

# Degrees of Progress

News from the State Regents for Higher Education



OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS  
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

*Improving our future by degrees*

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## Higher Education Is an Investment in Human Capital and a Better Future for Oklahoma

*Chairman Jay Helm, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education*

We want new roads, safer bridges and landscaped boulevards. We also want beautiful airports, abundant clean water and tree-lined trails. Better infrastructure improves the quality of life in our state and communities. State, county and local communities frequently invest in infrastructure projects in the name of economic growth. Inarguably, these physical capital projects are worthy investments.

Unfortunately, we are not observing the same enthusiastic government support for investment in human capital, the measure of our collective knowledge, skills, experience and health to produce economic value. This is a serious mistake, because state and national governments that neglect to invest in human capital place their future economic prosperity in peril.

Oklahomans will be the ultimate losers. In today's intensely competitive and rapidly evolving world, where economies must have well-educated and trained talent to sustain

growth, a failure to invest in human capital will relegate Oklahoma to the consistent bottom tier in health, education, crime and poverty with little hope to ever reverse the tide of decline.

It is time to invest in prosperity. Education is the pathway to a better future. The benefits of an educated citizenry are many — reduced economic inequality, poverty, crime, and illness and increased social participation and economic opportunity, to name a few.

We know declining revenues the past three years have forced state government to grapple with finding ways to minimize the severity of cuts to essential programs and the resulting negative impacts on Oklahomans. We understand, and we respect the difficult decisions made by the governor, House and Senate in the last legislative session to find common ground and pass a reasonable revenue package.

That said, with the rapid and significant progress of technology, a premium has been placed on producing an educated citizenry equipped with critical thinking and precise communication skills, analytical abilities and curious minds to solve the most challenging problems.

Investing in prosperity means investing in Oklahoma's higher education system by beginning to restore systematically the more than \$274 million cut from higher education appropriations over the past 10 years. This year, we will work with our Legislature and governor on a long overdue raise for faculty who patiently watched, and celebrated, as others in education received raises.



Accessibility, affordability and performance drive our system. Each university and college serves a meaningful purpose, from our two-year colleges to the regional universities to our state's two research institutions, OU and OSU. It should be noted, in the first five years of the Complete College America degree completion initiative, the number of degrees and certificates earned in Oklahoma has increased by 8,912, surpassing the state benchmark of 8,500 additional degrees and certificates.

As a system of higher education, we recognize we must manage our institutions responsibly. We know we must constantly innovate to remain vibrant and viable. That's why, as a system, we convened a task force last year composed of 68 individuals from across the state to assess the system and lay out a path for the future. The task force didn't skirt the subject of structure.

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## Combining Resources Benefits Our Students

*President Jeanie Webb, Rose State College*

*President Jerry Steward, Oklahoma City Community College*

Every college and university in the state of Oklahoma is tasked with looking for opportunities to make our higher education offerings more affordable for our most valuable stakeholder — our students. Every president and leadership group has read through the 2018 Task Force on the Future of Higher Education report. One of the recommendations of that report was to find ways to streamline functions in higher education.

In the largest urban community in the state, Oklahoma City, Rose State College and Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC) have found a solution to serve and save. In May of this year, we met in the Governor's conference room at the Capitol to sign a one-of-a-kind memorandum of understanding (MOU) to create a partnership to combine fiscal and educational resources. It's not your typical joint venture, but because of the geographical location of both institutions — it makes sense.

The first initiative involves our campuses working toward issuing a combined or joint request for proposal to provide food services on both campuses by using one vendor. The application will include not only cafeteria



services, but also catering and event servicing. This collaboration will allow both institutions to better evaluate potential efficiencies and costs savings. For colleges, the food business can be a significant cost, mostly due to the labor expenses associated with hiring the staff to run the food services. By combining our efforts, efficiencies can be maximized while preserving a diverse culinary experience.

In addition to food services, both colleges are looking at jointly bidding on administrative supplies, like cleaning and paper products and hardware. Any economics professor will advise that it's good business to buy in high volume, which can provide discounts that lead to more cost savings. Just how much savings can be realized is yet to be determined. Both of our campuses are working through needs assessments and analyzing the data.

Another element of the MOU already in place and operational is an exchange partnership for academic resources. Rose State offers Russian coursework, while OCCC provides French classes. The partnership, which has been in place for several years, allows for students

needing language credit hours in French or Russian to seamlessly progress through the coursework without having to transfer schools.

These types of partnerships are invaluable as colleges and universities consistently assess their business models. It's a proactive approach to address challenges and creatively identify ways we can serve our students better while continuing to be good stewards of the state's investment in public higher education.



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They addressed it directly by coming up with a practical, incremental plan to merge boards as an initial step to generate efficiency through shared governance and services.

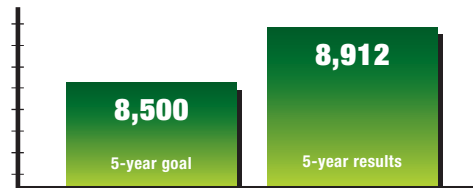
The investment in people begins with education, because education can produce a large return on many economic and societal fronts. Quality of education matters, from fundamentals through high levels of academia. Prioritizing and funding higher education is an investment in human capital and, therefore, an investment in a brighter future for our state.



## COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

Work continues to reach Oklahoma's goal of increasing the number of degrees and certificates earned through the Complete College America (CCA) initiative. Oklahoma's public and private higher education institutions and career technology centers have exceeded the CCA target for the first five years of the initiative. Oklahoma's CCA goal is to increase the number of degrees and certificates earned by an average of 1,700 per year. Oklahoma

institutions conferred 8,912 additional degrees and certificates in year five, surpassing the state benchmark of a cumulative increase of 8,500 degrees and certificates.



Oklahoma's five-point plan to increase degree and certificate completion has led to CCA naming Oklahoma a national model. The state plan focuses on promoting college readiness, transforming remediation, strengthening pathways to certificates and degrees, expanding adult degree completion efforts, and rewarding performance and completion.

## Oklahoma's Promise Scholarship: External Review

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) recently conducted a comprehensive review of the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program. SREB's findings show that Oklahoma's Promise is both effective and efficient, is one of the premier student support initiatives in the nation, and

is an example of how a state can invest valuable resources in its students and see a strong return on that investment.

Since its inception, more than 80,000 Oklahoma students have earned the scholarship, helping them attend

postsecondary education at a time when a college degree has never been more valuable.



## Distinguished Service Awards for Higher Education

The State Regents recently honored eight individuals with Distinguished Service Awards, which are conferred to recognize individuals who demonstrate distinguished leadership and support of higher education in Oklahoma during the legislative session.



Sen. Kim David



Sen. Tom Dugger



Sen. Eddie Fields



Rep. Ben Loring



Sen. Jason Smalley



Sen. John Sparks



Sen. Kevin Wallace



Sen. Ervin Yen



## College Application Week 2018

Oklahoma College Application Week (CAW) 2018, an opportunity for high school seniors to receive hands-on assistance from knowledgeable volunteers while completing their applications to college, has been going strong. So far, 92 GEAR UP and non-GEAR up schools and organizations in Oklahoma have registered for CAW 2018. Those who are already registered represent over 9,000 high school seniors in our state.

"While these events are designed to help all students," said Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) outreach specialist and Oklahoma College Access Network (OK-CAN) member Letha Huddleston, "they're especially beneficial for those who've never considered going to college or will be the first in their family to attend."

Ninety-one Oklahoma high schools participated in CAW 2017, with 6,281 students completing applications to 284 different colleges in 41 states and six countries. "In the exit surveys that we have received so far this year," said Huddleston, "every event coordinator has indicated that they will hold a College Application Week again next year. They all see this as an important event."

Oklahoma GEAR UP piloted CAW in its 24 school districts in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, all high schools across the state were invited to participate. In 2015, OCAP and OK-CAN joined GEAR UP in promoting CAW, which officially took place the week of Sept. 17-21 this year, though school events can be held as late as the end of November. GEAR UP and OCAP offer free promotional materials and have used

webinars and conference calls to introduce CAW to event coordinators and walk them through the program materials and resources.



College Application Week is part of a national initiative sponsored by The Kresge Foundation, the Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the American Council on Education. At the state level, the project is endorsed by Chancellor Glen D. Johnson of the State Regents, the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the Oklahoma State Chamber.

## OCAP's Counselor Connect Workshops

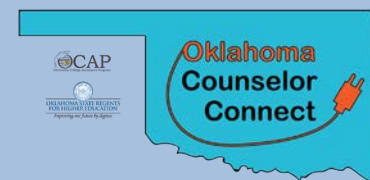
The Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) provided four Oklahoma Counselor Connect workshops this fall, highlighting college planning services offered through the State Regents. These workshops, offered in Oklahoma City, Ardmore and Tulsa, are a new service provided by OCAP's outreach team, taking the place of the recently discontinued National Training for Counselors and Mentors (NT4CM) workshop program.

At each workshop, OCAP's outreach team presented new information and highlights of the 2019-20 FAFSA and the helpful resources provided through [StartWithFAFSA.org](http://StartWithFAFSA.org), the [UCanGo2.org](http://UCanGo2.org) college planning website, instructional materials provided in the FSA *Financial Aid Toolkit*, and updates on the new features of [OKcollegestart.org](http://OKcollegestart.org), including college admission applications at the click of a button and Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP) instruction and templates for Oklahoma schools. The guidelines for Oklahoma's Promise were covered in detail and the Oklahoma Money Matters team

offered a presentation about the financial education resources they provide to schools and families across the state. Information about the new Oklahoma FAFSA Data Portal (OK-FDP) was also presented, including how counselors can enroll and begin tracking their 2019 seniors' FAFSA progress.

Oklahoma Counselor Connect workshops will continue to contribute to OCAP's ongoing mission to provide schools and community partners the support required to empower students and families to reach their educational goals. "We knew when NT4CM was discontinued that we needed to continue providing training that supports efforts to educate students and parents as they prepare for higher education," said Kelli Kelnar, OCAP outreach manager. "That's why we developed Oklahoma Counselor Connect. We originally scheduled three workshops this year, but demand was so high that we added a fourth to accommodate more counselors and mentors." Through these workshops, OCAP offers informational sessions for Oklahoma's high

school and middle school counselors, financial aid administrators, Native American program specialists and various community partners.



OCAP, an operating division of the State Regents, provides college access, aid awareness, financial literacy and student loan management programs and services that benefit students, parents, schools and community partners. OCAP offers numerous FAFSA resources for educators and students through [StartWithFAFSA.org](http://StartWithFAFSA.org), [UCanGo2.org](http://UCanGo2.org) and [OKcollegestart.org](http://OKcollegestart.org). To learn more about OCAP, visit [OCAP.org](http://OCAP.org).

## 2018 Student Leadership Retreat

One hundred and seventy student leaders and student affairs administrators from 19 different campuses, including one private institution, recently attended the annual Student Leadership Retreat (SLR) at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. For the last 18 years, this event has been planned and hosted by the Council on Student Affairs (COSA), together with the Oklahoma Student Government Association, Student Advisory Board, and State Regents.

The day included a welcome from Southwestern Oklahoma State University, statewide student organization leaders and a keynote address from Oklahoma Adjutant General Michael C. Thompson. Chancellor Glen D. Johnson spoke about the current status of higher education and emphasized

the importance of student participation in civic engagement. Maj. Gen. Thompson's keynote message dealt with his personal story of hard work and success, coming from a single-parent, low-income family and the difference that leadership can make in one person's life and in the world.

The SLR is an event that enables the best student leaders from across the state to participate in leadership training, meet their counterparts from other campuses, establish common interests and forge lines of communication.



## 2018 Reading Conference

Oklahoma Teacher Connection was honored to host the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Reading Conference this year. The conference, titled *Plugging In to Literacy*, was attended by higher education faculty, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders throughout Oklahoma.

Each year the State Regents, in conjunction with other higher education institutions, hosts an annual reading conference to offer substantive reading professional development and curriculum alignment with a variety of crucial and timely topics that affects both conventional and emergent readers. Past conference topics have included literacy development, technology, linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, and operative tools and research-based practices that can help in the classroom.

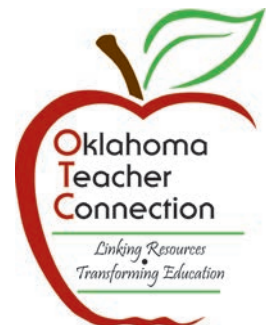
Keynote speaker Dan Gillmor, a digital media leader and journalist at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, led the conference with compelling

expertise on the digital age of literacy and communication, using discernment skills and effective tools for reading various types of news and communication.

During the afternoon, participants were able to choose between three literacy breakout sessions. These sessions consisted of informative topics and included several Oklahoma experts in the fields of reading and literacy. Dr. Jody Bowie from Southern Nazarene University led the session titled *Digital Literacy Is Not Enough*. Dr. Meribeth Nottingham and Dr. Barbara McClanahan from Southeastern Oklahoma State University led the session, *Graphic Novels: Why and How They Belong in Your Classroom*. The third and final breakout session was presented by Dr. Sheri Vasinda from Oklahoma State University, who took participants on a journey of discovery in her session, *The Future Is Now! Transforming Literacy Practices Through Powerful Pairings of Easy-Access Digital Tools*.

The conference ended with an awe-inspiring overview by Dr. Shelbie Witte from Oklahoma State University, whose presentation, *We Just Might. How Literacy Can Save the World*, reminded the audience that literacy can help us all become intentional and build relationships. She encouraged the audience to consider how to use technology more effectively to maximize learning opportunities for all students.

The 11<sup>th</sup> annual reading conference was well-attended and provided substantive professional development for educators.



## Celebrating OCAN's Fifth Anniversary

This year, OneNet marks the five-year anniversary of the Oklahoma Community Anchor Network (OCAN). OCAN is a system of high-speed fiber optic cable that spans 1,005 miles and connects 35 Oklahoma counties. The network was designed to bring high-speed broadband options to rural communities across Oklahoma.

OCAN originally connected 33 community anchors, including higher education institutions, career technology centers, libraries, public safety departments and health care providers. Over the past five years, that number has more than doubled; the network now includes 87 community anchors.

OCAN is a middle-mile network. This means the network provides broadband services between its anchor institutions, but not directly to users' homes or businesses—traditional telecommunications providers provide this "last-mile" broadband service through private-public partnerships.

Because Oklahoma's colleges and universities are an integral part of their communities, most OCAN anchors are institutes of higher learning. However, OCAN's broadband services provide opportunities to many other constituencies.

The Chickasaw Nation Medical Center in Ada, a state-of-the-art facility constructed in 2010, is directly connected to OCAN and its fiber broadband network. This allows the hospital to access patient data quickly and securely without compromising its network capability. OneNet and Chickasaw Nation Telecom (CNT) also support an OCAN route through East Central University in Ada, which has been a community anchor institution since OCAN launched in 2013.

"The availability of affordable high-speed broadband is essential for e-commerce and

economic growth for many rural communities in Chickasaw County," said Josh Snow, senior manager of CNT. "Broadband connections will pave the way to technology breakthroughs and advancements. However, we must first have affordable access so all Chickasaw people can benefit. Partnerships like this one help lead to those types of breakthroughs."



OCAN connectivity benefits both anchor institutions and their surrounding communities, particularly in rural areas. Michael Martin, chief information officer at Carl Albert State College, has seen this happen in Poteau.

"Our community has benefited from OCAN by providing vendors access to high-bandwidth fiber and providing our businesses and citizens with competitive choices in internet service providers, as well as new job opportunities," Martin said. "OCAN has provided a small, rural college town the

opportunity to compete with the rest of the world in technology, education and business."

Most funding for OCAN came through a \$74 million grant from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, along with a \$19 million in-kind state grant. Several state agencies partnered to develop the project. Construction of the network finished in 2012, and OCAN came online in August 2013. OCAN was developed and engineered to be a self-sustaining network and is maintained and operated by OneNet.

As Oklahoma looks forward to the next five years and beyond, OCAN will continue to serve community institutions statewide. OneNet Executive Director Von Royal says the network is an important platform for helping Oklahomans compete in the modern world.

"In the future, we look forward to supporting rural Oklahoma by continuing to provide high-speed broadband services," Royal said. "It remains our goal to give people across the state every tool they need in today's fast-paced digital landscape."





## UCanGo2's College Planning, FAFSA Completion Outreach

With the fall semester in full-swing and the Oct. 1 release of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the outreach team at the Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) has been in schools and the community in full force. Its two largest objectives in the fall are promoting college preparedness and completion of the FAFSA. OCAP's outreach team has already mailed over 1,000 college prep and FAFSA kits to counselors and presented over 80 college preparedness and FAFSA presentations around the state so far this fall.

### College Preparedness

The fall semester has always been the busiest time for UCanGo2, OCAP's college access initiative. Through UCanGo2, OCAP's outreach team helps counselors, teachers and administrators create a college-going culture in schools by offering on-site presentations and providing a full range of college planning resources. This includes information about academic requirements and finding the

right institutional fit, career exploration tools, financial aid educational materials, scholarship guidance and much more.

In addition to presentations for students and their families, UCanGo2 also provides customized train-the-trainer sessions for educators and administrators, and UCanGo2's College Planning Toolkit empowers counselors to help students reach their higher education goals. "Counselors and educators have a very full schedule," said Kelli Kelnar, OCAP's outreach manager. "Through resources and training, we try to make it as simple as possible for them to help their students prepare for education beyond high school."

### FAFSA Completion

The new 2019-20 FAFSA became available Oct. 1, but OCAP's FAFSA awareness campaign began in August. Families are

encouraged to complete the application as early as possible, while federal and state funding is available. FAFSA results are also sometimes required for state and other scholarship applications, so timely completion serves multiple purposes.

Completion Challenge, for which OCAP received a \$40,000 grant to provide FAFSA completion programs and services to Oklahoma City Public Schools. NCAN's project focuses on areas with current FAFSA completion rates below the national average and challenges grant recipients to increase their city's FAFSA completion rates by at least 5 percent.

UCanGo2 is a comprehensive college access outreach initiative of the Oklahoma College Assistance Program, an operating division of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. For additional information, like UCanGo2 on Facebook and join OCAP's mailing lists at [ocap.org/News/subscribe](http://ocap.org/News/subscribe) to receive the most important college planning and FAFSA updates. To learn more about the FAFSA, visit [StartWithFAFSA.org](http://StartWithFAFSA.org).

# startwithfafsa.org

## QUICK FACT

Helping all students — especially first-generation students from lower-income families — complete the FAFSA significantly increases the odds those students will pursue higher education.

- 90% of 2017 graduating seniors who completed the FAFSA went directly to college.
- 52% of people who filed the FAFSA completed a bachelor's degree in six years.

"Our presentations are designed to show students and families that the FAFSA can be completed easily," said Kelnar, "and everyone planning to attend college or a career technology center should apply. Most people who complete the FAFSA are offered some kind of aid." These grassroots efforts are also supported by a targeted digital media campaign designed to raise FAFSA awareness among Oklahoma students and families.

This year, the outreach team's FAFSA promotional efforts also include the National College Access Network (NCAN) FAFSA

encouraged to complete the application as early as possible, while federal and state funding is available. FAFSA results are also sometimes required for state and other scholarship applications, so timely completion serves multiple purposes.

## SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT



[www.facebook.com/UCanGo2/](http://www.facebook.com/UCanGo2/)



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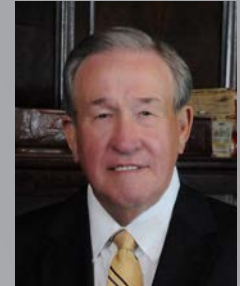
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