Opening Day 2024

Clark College faculty and staff gathered on September 16 to kick off the 2024-2025 academic year during Opening Day festivities at O'Connell Sports Center.

It was a homecoming of sorts. People greeted each other as they lined up at tables laden with gallons of coffee and hundreds of bagels for a breakfast hosted by iQ Credit Union. Staff and faculty gathered in small groups all over the gym to reconnect and catch up on their summer activities. Dozens got a new staff photo taken by Jenny Shadley from Communications and Marketing. During the celebration, several employees were honored with awards. **Read more about the employee awards: https://news.clark.edu/2024/09/2024-employee-awards/**

Cristhian Caseco Juarez, Andrew Gratze, and Denise Gideon

Melissa O'Dea, Levi Nelson, Kristina Martin, and Brittanie Castrey

Dr. Terry Brown, Mike Law, and Niira Krupnick

Dr. Edwards, Carl Douglas, Tiffany Saari, Brian McVay, and Chad Laughlin

Dr. Michele Cruse, Vanessa Neal, and Courtney Hoover

Zach Lattin and Laura Nagel

Welcome by Dr. Edwards

Dr. Edwards greeted faculty and staff in a message focused on the power of unity, with everyone working together and using the college's Equity-Centered Strategic Plan as our roadmap. Next, a new Strategic Plan video was screened.

Speaking about unity, Dr. Edwards quoted Thomas Paine, an 18th-century political writer: "It's not in numbers, but in unity, that our great strength lies."

Following the theme of "unity," Oswald, our beloved Penguin mascot, starred in a video that showed Degrundra "Dee" Harris from ODEI leading him around campus in search of components to

build a special Opening Day surprise gift. (View the video: https://youtu.be/Ok2Q0T63LUA) The video concluded with real-life Oswald entering the gym with an ASCC leader and bearing his special gift. With an extra power boost from the clapping and cheering from the audience, Oswald pushed the button and launched a wall of confetti into the audience, who shrieked appreciatively.

Dr. Edwards thanked the Clark College Foundation for their partnership. Each year, the foundation awards $1.3 million in scholarships, special awards, and financial support to hundreds of our students, and contributes an average of $3.5 million annually to the college for programs and capital support.

She said, "This collaboration has been a pivotal component of our success over the last 50 years. Please join me in giving another heartfelt thank you to our partners at the Clark College Foundation."

Dr. Edwards highlighted a dozen projects and programs

including:

- An AI-powered chatbot will be added to our website to enhance user experience.
- Our new Associate of Applied Technology (AAT) degree in Surgical Technology has been approved.
- Our first building at Boschma Farms is nearly completed. General education classes will begin in Spring 2025. Our Advanced Manufacturing program is awaiting NWCUU approval.
- We currently have $13 million in grants and allocations including a $1 million grant from the National Science Foundation to close opportunity gaps by providing cohort-based support and academic preparation program, faculty mentoring, and scholarships to 48 students pursuing associate degrees in Engineering or Computer Science.
- We have hired Caitlin Malvar as our Basic Needs Navigator, a new role supported by the state to provide a single point of contact for students seeking essential resources.
- We are preparing for accreditation for 2024-2025 under the leadership of Dr. Cecelia Martin.
- And much more!

ASCC President Gurraj Singh Dhami, *pictured above,* introduced this academic year's student leaders. Then he spoke about his focus: To "ensure that every student has access to the resources and support they need to succeed. Each of us has unique obstacles, and it's vital that we create an environment where every student feels supported, whether through financial aid, mental health resources, or extracurricular involvement. We all need that sense of community, and I'm committed to making sure no one feels left behind."

Board of Trustees Chair Cristhian Canseco Juarez spoke about unity throughout the Clark community: the board of trustees, Dr. Edwards, Clark College Foundation, and faculty and staff across campus. He closed by saying, "Imagine what impact we can make this academic year as we work together in unity on behalf of our students and our college community. I am honored to work with you and to be part of Penguin Nation."

Dr. Edwards closed Opening Day by saying: "Next week, we will welcome a new cohort of students who have put their trust in Clark College—and all of us collectively—to help them step

onto a path toward success in their academic goals, their careers, and in life. I thank each of you for being a part of the Clark team doing this important work on behalf of our students. We have our equity-centered Strategic Plan as our road map in place. We have our team of good people in place. Now it's time for us to focus on finding ways to work together—in Unity."

Fall Faculty Focus

Opening Day is part of a multi-day orientation and training for faculty organized by the Clark College Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) to inspire, inform, and engage faculty to build community, learn, and grow in their teaching.

Fall Faculty Focus on September 17 welcomed faculty back for the new academic year. The theme was "Me, Myself, and AI." The keynote speaker was Wilson Nitunga, *pictured above,* a professor of Business and Marketing at Portland Community College (PCC) who works with PCC's Center of Artificial

Intelligence and Cultural Computing. He shared his academic journey from refugee to at-risk student to faculty member. Then he shared instructional and relational strategies to develop the best possible support system for students, and innovative ways to use AI for enhanced teaching and learning.

Dr. Terry Brown, *center,* meets with faculty at Faculty Focus.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley and Susan Parrish

More photos from Opening Day can be viewed on Flickr: https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjBHKt8