

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE: Hope and Challenges for 2021

Thursday, January 7, 2020

With the beginning of classes on Wednesday, we mark the opening of winter semester, and the dawn of a new year filled with hope, but also challenges and the unfolding of a national crisis that demands our immediate attention.

The insurrection at the U.S. Capitol yesterday is a chilling reminder that we must remain vigilant in the protection of American democracy and stand up for the values upon which our republic is founded. These are the same values perpetuated by higher education.

The violent events that challenged the legitimate result of the presidential election are not expressions of free speech and protest. The criminal actions are an assault on democracy, civility and on the ideal that public discourse is based on reason.

We must be unwavering in our opposition to violence.

And, we must remain steadfast in our advocacy for the First Amendment, expression of a diversity of opinions, rigorous and peaceful protests. These are the principles upon which Oakland University's Center for Center for Civic Engagement is founded. As a "convener of conversations," the center aims to be a catalyst for civic literacy and tolerance throughout the region. These principles are at the core of our values at Oakland University.

As we begin 2021, I hope you find solace in the sage advice of Civil Rights icon and statesman John Lewis, who said: "What I try to tell young people is that if you come together with a mission, and it's grounded with love and a sense of community, you can make the impossible possible."

Clearly, at times, the past year had that "impossible feeling."

Yet as I look back, so many of you made 2020 memorable.

In the face of many dramatic challenges and unforeseen events of the past year, I greatly appreciate the Oakland University community's resilience, selflessness and commitment to the values at the heart of higher education -- compassion, cooperation and a sense of purpose.

While 2020 was an extremely difficult and trying year, it has imparted several striking positive lessons; most notably, the past year serves as a reminder for each of us to pause and reflect on what is truly important and think about the priorities of our lives.

During the holiday break, I hope you had time to realize the vital importance of a collaborative campus community, and the fundamental bonds you share with your family and friends. These ties are the essential connections that provide our lives with meaning, focus and purpose.

Furthermore, the past year reminds us that it is extremely important that we acknowledge stress and anxiety of our daily lives. While each of us tolerates stress differently, there is no doubt that we must readily identify the signs and symptoms of unhealthy tension caused by endless worrying.

If you need support, please contact [OU Counseling Center](#) or the [SEHS Counseling Center](#), which offers free services to help students, faculty and staff deal with stress, anxiety, depression, and career planning. SEHS services are available through telehealth, and are provided remotely via video sessions.

For now, as we consider the possibilities of the new year, let's focus on hope.

In the upcoming months, vaccines will bolster our immune systems so we can effectively fight the virus, if exposed. Let us recommit to wearing a mask and social distancing. By working together, we will speed toward the day when the virus will be vanquished.

The discovery in record time and unfolding distribution of the vaccines shows that if we stay focused and positive, anything is possible.

And, in the same spirit, anything is possible for you.

Perhaps especially in these uncertain times, students should consider their education as a necessary path that will define the course of their lives and serve as a foundation for a lifetime of opportunity and learning.

Indeed, these are difficult times, but planning for your future should not be diverted. The fortitude you demonstrate today will be invaluable as you face many challenges in the days and years ahead.

Inspired by compassion and a sense of community, we believe Oakland University is the place where students can pursue their dreams, and where what once seemed impossible is possible.

I look forward to the days ahead when we can once again connect in person, and share the sense of community and appreciation for learning that defines the Oakland University experience.

May this year bring you sustained good health,

Ora

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