

**PRESIDENT STEVEN P. O'DAY  
AUSTIN COLLEGE**

**Service of Perspectives & Reflections  
President's Address to the Austin College Faculty and Staff  
August 12, 2021**

The very first time I gave remarks at Perspectives and Reflections, I talked about all of us being a team: how each person has a role to play, that together we are greater than the sum of our parts. If ever there has been a time when that truth has been demonstrated, it is the past 18 months. We, as individuals and as an institution, have been challenged as never before.

Other eras have had their own challenges. Austin College has faced and overcome obstacles throughout its history, and we too can say that we are meeting the challenges of our time. Not only have we battled a global pandemic that just won't end, we have also persevered through a paralyzing winter storm that crippled the region and the state's ability to deliver basic services. We all have our own stories, and together we have been and will continue to be equal to our moment in history.

And so, equipped with this knowledge, we move boldly into the future. We are forging a path for students to come to Austin College and ultimately graduate ready for the world. We are developing new, relevant, and meaningful programs in areas of study like Kinesiology. We are exploring the potential of a physician assistant program. Contemporary programs in areas of Data Science and Analytics, Communications, Health Care Administration, and Public Health continue to grow and prepare graduates to address the modern needs of society. We are recognizing the needs of this generation's students by revitalizing our summer academic offerings, deepening the sense of inclusion and diversity within our community, and enhancing the ways in which we support our students' efforts toward graduation and success.

Beyond the classroom, but also vital to the student experience, we continue to update our physical surroundings. As we can see from the plastic sheeting in Mason, work continues on the renovation of the Natatorium locker rooms that will not only refresh locker room facilities but will also result in a brand new recruiting suite. Work to create a new outdoor space on campus, a meditation garden, is in full swing on the east side of Wynne Chapel and will be completed early this fall. These projects are remarkable demonstrations of private philanthropy—alumni and friends of the College who are inspired by what this place does and will do in the future.

All these things we do are connected. All these things are possible because of the extraordinary people who make Austin College. In just a minute, we will congratulate those celebrating milestones in their service. At lunch, we'll introduce those new members of our community.

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And as all that is happening, we prepare to greet new students, returning students, and their families in the days leading to the start of the new academic year.

The incoming class consists of 323 first-year students and transfers. They hail from Texas and 11 other states, and four other countries. Students of color represent almost 49 percent of the class. Nearly 41 percent are student athletes, and almost 26 percent are first generation students.

These incoming students, indeed all of our students, have spent the last year and a half in learning environments impacted by COVID. They come to Austin College this fall full of hope and optimism but perhaps also with some uncertainty. They may feel a stronger pull from home and family, but they are also searching for their breakout path toward becoming who they aspire to be. They came to Austin College to join a community that is smart, resilient, and good to each other.

We know that COVID—or no COVID—that is true. We are smart, resilient, and good to each other.

We transform students so they can transform the world. You hear me say it all the time. I believe that deeply, and I think it's good for us to hear that at the beginning of each school year. We, together, transform students so they can transform the world. Thank you for all you do. It's my honor to work with all of you.

Let's get to it.