**How Not to be Wrong: The Power of Mathematical Thinking** by Jordan Ellenberg

With all of our conversation about the right math for the right majors and careers, I could not resist reading this book. Ellenberg defines mathematics as “the extension of common sense by other means” and offers engaging lessons and real life examples on linearity, inference, expectation, regression, and existence.

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**The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World that Values Sameness** by Todd Rose

According to Rose, any system designed around the average person is doomed to fail, making a case that if you design to average, you design to no one. There is a message here for our colleges to design new efforts to support student success for “individual fit.” Rose offers a powerful ending message, stating that it is only with design for “equal fit” that we will reach “equal opportunity.” What does equal fit design look like in action on our campuses?

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**The Seventh Sense: Power, Fortune and Survival in the Age of Networks** by Joshua Cooper Ramo

Recommended by many as a must read for our presidential candidates, Ramo speaks to a new landscape of power that is emerging through the formation of networks and the consequences for leadership, including higher education leadership, in this new age. The 7th sense is the ability to look at any object and see the way it can be changed by connection. Good leaders, Ramo posits, must see the structures in networks. Leaders in this age must be able to hold a “vivid picture of the road network, the river-lines and the mountain ranges without ever losing a sense of (his) immediate surroundings.”

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**Primed to Perform: How to Build the Highest Performing Culture Through the Science of Total Motivation** by Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGraw

This book makes a strong case for organizations to speak more to the “why” than to the “how” (because the “why” can change the “how”) in order to establish a tight relationship between the organization’s culture and the customer (student experience). It made me think that our “why” for completion is not strong enough and is too often outweighed and overburdened by the “how,” thus thwarting some of our efforts to scale good work.
Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance by Angela Duckworth

Given all of our discussion on the importance of mindset—the mindset of our students, our own mindsets as we approach our vocation, and our organization’s mindset—this was a must read for me and should be for you as well. I love this quote because it is so true for colleges engaged in student success work: “A high level of performance, is in fact, an accretion of mundane acts.” It should remind us that we all have a role to play in student success. The recent article published in The Chronicle of Higher Education titled The College Custodian as an Unheralded Pillar of Student Support features Jeremy Reed’s research from his study of the daily lives of custodians working at a public university. His study revealed that “custodians and resident advisers ‘are literally on the front lines with students in a very intimate environment,’” further underscoring how all individuals on a campus play a role in student success.

Being Mortal by Atul Gawande

Gawande offers a story of a cultural transformation at a nursing home for people with advanced dementia. To combat inertia in the culture, the CEO decided to hit against the resistance directly and to “hit it hard.” He called in the “Big Bang.” Instead of bringing in an animal here and there to meet the patients, he decided to bring in all the animals, to live there, all at once. They brought in cats, and dogs, and birds, and plants, a garden, a playground for children. He writes: “We didn’t know what the heck we were doing. That was the beauty of it. It was glorious chaos.” They learned to resolve problems on the fly, as a team, staffers and residents. “People we believed weren’t able to talk started speaking. People who were completely withdrawn started to volunteer to take dogs for walks.” Gawande says health care for the elderly is caught in a transitional phase: “However miserable the old system has been, we are all experts at it. We know the dance moves.” He says taking on new approaches forces us to be “prodding novices” a feeling we are uncomfortable with. This was a personally difficult book for me to read, but I found powerful analogous cases for higher education to consider.

The Nightingale by Kristin Hannah

A powerful read with many surprises that stayed with me for days. One simple quote, early in the book, captured my attention when Isabelle says to her sister: “It’s easy to disappear when no one is looking at you.” It made me think of all the students who disappear from our community college campuses.
**H is for Hawk by Helen Macdonald**

The author’s childhood obsession with birds and being a falconer reminds me of mine with baseball. Macdonald traces, in deep and emotional detail, the taming of a hawk, and in that work, finding herself. She writes, “as the hawk became tamer, I became wilder.” She also writes: “Being a novice is safe. Being an expert opens you up for judgement. Success is pressure.”

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**The Little Paris Bookstore by Nina George**

A must read for anyone who loves books and believes in the power of words, stories, and books to shape people’s lives. “Often it’s not we who shape words, but the words we use that shape us.” “Listening in silence was essential to making a comprehensive scan of a person’s soul.”