

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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OKLAHOMA STATE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION REMAINS AMONG MOST AFFORDABLE IN THE NATION

By Chancellor Glen D. Johnson

Whether we're talking about state economies or individual students, there's no question that higher education is an investment in the future. We hear statements across the nation about "skyrocketing" tuition and student debt, and we, too, are concerned about college affordability for students and families. Fortunately, Oklahoma's tuition and student debt story differs significantly from the national landscape.

In reviewing Oklahoma's higher education story, it's important to note that although we

have faced substantial budget challenges over the past several years, the State Regents and our public colleges and universities have continued to keep tuition and mandatory fees affordable for Oklahoma families.

In stark contrast to the double-digit tuition increases in many other states, tuition and mandatory fees for in-state undergraduate students in Oklahoma increased an average of only 1.3% statewide for the 2020-21 academic year. Looking back over the last decade, tuition and mandatory fee increases at our public colleges and universities have averaged less than 5% annually. The latest *U.S. News and World Report* ranking shows Oklahoma tuition and fees are 12th-lowest in the nation.

The nationally-recognized *Project on Student Debt* ranks Oklahoma among the 11 states with the lowest student debt level. More than 50% of Oklahoma college graduates leave college without any student loan debt. The average debt load for our state system graduates is \$21,523, which is 26% below the national average of \$28,950.

To ensure student loan borrowers understand their rights and responsibilities, the State Regents' Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) administers comprehensive financial aid awareness, financial literacy and student loan management initiatives. OCAP programs and services empower student borrowers to make smart borrowing choices, successfully navigate repayment options, and avoid/address loan default. Our student loan management website, www.ReadySetRepay.org, features educational resources for



Chancellor Glen D. Johnson

borrowers and for college and university financial aid officers, who assist students and families throughout the lending process and provide student loan counseling. We'll continue working to ensure that Oklahomans who invest in a student loan understand their obligations and how to find the help they need to successfully manage the repayment process.

The State Regents and our public colleges and universities have long recognized the critical importance of keeping tuition costs as low as possible. We're committed to remaining one of the most affordable higher education systems in the country while providing the college graduates necessary to meet Oklahoma's current and future workforce needs.

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BUILDING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS, SUPPORTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

By Dr. Pamela Fry, President, Oklahoma State University-Tulsa

As an urban-serving research university, one of our top priorities is to serve as an anchor in our community. To accomplish that, it is critical to build relationships with our neighbors and local organizations so we can understand their needs and how we can support them. OSU-Tulsa recently formed a Campus-Neighborhood Collaborative, where about 20 community representatives meet each semester with campus leadership to share their priorities and learn about projects happening within the university.

These meetings recently led to a partnership with the non-profit North Tulsa Economic Development Initiative (NTEDI). Dr. Lana Turner-Addison, chairperson of NTEDI and Campus-Neighborhood Collaborative member, reached out to us about their new A Self Sufficiency Entrepreneur Training (ASSET) program, created to help north Tulsa entrepreneurs learn about starting and maintaining a business.

The eight-week-long ASSET program covered topics including starting a business, record-keeping, hiring employees, commercial insurance and business proposals. The program also covered where to look for local and federal funding, along with the certification and permitting process with the State of Oklahoma and the City of Tulsa. Around a dozen North Tulsa entrepreneurs participated.

Courses were held at OSU-Tulsa, which allowed the program to utilize classrooms, computers and other campus resources. In addition to OSU-Tulsa, program partners included the Arvest Foundation, TEDC Creative Capital and Tulsa Tech.

Collaborations like those with NTEDI enable OSU-Tulsa to use our campus resources to serve our community and amplify the impact of our neighborhood partners. Future partnerships with community organizations include a Saturday School to provide supplemental instruction to high school students who have fallen behind during the pandemic and a Youth Entrepreneurship Forum for middle and high school students.

I know that these are only the beginning and look forward to the ideas and opportunities our Campus-Neighborhood Collaborative will bring.

When we open our campus to our neighbors and invite them in to our planning processes, we can transform urban universities from simply being located in a community to truly being part of that community.

Learn more about OSU-Tulsa's community engagement efforts on our [website](#).



President Pamela Fry, OSU-Tulsa



TULSA

ASSET program participants. Photo courtesy of NTEDI.





DENNIS CASEY, JACK SHERRY SWORN IN AS STATE REGENTS

Morrison resident Dennis Casey and Holdenville resident Jack Sherry were sworn in as members of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education on March 4 by Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Noma Gurich. Their appointments by Gov. Kevin Stitt were confirmed by both the Senate Education Committee and the full Senate.

Casey fulfills the unexpired term of Regent Andy Lester, and will serve through May 2025. Sherry will serve a nine-year term that expires in May 2029, and replaces Regent Toney Stricklin.

Casey is a retired public school educator, coach, principal, and superintendent. He also

served four terms in the Oklahoma State House of Representatives, representing District 35, and currently owns and operates a cow/calf operation and custom hay-cutting business in Morrison. Casey earned his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Education from Northeastern State University.

Sherry owns Jack Sherry Real Estate and Investments in Holdenville and operates a cattle ranch in Hughes and Seminole counties. He currently serves as an advisory director to the First National Bank in Holdenville, president of the Hughes County Farm Bureau, and chairman of the Holdenville Hospital Board, and served as a trustee on



Regent Dennis Casey



Regent Jack Sherry

the Seminole State College Educational Foundation Board of Trustees. He attended Oklahoma State University and Seminole State College, and earned his bachelor's degree from Southern Nazarene University.

2021 VIRTUAL HIGHER EDUCATION DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL

Students from Oklahoma's state system institutions and members of the public higher education community across the state connected with area legislators Tuesday, March 9, during a virtual advocacy day to promote the value and importance of higher education in Oklahoma.

In lieu of in-person legislative office visits and a formal program at the State Capitol, state system colleges and universities sponsored a variety of virtual activities on Virtual Higher Education Day to allow students, campus personnel, and community leaders to safely engage with legislators to demonstrate the critical role of our state system of higher education in Oklahoma's continued workforce development and economic growth.

The State Regents are requesting \$33.8 million for STEM workforce development initiatives, including funds to help meet engineering, nursing, and teacher education workforce needs, increase the number of physician residency slots in the state, and develop microcredentials and rapid re-employment strategies.

Requests to restore financial aid and scholarship programs (\$9.8 million), to fully fund the concurrent enrollment program for high school seniors and juniors (\$4 million), and to provide endowed chair state matching funds bond authorization and debt service (\$10.4 million) are also top priorities in the budget request.

In addition, the State Regents are requesting \$30.8 million for operational cost increases, including systemwide mandatory fixed costs, Section 13 Offset deferred maintenance for campus infrastructure improvements, and funds to support STEM Summer Academies.

Another state system priority in this legislative session is to maintain the current law regarding weapons on higher education campuses. Oklahoma higher education supports the second amendment and gun ownership. Under current law, campus presidents have the discretion to authorize who may carry weapons on campus when the individual circumstances warrant it. The State Regents and the presidents of all 25 state system institutions strongly believe that

the current law with regard to weapons on campus is working.

The State Regents will also continue efforts to preserve the dedicated funding source for the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship. Oklahoma's Promise is considered a national model that combines emphases on academic preparation and financial support for college. More than 95,000 students have earned college tuition scholarships through Oklahoma's Promise since the program's inception in 1992.



CARL ALBERT, CONNORS STATE AND EASTERN ANNOUNCE ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDENTS

Carl Albert State College, Connors State College and Eastern Oklahoma State College recently announced an academic partnership that will expand access and provide additional educational opportunities for students in southeast Oklahoma. The CACE Consortium, which is an acronym for Carl Albert, Connors and Eastern, includes the three rural, two-year colleges in southeast Oklahoma, which are partnering to offer a wider variety of general education and major courses to students through faculty and course sharing.

Carl Albert State College President Dr. Jay Falkner praised the partnership as an innovative approach to help meet the needs of students in rural areas.

"This partnership is an important example of how institutions can work together to remove barriers to higher education and best serve the needs of all of our students and communities," Falkner said. "Focusing our efforts on expanding access to additional courses will benefit all of our students. I am grateful for the cooperation and commitment shown by the academic leaders from all three institutions to make this partnership a reality."

Per the agreement, each receiving college will provide the classroom space, technology and administrative oversight of advising and enrolling students. The sending site will provide the instruction. Each college will receive the tuition, fees and enrollment data from the students enrolled at their site.

Connors State College President Dr. Ron Ramming said the institutions will use both online courses and live courses taught with video conferencing software such as Zoom to teach students from all three institutions simultaneously.

"This collaborative effort will enable each institution to improve efficiencies by combining low enrollment courses and



avoiding academic redundancies," Ramming said. "Many institutions across the nation recognize the need to increase access and improve student learning while also reducing the costs to students and their families. This is a strategic effort to utilize the expertise of our talented faculty within each institution and continue to fulfill our mission of offering high quality, affordable degrees."

Each institution will determine which courses will be sent or received between the colleges on a yearly basis. An equal number of courses will be taught and received for each institution.

Eastern Oklahoma State College President Dr. Janet Wansick said the agreement will begin in the fall 2021 semester and

be reevaluated at the end of three years. She said the institutions are optimistic for a successful long-term partnership that will have a positive impact in southeast Oklahoma.

"We all agree that innovative collaborations are essential to economic growth. I believe this exciting partnership will use our collective strengths to better prepare our students for success and help meet the workforce needs of our state," Wansick said. "We look forward to a long and successful partnership between Carl Albert, Connors State and Eastern."



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education recently honored two legislators with Distinguished Service Awards for Higher Education, which recognize individuals who demonstrate distinguished leadership and support of higher education in Oklahoma during the legislative session.

State Sen. Roger Thompson was recognized with a 2019 Distinguished Service Award for his support of higher education in his role as Chair of the Appropriations Committee and as a member of the Finance and Rules committees. Sen. Thompson has been a steadfast supporter of funding our state system of higher education's budget priorities and our Endowed Chairs program, including the need to address the state matching fund backlog.

State Sen. Dave Rader was recognized with a 2020 Distinguished Service Award for his support of higher education in his role as Vice Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee and as a member of the Natural Resources and Regulatory Services, Energy, Finance, and Public Safety committees and the Committee on Redistricting. Sen. Rader has been a strong advocate for our state system colleges and universities and for investing in public higher education, including the concurrent enrollment program.

The Distinguished Service Award for Higher Education is the highest award presented by the State Regents and the Council of College and University Presidents.



Sen. Roger Thompson

Sen. Dave Rader

OCAP DIGITAL INNOVATIONS

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. With traditional in-person workshops hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, OCAP has expanded its virtual reach through new content, creative presentations and a digital-forward mindset.

UCanGo2, the agency's college access initiative, continues offering virtual workshops for educators and students across the state. UCanGo2 highlights how to plan, prepare and pay for college with numerous tools and resources to assist with finding college scholarships, FAFSA completion and navigating financial aid. These programs and services are also being highlighted in a new monthly e-newsletter, *UCanGo2 Connections*, which is shared with educators and counselors across the state.

[StartWithFAFSA](#) is OCAP's website designed to help Oklahoma students and parents

understand financial aid and the FAFSA process. Recent developments include a series of financial aid and FAFSA videos, packaged presentations and FAFSA self-paced, online learning modules. Topics covered include completing the FAFSA, setting up a FSA ID, understanding the EFC (Expected Family Contribution), deciphering financial aid offers and federal and state financial aid programs.

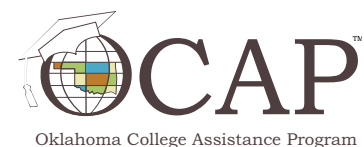
[Oklahoma Money Matters \(OKMM\)](#), the agency's financial literacy initiative, has also moved personal finance workshops to a digital format, speaking to students, educators and community service providers about budgeting, saving, credit, student loan management and more. New digital services include OKMM's weekly *Money Master* social media content and a short-format video series called *OKMM Money Minute*, which can be found on [OCAP's YouTube channel](#).

Ready Set Repay, OCAP's student loan management and default prevention initiative, works with student loan borrowers and Oklahoma higher education institutions to help

students make smart borrowing decisions and successfully repay their student loans. Along with more virtual workshops, Ready Set Repay has also premiered a new short-format video series, *RSR Rundown*, which features tips and tools for managing student loans, including the loan grace period transition, repayment options, and loan forgiveness and discharge programs.

[OKcollegestart](#) serves as an online one-stop shop for college planning, career exploration and financial aid resources for students and parents. OKcollegestart has a new digital bulletin for educators and counselors, *News & Notes*, which offers updates, helpful resources and ICAP (Individual Career Academic Plan) information.

For more information about OCAP's digital services for students, educators and community partners, visit [OCAP.org](#).



ONENET RESEARCH FAST FACTS

OneNet

Oklahoma's Research & Education Network

Helped bring **\$46+ million** in research computing grants to the state since 2009



ONENET POWERS



High Energy Physics



Climate Modeling



Genomic Research



Supercomputing



Weather Forecasting



Telemedicine



Bioscience

REGIONAL & GLOBAL RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

- Internet2
- Great Plains Network
- OneOklahoma Friction Free Network
- Western Regional Network
- Pacific Wave International Exchange



OneNet is Oklahoma's exclusive connector to Internet2's 100Gbps nationwide research and education network.

The ATLAS project is probing the frontier of human knowledge through innovative technologies. OneNet is a vital partner in supporting that technology by providing the bandwidth capacity needed to implement it.



Horst Severini, Ph.D.
Research Scientist
University of Oklahoma

OneNet has been an outstanding partner in OSU's work to address the digital divide across the state. They are committed to making a difference in connectivity across the state.



Brian Whitacre, Ph.D.
Sarkeys Distinguished Professor
Oklahoma State University

OKLAHOMA'S PROMISE 2020 STATE CHAMPIONS

Seven Oklahoma high schools have been named "Oklahoma's Promise 2020 State Champions," leading the state in the number of graduates who met the requirements to receive an Oklahoma's Promise scholarship. Oklahoma's Promise is a state program that provides an opportunity for students from families whose annual income is \$55,000 or less to earn a tuition scholarship for college or certain programs at public career technology centers.

High schools named Oklahoma's Promise 2020 State Champions are:

- **Class B**, Indianoma, seven Oklahoma's Promise graduates.
- **Class A**, Fort Cobb-Broxton, 12 Oklahoma's Promise graduates.
- **Class 2A**, Wilburton, 18 Oklahoma's Promise graduates.
- **Class 3A**, Dove Science Academy (Oklahoma City), 35 Oklahoma's Promise graduates.

- **Class 4A**, Classen School of Advanced Studies at Northeast (Oklahoma City), 46 Oklahoma's Promise graduates.
- **Class 5A**, Santa Fe South (Oklahoma City), 116 Oklahoma's Promise graduates.
- **Class 6A**, Union (Tulsa), 167 Oklahoma's Promise graduates.

Recognized as one of the top college access scholarship programs in the nation, Oklahoma's Promise was created in 1992 by the Legislature to help more Oklahoma families send their children to college. The scholarship pays tuition at any Oklahoma public college or university until the student receives a bachelor's degree or for up to five years, whichever comes first. It will also cover a portion of tuition at an accredited Oklahoma private institution or public career technology center. The scholarship does not cover the cost of fees, books, or room and board.

Students completing the Oklahoma's Promise program continue to be successful academically, with high school GPAs (3.48 average GPA) that exceed the state average and ACT scores that exceed those of non-Oklahoma's Promise students. The college-going rate of Oklahoma's Promise students exceeds the state average for high school graduates. They also have above-average full-time college enrollment, persistence and degree-completion rates. In addition, Oklahoma's Promise college graduates are employed and stay in Oklahoma after college at a higher rate than non-Oklahoma's Promise graduates. For more information about Oklahoma's Promise, visit www.okpromise.org.



2021 STEM SUMMER ACADEMIES

This summer, middle and high school students will be able to experience life on a college campus while exploring exciting and varied fields of study at the free 2021 Summer Academies in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

The State Regents' STEM Summer Academies are open to rising eighth- through 12th-graders. Each academy explores the latest trends in science, technology, engineering and math through fun, hands-on activities and innovative software as students experiment both in the classroom and outdoors.

The academies will be offered at several of Oklahoma's college and university campus locations in May, June and July, and will last from five days to two weeks. Some academies require students to live in the campus

residence halls, while others require that students travel to and from campus each day.

Academies are designed to give all students an opportunity to increase their interest and confidence in science, technology, engineering and math and, ultimately, expand their career and educational aspirations to go on to college when they graduate high school.

Due to the changing environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Summer Academies may be subject to change. Find the latest information on the [OKcollegestart website](http://OKcollegestart.com).





2021 NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOWS

Determined to find solutions for the challenges communities face throughout the country, four inspirational students from Oklahoma's colleges and universities were recently recognized as 2021 Newman Civic Fellows.

Braedon Cook of Alva, Northwestern Oklahoma State University; Patricia Bear of Henryetta, Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology; Cade Russell of Pryor, Rogers State University; and Elah Alcuitas of Enid, Southwestern Oklahoma State University are among the cohort representing 39 states, Washington, D.C., Greece, Lebanon and Mexico.

The Newman Civic Fellowship is a yearlong program for students from Campus Compact member institutions. The students selected for the fellowship are leaders on their campuses who demonstrate a commitment to finding

solutions for challenges facing communities locally, nationally and internationally. Through the fellowship, Campus Compact provides the students with a variety of learning and networking opportunities that emphasize personal, professional and civic growth. Fellows are invited to a national conference of Newman Civic Fellows and participate in numerous virtual training and networking opportunities. The fellowship also provides pathways to apply for exclusive scholarship and post-graduate opportunities.

"These students are committed to solving challenging problems faced by fellow Oklahomans, and the State Regents and I are proud to recognize them for their civic leadership and community involvement," said Chancellor Glen D. Johnson. "We wish them continued success as they complete

their higher education and continue to pursue opportunities to positively impact our state and the world."

The Newman Civic Fellows program was established by Campus Compact in honor of co-founder Frank Newman, who dedicated his life to creating opportunities for student civic learning and engagement. The award is designed to recognize college students who have demonstrated an investment in finding solutions for the challenges faced by communities across the nation through service, research and advocacy. Each of Oklahoma's fellows will receive a \$500 scholarship from Oklahoma Campus Compact. Students are nominated by their college or university president.

ASPIRING TEACHERS COMPETE FOR NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Each year, Oklahoma students from around the state participate in the Educators Rising state competitions, which provide the opportunity to showcase their talents and abilities in the areas of storytelling through Children's Literature, Creative Lecture and Lesson Planning and Delivery. As part of the Educators Rising program, these students learn about the profession of teaching and the requirements and skills necessary to pursue a teaching career. The annual competition is an opportunity for these students to illustrate what they've learned about the profession through an area that reflects real-life classroom activities.

The State Regents' Oklahoma Teacher Connection sponsors the Educators Rising program as part of a statewide mission to recruit, retain and place teachers in Oklahoma classrooms. Participating students gain valuable knowledge about what it

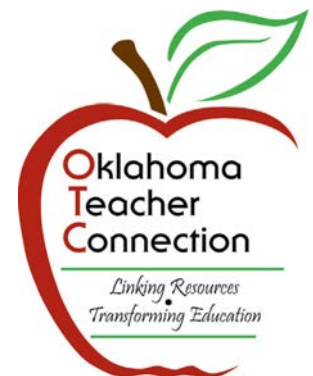
means to teach and the potential impact they could have on future generations of students if they became teachers. The program is funded by a grant to assist with program activities, and students are connected with the national organization for access to scholarships and educational resources.

In 2021, 46 Oklahoma Educators Rising students competed statewide. These winners will have the opportunity to go on and compete at the national level during the 2021 National Educators Rising Conference in June. This year's conference theme is *Inspiring Excellence*.

"We are so proud of these young adults and their accomplishments in the program. Our hope is to see them in future Oklahoma classrooms as teachers making a difference in the lives of students," said Dr. Goldie Thompson, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Teacher Preparation and Special Programs.

For more information about Educators Rising, visit okhighered.org/otc/educators-rising.

SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT



[facebook.com/
OklahomaTeacherConnection/](https://facebook.com/OklahomaTeacherConnection/)

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