

PRESIDENT STEVEN P. O'DAY
AUSTIN COLLEGE
Service of Perspectives & Reflections
President's Address to the Austin College Faculty and Staff
August 18, 2022

Welcome to the 174th year of Austin College!

I am so happy to begin a new academic year. I don't know about you, but this summer felt different. We are emerging from more than two years of disruptions brought on by the world's response to a global pandemic, a war in Europe, and economic upheaval in the global marketplace. But, we have not just made it through. We are emerging with momentum. This will not be a year of "just getting back to normal." We are surging ahead. We have dealt with the immediate issues of these last couple years, and now is a good moment to celebrate the fact that Austin College has never stopped advancing our mission and meeting the needs of today's students.

We are well on our way to launching an exciting new program—**Master of Medical Science – Physician Associate Program**. With students expected to begin in January of 2024, this program will be one of only twelve of its kind in all of Texas and will address a staggering national and regional shortage in healthcare providers. Work has begun on the physical space that will be the Austin College Health Campus in the Texoma Medical Center complex right up the road. Work also continues on both the curriculum and the learning experiences that will allow us to provide a premier opportunity to students who strive to make the world a better place. We also continue to embrace our roots as an institution that fosters deeper thinking and higher learning throughout the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Sciences. One example of this comes from earlier this year. Austin College was awarded a prestigious \$1.3 million grant, one of only 12 in the country from the Mellon Foundation, to explore "Pathways to a Just Society."

Dr. Sandy Philipose, Associate Professor of Education, has been selected to participate in the inaugural "Inquiry Initiative" sponsored by the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE). She will be among 80 teacher educators across the United States focusing on teacher education practice and identifying roadblocks or opportunity gaps for students wishing to enter the field of education.

This summer, two Austin College students, Anika Chand and Sydney Versen, were named Goldwater Scholars. Goldwater Scholarships are among the most prestigious awards in the country given to undergraduate researchers in STEM fields. Junior Carrie Johnson was named a

recipient of a Native American Journalism Fellowship. Fourteen student interns with the Social Entrepreneurship for Poverty Alleviation (SEPA) program spent the summer assisting in grant writing efforts at local nonprofit organizations. Nine science students conducted guided research with our faculty over the summer. The list goes on.

These achievements, however, don't just happen. They happen because of the education, opportunities, and guidance that our students receive from all of us who contribute in our own ways to their experiences at Austin College.

With remarkable experiences comes excellence in other areas as well. Liberty Chanin was a SCAC swimming champion in the 1,650 freestyle. Our Women's Water Polo team, in only their fourth year of existence, brought home their second Collegiate Water Polo Association Division III Championship and an NCAA/USA Water Polo Division III third-place finish in the National Championship Tournament. In fact, the number of honors among all our students is so long, I couldn't possibly list them for you now.

While we might be tempted to hear about these individual honors and accomplishments and merely congratulate the students, I offer that you should give yourselves a nod of congratulations, too, whenever you hear these things. Know that they simply would not happen without you.

While all of this is happening—initiatives launching and honors accumulating—another area of vital strategic importance is our commitment to gradually transforming the esthetic of our campus. In this day and age, we must recognize the importance of continually deepening the sense of belonging, community, wellbeing, and safety that enriches the student experience. While the culture on our campus has long been built on these principles, our physical surroundings must echo and support that culture. To that end, I've formed a working group of faculty, staff, and students to lead in this effort. We're also in the process of getting some advice from experts that will inform decisions we make regarding environmentally friendly and financially sustainable improvements to our campus. We are making progress. You may have noticed the removal of some diseased and dying trees this summer. You also may have become accustomed to the orange and black flags stuck in the ground around campus. They indicate irrigation sprinklers that are being repaired or replaced. We'll keep folks updated on our progress moving forward. And, I should add that it is ultimately our goal to have these improvements funded through private philanthropic support. Stay tuned!

We also have a major summer project underway. I'm sure you've all noticed the renovation of Jerry Apple Stadium. It is being transformed into a community hub that features a state-of-the-art artificial surface, a fitness track, lights, additional spectator seating, a new scoreboard, and numerous other upgrades. These changes are not just for football. The stadium will provide

additional competition space for various sports and is a place that the entire campus community will enjoy for years to come.

All of the initiatives and projects I've mentioned today, and so many more across divisions, are connected. They are all built around the pillars of continuing to successfully recruit, enroll, and graduate students so they can transform the world. They also are examples of the unwavering dedication of all of you.

That dedication will now be extended to a new class of 375 first-year and transfer students. They hail from Texas and 14 other states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, Washington), as well as six other countries (Germany, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia). Students of color represent 51.7 percent of the class, 35 percent are first generation students, 15 percent are legacy, and 42 percent are student athletes. They are racially diverse and come from varied socioeconomic backgrounds.

Further, our first-year students bring a strong academic profile with an average high school GPA of 3.58. Sixty-two percent of our incoming class are test-optional, and those who submitted test scores have an average SAT or ACT score of 1250 and 27, respectively.

And so, my friends, as we ready ourselves for the tidal wave of activity that comes with the start of every new year, let us remind ourselves of the value of our work together. Let us remember that it is our work, our calling, that readies students for their lives ahead. Our work that teaches and guides, mentors and coaxes, enlightens and pushes, encourages and supports students as they ready themselves for the rest of their lives, even if they don't yet know what their lives will look like.

Let Me remind you that what you are do is amazing. Be proud of it. You are making a difference in people's lives. You are making a difference in the world.

My hope is that we all begin this academic year energized, excited for where we're going, and secure in the belief that Austin College's finest days are ahead.

Thank you for all that you're doing!

Have a great year!