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Good afternoon, and welcome to Fall 2021!

It's nice to see cars in the parking lots again and students roaming the hallways. As you're well aware, OTC's current mask requirement, which mandates masking in all inside public areas, will stay in effect until September 10. We're all hopeful we can drop the requirement soon, but that will be heavily dependent on vaccination rates and the rate of COVID infections in the broader community.

**VACCINATION CLINICS:** OTC will offer vaccinations on the Springfield campus this week. These clinics will offer the Pfizer vaccine, which has now received full FDA approval. Please remind your students about these vaccination clinics, which will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in ICW 108BC.

**STRATEGIC PLANNING:** The college is now entering the fourth year of the [Your Dreams, Our Plan](#) strategic plan. Over the past three years, a number of workgroups have been hard at work helping to accomplish many of the goals and deliverables of the plan. I know several of you have participated in these groups and can attest to the work being done around the college. If you are interested in catching up on the progress that has been made so far, you can find updates on the [Strategic Planning Website](#). As faculty, you all play a critical role in the strategic plan. Your experiences with your students and peers gives you a unique perspective about ways to further our institution's goals. I encourage each of you to explore opportunities to get involved in the strategic plan this year. If you are interested in being more involved in the work going on, please either let me know or you can [sign up online](#) to join one of the workgroups.

**RECORDINGS OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCES:** The recording playlists for the [Faculty Development Days](#) kickoff for full-time faculty and the [Adjunct Educator Conference](#) are now available on their respective websites.

**DEPARTMENTAL ANNUAL PLANNING:** Over the summer, I was able to review each academic departments' annual plans. I was so happy to see many plans include adding more accelerated learning options, flexible scheduling, and the use of open educational resources.

**MILESTONE ANNIVERSARY:** Congrats to Dr. Lance Renner, Dean of General Education, on beginning his 25<sup>th</sup> year at the college! We all like to joke that Lance has done just about every job at the college, but it's funny because it's practically true! Countless students and employees have benefited from his service, and his tremendous heart for serving students is unmatched. While Lance considers it an honor to have served OTC for so long, there are so many of us who consider it an honor to have worked alongside of him. Congratulations, Lance!

**STUDENT-FIRST CULTURE OF CARE:** I'm very proud of the culture of care that is the foundation of all we do at OTC. As I shared with you over the last week, you're going to hear much more about how we build upon this student-first culture and imbed that thinking into everything we do and all the

decisions we make.

As I was walking into work this morning, a student pulled up alongside me in the parking lot, rolled his window down, and said, “I need help.” He was looking for his automotive class. He didn’t know which building it was in and didn’t know where to park. He was very anxious and overwhelmed. “This is my first time on campus. I don’t know where I’m going.” I showed him how close he was to the ITTC building where he would find his class and informed him that he could park anywhere on campus that wasn’t a reserved spot. “I’m a high school student, and I just don’t know about all this.” His anxiety was evident. I told him that it’s normal to be nervous, but then added, “It’s going to be okay. We’re going to take good care of you.” He smiled, thanked me, and then headed toward a parking spot.

It felt good to help that young man, and I felt confident telling him that we would take good care of him, because I know we will. I know YOU will. That’s why I’m excited to talk about all the ways we care for students. What I did in the parking lot this morning is a tiny fraction of the impact you have every day, whether you work in the classroom or in our academic support areas and offices. I look forward to all of us sharing with each other the ways we demonstrate to students that we care. But it isn’t just about showing students we care – yes, it feels good to help someone, but research tells us that our care translates directly into higher student persistence, retention, and graduation. The young man I helped direct to his automotive class may very well be the technician who works on my car one day. The student struggling in your class may one day be your respiratory therapist, pharmacist, mortgage loan officer, or the farmer who grows your food. It serves none of us well if that student gets discouraged and drops out.

We have lots of stories to share. I encourage you tell your stories about the students you have helped along the way. After all, caring for students and helping them along their educational path is why we’re here and is the most gratifying part of what we do.

Enjoy your first week of Fall 2021!

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