



DEGREES OF PROGRESS

eNews from the State Regents for Higher Education

OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Improving our future by degrees



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HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPS CUSTOM WORKFORCE CREDENTIALS

By Chancellor Allison D. Garrett

I love to play golf, though I don't play well. Carrying the scuba gear and chainsaw is an extra burden when you play like I do. But if — and that's a huge "if" — I practiced more, I'd most certainly be better.

All of us constantly seek ways to improve, whether on the job or in personal pursuits. Business leaders seek to recruit, retain and develop candidates with the right skills and those who are willing to level-up. The need for a well-trained workforce is the primary reason the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education launched our new micro-credentials initiative, [UpskillOK](#).



advanced technology, teacher education and agriculture. We've worked with businesses and our public colleges and universities to identify more than 70 programs and occupations where there is a vital need for micro-credentialing.



UpskillOK is one of the most impactful ways public higher education supports Oklahoma businesses in real-time. The program helps businesses tap into a skills-verified hiring pool and retain talent by upskilling existing employees through partnerships with local colleges and universities. Those arrangements create training programs and credentials specifically designed to build the critical skills businesses need. In turn, they can reduce hiring costs, are better positioned for organic growth, and can quickly adapt to industry changes or shifting operational needs.

For workers who engage with UpskillOK, the program provides a short-term, accredited postsecondary credential that is focused on a specific, verifiable career-critical skill or knowledge set that can be readily transferred to the workplace.

Micro-credential programs through UpskillOK align with Oklahoma's most critical occupations and range from health careers to IT, cybersecurity,

Support for micro-credential programs in the Oklahoma business community has been overwhelmingly positive. Since the program's launch earlier this year, we've seen incredible participation from more than 80 industry partners across the state. We've connected large and small employers to local higher education institutions that offer programs, classes, apprenticeships and internships. Feedback from participating employers indicates they appreciate the opportunity to independently verify candidates' skills and achievements and partner with an institution to create industry-recognized credentials and [skills-based badges](#) that reflect their unique workforce needs.

UpskillOK helps employers address critical skills gaps quickly and helps Oklahomans document learning and demonstrate competency through stackable credentials. Oklahoma colleges and universities are poised to partner with businesses to meet specific employment needs.

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REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES FILL AEROSPACE NEEDS

By Connie Reilly, Chair, Regional University System of Oklahoma Board of Regents

The Regional University System of Oklahoma, or RUSO, offers degrees that meet the critical occupation needs of Oklahoma's aerospace industry. Aerospace is Oklahoma's second-largest industry and the state's fastest-growing sector. More than 1,100 aerospace entities are based in the state, and the industry's annual economic impact on Oklahoma is estimated at more than \$44 billion. A dependable and educated workforce is essential to support the aerospace industry.

RUSO includes the University of Central Oklahoma, East Central University, Northeastern State University, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Southeastern Oklahoma State University and Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Most RUSO students live within 50 miles of one of our campuses. RUSO universities cost about half the national average for a degree, and half of our graduates begin their careers with no student loan debt. RUSO graduates stay in the state and contribute to Oklahoma's economy, and RUSO universities are committed to providing degrees that support Oklahoma's critical occupations, including aerospace.

For example, the Aviation Sciences Institute, or ASI, at Southeastern Oklahoma State

University has a rich history of academic and professional pilot accomplishments dating back 56 years. Its mission is to provide its students with the highest-quality aviation education and flight training possible. The ASI offers degree programs in aviation management, professional pilot, an aviation minor, and a master's in aerospace administration and logistics. The institute's airline partners in the Professional Pilot Program are Southwest Airlines, American Airlines and Delta Air Lines.

The University of Central Oklahoma's Department of Engineering and Physics offers accredited bachelor's degrees in electrical engineering, engineering physics, and mechanical engineering. Many graduates work in the aviation/defense industrial sector, including Tinker Air Force Base, Boeing, Northrup Grumman, the Federal Aviation Administration, Chickasaw National Industries, etc.

UCO recently launched a computer engineering program recognizing the need for engineers that have a strong background in embedded systems software development and cybersecurity. Tinker AFB donated a supercomputer cluster to UCO that expands UCO's capabilities to perform computational research and education and to collaborate



with Tinker AFB to meet their workforce development needs.

Southwestern Oklahoma State University has partnered with Delaware Resource Group to emphasize accredited programs in applied engineering management and manufacturing engineering technology and degrees in engineering technology, engineering physics and computer science.

Northeastern State University offers bachelor's degrees in mechanical engineering, physics, and mathematics and computer science programs. NSU's students have qualified for the World Championships for VEX Robotics and have won the Vex World Championship Judge's Award.

East Central University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University have pre-engineering programs, which prepare students for advanced study in aerospace and other high-demand engineering fields.

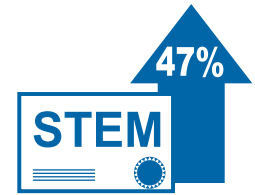
RUSO universities provide a high-quality education at an extraordinary value. Those who want to be a part of the largest growing industry in Oklahoma should consider exploring their passion for aerospace and defense careers at RUSO universities.





WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

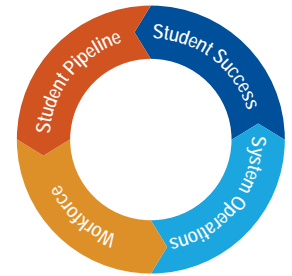
Higher education continues to build strong connections between academic programs and high-growth, high-demand occupations and industries, including micro-credentials to equip learners to fill critical workforce needs. Our public colleges and universities will create more pathways to degree completion in key fields, including engineering, nursing and computer science. Collaborating with the CareerTech system, state system institutions will work to better align the nursing student corridor from LPN to RN to BSN.



The number of STEM bachelor's degrees conferred by state system institutions **increased 47%** over the last decade, and STEM degrees at all levels **increased 29%**.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The State Regents are completing a comprehensive strategic planning process for the state system of higher education. The State Regents will engage the Legislature to advance recommendations to strengthen the student pipeline, enhance student success, expand workforce development and streamline system operations.



EXPAND TEACHER EDUCATION PIPELINE

The Oklahoma Future Teacher Scholarship and Employment Incentive Program ("Inspired to Teach"), approved during the 2022 legislative session, is designed to draw high-quality, effective educators for our public schools through scholarship funds and targeted incentives to help our state meet the critical need for more teachers. The State Regents propose statutory revisions for program administration, including establishing a pathway for home school graduates to enroll in accredited teacher education programs.



CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT TASK FORCE

The concurrent enrollment program strengthens student preparation, reduces family college costs and decreases the time required to complete a degree. The State Regents will work in partnership with the Concurrent Enrollment Task Force to advance recommendations focused on access to concurrent enrollment, concurrent course options, and additional investment in the program.



UNIVERSAL FAFSA COMPLETION

States across the country have reported increases in student enrollment when Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion is required. The State Regents recommend universal FAFSA completion for Oklahoma high school seniors with a waiver option to address student needs, when warranted.



OKLAHOMA'S PROMISE

The State Regents' goals for the 2023 legislative session include streamlining high school course requirements for scholarship eligibility; an adjustable formula for income limits each year to increase flexibility for eligible students and families; and an appeal process to assist students facing unique circumstances.



2023 BUDGET REQUEST



FY 2023 BASE APPROPRIATION..... \$873,405,911

Supplemental Request and Scholarship Base Adjustment \$7,500,000

FY 2023 BASE APPROPRIATION (AS ADJUSTED) \$880,905,911

FY 2024 BUDGET NEED:

1. Legislative Initiatives and Programming	\$22,960,474
A. SB 1418 National Guard Scholarship Program (annualized)	\$3,500,000
B. HB 3564 Oklahoma Future Teacher Scholarship and Employment Incentive Program	\$17,378,500
C. Concurrent Enrollment for All High School Seniors and Juniors	\$2,081,974
2. Critical Workforce Needs.....	\$26,325,000
A. Healthcare Workforce Critical Needs	\$20,000,000
i. Nursing Direct Instruction and Workforce Needs Response	\$10,000,000
ii. Medical Residents and Other Professional Degrees	\$10,000,000
B. STEM-related Fields	\$5,750,000
C. Adult Degree Completion Student Aid Initiatives	\$575,000
3. Institutional Excellence and Student Success	\$49,306,497
A. Performance-Based Allocations	\$36,706,497
B. Student Support/Career Services Reinvestment	\$5,000,000
C. Institution Collaboration and Consolidation Assistance Fund	\$5,000,000
D. OSRHE Institutional Shared Services Initiatives	\$600,000
E. OSRHE Data Analytics, Digital Transformation, and Cybersecurity	\$2,000,000
4. Capital Funding	\$6,500,000
A. Campus Security Systems Improvements/Obsolete Structure Demolition	\$6,500,000
FY 2024 TOTAL BUDGET NEED	\$985,997,882
• \$ Difference from FY 2023 State Appropriation (as adjusted)	\$105,091,971
• % Difference from FY 2023 State Appropriation (as adjusted)	11.9%



OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS
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DIGITAL TOOLKIT FOR EMPLOYERS

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education offer a digital toolkit for employers that features quick access to our many services for your business and a variety of helpful resources for your workforce.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THE TOOLKIT

RESOURCES FOR YOUR WORKFORCE

- ▶ **UpskillOK**
 - ▷ Learn about micro-credentials, alternative learning pathways that provide specific career skillsets, competencies, and knowledge for critical workforce needs
- ▶ **Reach Higher**
 - ▷ Our FlexFinish and DirectComplete programs offer specialized advising and support systems to help adults return and complete degrees that lead to employment in Oklahoma's critical occupations
- ▶ **Show What You Know**
 - ▷ Empower employees to determine how previously earned college credit, licenses, certifications, military training, and other learning experiences can be applied toward a college degree
- ▶ **College Planning**
 - ▷ Access information to help students of all ages prepare, plan and pay for college

SERVICES FOR YOUR BUSINESS

- ▶ Create an employer profile on Handshake to post job openings with campus career services and connect with graduates in your field
- ▶ Contact leadership at our colleges and universities to consider partnership opportunities
- ▶ Review workforce projection data for Oklahoma's critical occupations
- ▶ Complete our Tuition Assistance Benefit survey to be featured on our website
- ▶ Search our online database of campus-based employer services
- ▶ Download our by-institution Business Support Services directory
- ▶ Access print materials to share and post in the workplace

View the toolkit at okhighered.org/econ-dev/digital-toolkit.shtml. For more information about our services for businesses, contact Workforce and Economic Development Director Cassidy Minx at cminx@osrhe.edu.



QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [2023-24 FAFSA Now Available to Oklahoma Students](#)
- [Oklahoma's College App Week](#)
- [State Regents Launch New Micro-credentials Website](#)
- [Growth of Concurrent Enrollment Reflects Value of Program for Students and Families](#)
- [State Regents Advance Initiatives to Strengthen Teacher Education Pipeline](#)
- [Many Oklahoma Businesses Provide Tuition Assistance for Employees](#)

LAST-MILE PARTNERSHIPS KEY TO DELIVERING BROADBAND TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

By John Hennessey, OneNet Executive Director and Higher Education CIO

Over the last few months, I have had the opportunity to meet with several of OneNet's last-mile partners here in Oklahoma. These meetings have reminded me how important partnerships are to OneNet and to delivering broadband to rural communities across our state.

When OneNet was developed in the 90s, the network was designed as a middle-mile network. This means we connect communities throughout the state. To connect our network to our subscribers (the last-mile connection), we formed partnerships with local telecommunications companies that serve rural communities.

Since the 90s, our partnerships have grown. While some partners have been with us for over 20 years, we are always willing to work with new providers. Today we partner with approximately 30 companies across the state.

How does it work? When OneNet receives a service quote request, we send a quote request for the last-mile connection to all of our telecommunications partners in that area. Once we receive the quotes, we select the provider with the lowest quote, unless there is a special service requirement that another provider can address better. We then add the cost for OneNet to provide connectivity on our middle-mile network and the upstream connection to the internet and send the quote to the subscriber.

This is a win-win for everyone involved. While we leverage our middle-mile network to provide affordable services to rural communities, utilizing partners for the last-mile connections keeps those services in the community. In fact, last year we paid telecommunications partners nearly \$12 million for last-mile connections.

OneNet also has the opportunity to facilitate services for telecommunications companies through our management of the Oklahoma Community Anchor Network (OCAN). This middle-mile network provides a variety of services, including lit and dark fiber, that help telecommunications companies expand their service areas into communities throughout our state.



I appreciate all that our partners do to improve broadband services in their communities. As Oklahoma's research and education network, OneNet provides internet access to higher education and technology center campuses, K-12 schools, healthcare facilities, research institutions and government entities, not to private residences or private businesses. While we know that many Oklahomans still lack access to broadband services, our partners are making investments in rural communities to bring broadband to residents, businesses, schools, hospitals, municipalities and other local organizations.

As OneNet's leadership team plans for our future, we remain dedicated to serving as a middle-mile network and continuing to utilize our partnerships with local telecommunications providers.

We recently developed a new values statement for our organization. One of those values is Building Partnerships:

OneNet seeks strategic partnerships that enable us to achieve more than we could alone. By developing public-private partnerships at the local, state and national levels, we bring together organizations to eliminate boundaries and create value for our subscribers.

Our last-mile partners are key to this effort, and we look forward to continuing to serve our great state together for many years to come.

If you are a telecommunications provider in Oklahoma and would like to partner with OneNet, reach out to provisioning@onetnet.net.

Keep in touch with OneNet
OneNet.net



OCAP SCHOLARSHIP OUTREACH

The Oklahoma College Assistance Program (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's Outreach team offers in-person and virtual workshops for high school students, parents and educators throughout the state. Members of the Outreach team are often asked about finding scholarships — and they have answers!



OCAP has a full range of resources to assist in finding and applying for scholarships, including guides, databases, presentations and more.



UCanGo2, the agency's college access initiative, highlights how to plan, prepare and pay for college, with numerous tools and resources to help students find college scholarships. [UCanGo2's Scholarship page](#) provides a list of available scholarships by deadline date and category. Some of the scholarship categories include:

- ▶ Adult Learners
- ▶ The Arts
- ▶ Ethnicity
- ▶ Health
- ▶ Middle School
- ▶ Military
- ▶ STEM
- ▶ Special Needs

For helpful application tips and a list of specialized scholarships, students and educators can download UCanGo2's [Scholarship Success Guide](#) and view the [Scholarships 101 video](#).

OKCOLLEGESTART.ORG

[OKcollegestart.org](#) is Oklahoma's official website for college planning, providing a one-stop shop for students, parents, adult learners and educators. Students can use OKcollegestart's [Find Scholarships](#) feature to search a database of over 20,000 scholarships, browse local scholarships, and apply for the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship. Students can also build a "My Scholarship Profile" to match scholarships according to their ACT and SAT scores, GPA and more. In addition, OKcollegestart.org allows students to receive alerts on their profile when a saved scholarship deadline is approaching and sign up to receive monthly email alerts when new scholarships match their profiles.

One of OCAP's most popular publications is [Are You Looking for Money?](#) This booklet offers information about federal and state financial aid, as well as tips for successful scholarship completion. It provides a list of scholarship websites, including links to most Oklahoma tribal organizations.

During the 2021-22 academic year, OCAP's Outreach team spoke at over 250 events and reached over 7,000 people, and plan to increase these numbers in the upcoming year. At each event, the Outreach team highlights OCAP's scholarship tools and resources to encourage students to look for free money to help cover the cost of college.



OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NEWS

- [OU hosts national security leaders for inaugural aerospace and defense symposium](#)
- [Devon, OU, OSU team up on STEM promotion](#)
- [NSU signs educational partnership with the National Security Agency](#)
- [Claremore High School students to earn cybersecurity certificates in partnership with RSU](#)
- [SWOSU, RSC partner to streamline student transfers](#)
- [UCO partnership to encourage STEM education, future teachers](#)
- [CU partners with Lawton Public School Foundation to offer scholarships](#)
- [MSC, CASC, RCC partner to support student software needs](#)
- [OSU-OKC nursing students pass national licensing exam at 100% rate](#)
- [Cyber-defense program earns RSC national recognition](#)
- [TCC-led partnership's new cyber training program aims to create diverse tech workforce](#)

Keep in touch with OCAP

[OCAP.org](#)



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ReadySetRepay



UCanGo2



OKcollegestart



OKCollegeAssistance

DID YOU KNOW?

At our public colleges and universities, FY23 tuition and mandatory fees are nearly **25% less**, on average, than institutions in their national and regional peer groups.



With Oklahoma's nationally recognized low cost of attendance, **fewer than 40%** of first-time, full-time students in our public colleges and universities receive federal student loans.



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