died when I was two years old, so my grandmother reared me," Fleurima explains. "Whooping cough and other childhood illnesses often kept me from attending school. Luckily, my grandmother not only cared for me when I was ill, but she also provided home schooling that prepared me for high school and the university. I went on to

become a lab technician in a pediatric office. I was married, owned a home, and had a good job before I was kidnapped, raped, and tortured. That's when my world fell apart."

Fellow student Angel Pearson (above right) also was reared, in part, by her grandmother, who encouraged her to study hard. Yet when her grandmother passed away just before middle school graduation, Pearson's life took a dark turn. With her mother unable to care for her, she found herself being shuffled in and out of shelters and foster homes. By the time she was a young adult, she was homeless—and a single parent.

Pearson and her infant son, Jaylonnie, found shelter at Connections for the Homeless, an Evanston-based nonprofit that also helped her enroll in Oakton's GED program. She went on to take advantage of the College's 16-week Basic Nurse Assistant Training (BNAT) program, passing the State Competency Exam and obtaining her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) license. Not one to rest on her laurels, she, like Fleurima, currently is completing prerequisites for the nursing program and hopes eventually to earn her bachelor of science in nursing.

"Both women demonstrate exceptional resilience," comments Linda Davis, senior manager for adult education in the

Alliance for Lifelong Learning. "They are extraordinary in their ability to pursue their academic dreams, despite the many obstacles they have faced. We could not be more proud of their accomplishments."

Although course work keeps Fleurima and Pearson busy, they still find time to help other BNAT and GED students. "I can't help but mentor others," says Pearson. "So many people invested in me and pushed me along the way. Now it's my turn to give back. I see so many students who don't believe in themselves, who have no hope for the future. They think obtaining a GED will not make a difference in their lives, but it will. I stand before them as proof that it *absolutely* will. I let those I mentor know they are not the only ones who have had a rough start in life. The past doesn't matter. What matters is where you're headed. As the saying goes, 'Reach for the stars. If you fall short, you'll still catch the moon.'"

For both of these bright, talented students, Oakton has been a place of refuge, renewal, and hope. "I am grateful to the College for providing me with the education I need to create a new life," notes Fleurima. "Yes, my future is uncertain, but I'm not about to give up. Adversity only makes me stronger."



Water, Water, Everywhere! The Great Flood of 2013



OAKTON STUDENTS and employees went to sleep on Wednesday, April 17, 2013, with rain pounding the roof ... and awakened before dawn the next morning to ringing phones and beeping texts. The College had issued an OaktonAlert: both campuses would be closed that day because of heavy flooding.

Since the Des Plaines River runs through the flagship campus, rising waters have threatened the building since its construction in 1980. But the severity and duration of this flood were unprecedented. While the Skokie campus returned to business after two days, the Des Plaines

campus remained closed for more than a week. The “Great Flood of 2013” was among the worst in Oakton’s history.

By the time the storm tapered out at noon on April 18, approximately seven inches of rain had saturated the region. Des Plaines River levels reached a record 11 feet, flooding Golf and Central Roads—the two entry points to the campus. Lake Oakton overflowed its banks, and Parking Lots A, C, and D remained hidden under three feet of water.

Employees scrambled to manage the damage and keep the ball rolling as the end of the semester loomed. The facilities

team toiled around the clock, pumping water out of the basement, moving vehicles and equipment to higher elevations, sandbagging building entrances, and draining parking lots. Meanwhile, faculty invented ways to connect with students and revamp their final assignments—from meeting at Starbucks to using social media. Many Des Plaines employees set up shop at Skokie, working to keep students informed, reschedule events, answer questions, and conduct College business. After eight days, the Des Plaines campus finally reopened on Friday, April 26.





Center for Promoting STEM

IN 2006, Oakton's fledgling STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) program received its second grant from the prestigious National Science Foundation (NSF). A tremendous boon to the College, the award provided nearly \$1 million to continue the transforming work undertaken by the Center for Promoting STEM (CPSTEM).

Outlook marked the occasion with an in-depth look at the program ("Building on a Foundation for Success," Vol. 4). Seven years later, Oakton's Center can proudly point to its status as a national model.

Success stories abound. Take Maryam Khan. A solid math student in high school, she did not consider continuing her math studies at Oakton. Why should she? What sort of career path would she pursue? Khan found answers through Jennifer Strehler, professor of mathematics and STEM mentor. Now enrolled at Northeastern Illinois University, Khan is completing her undergraduate degree in applied math, with one published paper on the correlation between climate change and influenza already under her belt, and a stack of graduate applications on her desk.

"Having a female instructor as a role model made a significant difference for me," confesses Khan. "I wouldn't be at NEIU if Professor Strehler had not taken me under her wing. She made it possible for me to major in math, and helped me understand that my path to success did not have to be straight and narrow."

"Oakton truly has transformed the way we teach and support STEM students," notes Gloria Liu, a testament herself to

the College's commitment to STEM learning. With program management originally split among three faculty and staff members, Liu came on board full time in 2007 to launch the Center and serve as its coordinator.

"We're a teaching-centered College, but since receiving the NSF grant, we have ramped up our efforts to bolster student interest and proficiency in the field," she explains, adding that Oakton was the only college at the time housing a center equally devoted to all four STEM disciplines. "Our courses, events, and activities may have shifted over the years, but our goal remains the same: to enhance student success in STEM through monetary fellowships, faculty mentors, innovative teaching techniques, classroom simulations, and special seminars."

Since *Outlook* first covered the story, the number of faculty members who play a role in STEM programming has tripled. As in 2006, CPSTEM offers a STEM Experts lecture series; seminars to help with time management, test-taking, and stress management; and a faculty mentoring program for students in any 200-level STEM course.

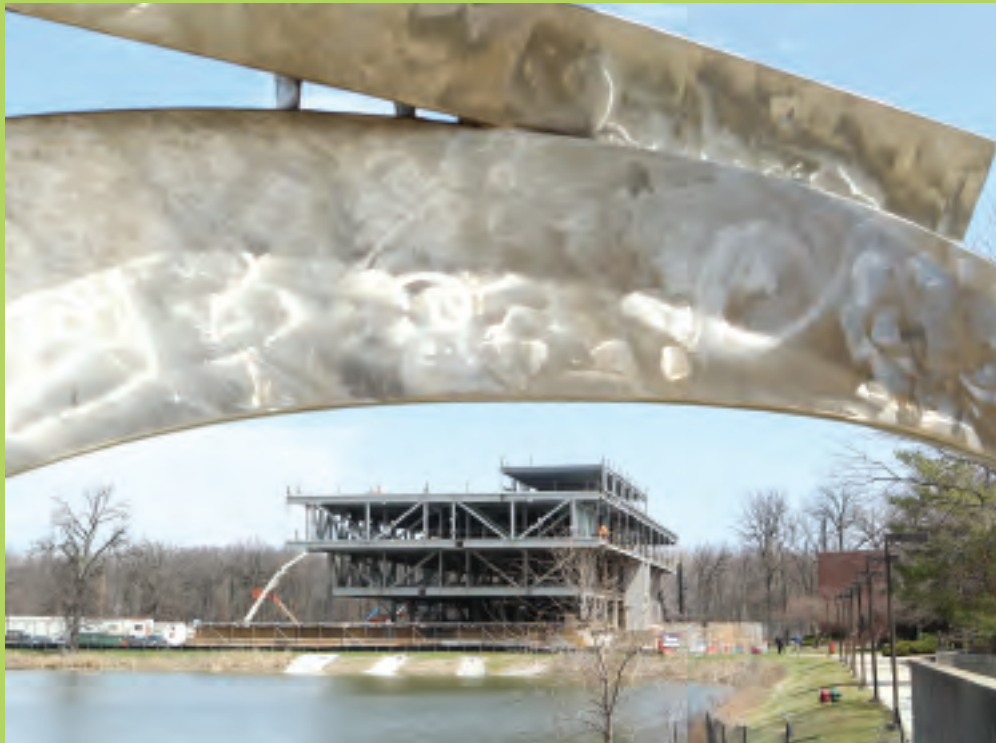
Over time, faculty also began incorporating more hands-on and interdisciplinary learning into STEM courses. All 200-level

classes now include a research project (spring 2013 topics focused on cancer cells, photodynamic therapy, biodiesel alternative fuel sources, and spectroscopy) and cross-departmental projects are increasingly common. Since spring 2007, engineering and health care students have worked together to design a mobile emergency unit, deciding which equipment to include, laying out the vehicle's interior space, and selecting the power source.

The Center's laser-like focus on student success has paid off. STEM students are three times more likely than other Oakton students to attain an associate's degree, and an increasing number of high school graduates come to the College specifically to enroll in STEM courses. Although the NSF grant wrapped up in 2012, the Center remains robust. The College's Educational Foundation provides funding for student internships, and the Student Government Association underwrites the STEM Experts series and the popular Student-Industry-Teaching Simulations (SIT-SIMs), an initiative that brings middle and high school students into the College for a day each March to solve "real world" problems with faculty and industry experts.

Liu, a math teacher by profession, marvels at the growth in STEM programming during her tenure. "I've seen so many students fall in love with fields they had never considered as a career choice. And that's because we stay flexible, provide access to exciting research opportunities, and never stop exploring the boundaries of learning."





Building Together: An Update

Construction continues apace on Oakton's new Science and Health Careers Center, the centerpiece of the College's \$68.5 million five-year Facilities Master Plan. On track to open for summer classes in 2014, the building's steel skeleton is complete and concrete floors are in place. The 93,000-square-foot facility will feature sophisticated labs; informal student gathering spaces on each floor; flexible, light-filled classrooms; sustainable "green" elements; and enhanced technology. Designed to meet contemporary and emerging science and health career educational standards, the Center will house the College's anatomy and physiology, biology, chemistry, earth science, medical laboratory technology, nursing, physics, and physical therapy assistant programs.