



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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DEGREE PRODUCTION IN CRITICAL OCCUPATIONS REFLECTS STATE PRIORITIES

By Chancellor Allison D. Garrett

It's football season in Oklahoma! As we tailgate and cheer on our teams, we know each player, cheerleader, groundskeeper, band member, coach, athletic trainer, and custodian contributes to winning the big game. We also know that without certain playmakers — deft quarterbacks, speedy receivers, precise kickers — even a strong team would struggle to win.

The same is true in building our workforce. While all occupations are important for economic growth, some jobs are particularly important to position our state for long-term prosperity.

Workforce projection data for Oklahoma's 100 critical occupations — jobs identified by the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission as crucial for economic development and creating wealth — show that more than half of our state's critical occupations require education after high school, and most of those jobs require an associate degree or higher. Each of the top 22 highest-paying jobs require at least an associate degree, and eight of the top 10 fastest-growing critical occupations require an associate degree or higher.

In our *Blueprint 2030* strategic plan, the State Regents prioritize aligning academic programs to meet evolving workforce needs. Our goal is to produce 100,000 degrees and other credentials in STEM and critical occupations by 2030, strengthening Oklahoma's labor force with more educators, engineers, computer scientists, and nurses.



To help us track our progress, we recently added an interactive Critical Occupations dashboard, which provides data on state system enrollments and degree production in STEM, healthcare, and other key fields aligned with Oklahoma's most pressing workforce needs. Would it surprise you to learn that over 89% of students at our public colleges and universities are pursuing degrees in critical occupation disciplines, and nearly 87% of degrees conferred are in those fields?

Engineering degrees and certificates increased over 43% in the last 10 years, and STEM degrees increased more than 19% at all levels. Degree production in computer and information sciences grew more than 32% in the last decade, and in biological sciences, more than 20%.

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STATE REGENTS NAME NEW CHANCELLOR

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education recently announced the selection of higher education leader Sean Burrage as the next chancellor of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education. Burrage will take office as Oklahoma's 10th chancellor on Dec. 2, 2024, succeeding Chancellor Allison D. Garrett, who has served in the office since November 2021 and will retire Dec. 1.

Burrage is an educator, civic leader, and attorney currently serving as vice president for executive affairs and chief of staff at the University of Oklahoma, where he is responsible for leading and directing strategic projects, including matters involving university officials, community, and government leaders. He is a past president of Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SE) in Durant and was managing partner with the Taylor Burrage Law Firm in Claremore. He served two terms in the Oklahoma State Senate, representing Rogers and Mayes counties, during which he served as minority floor leader from 2011-14.

Under Burrage's leadership, SE streamlined operations, including establishing a shared vice president position with Murray State College, and significantly increased both undergraduate and graduate enrollment and annual giving.

During his tenure as a state senator, Burrage represented approximately 80,000 constituents, authored or co-authored over 50 bills that were enacted into law, and served on several legislative committees and task forces, including the 2008 legislative task force on Oklahoma's Promise. In 2007, he was voted the Higher Education Alumni Council's "Best Newcomer Legislator of the Year" and was named "2013 Legislator of the Year" by the Oklahoma Association for Justice.

Burrage has been a member of numerous boards, councils and committees, including the State Regents' *Blueprint 2030* Strategic Planning Committee and the 2017 Task Force on the Future of Higher Education; Gov. Mary Fallin's Education Advisory Committee; the Rogers State University Foundation; the University Hospitals Authority and Trust; the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence; the Durant Economic Development Council; and the Durant Industrial Authority Board.



He served as associate bar examiner for the Oklahoma Bar Association and was named among the Best Lawyers in America and as a Super Lawyer, both designations conferred by his peers. He was a Litigation Counsel of America Fellow and an Aspen-Rodel Fellow in Public Leadership.

Born in Durant and raised in Antlers, Burrage is a member of the Choctaw Nation and holds a bachelor's degree in accounting and a juris doctorate from OU. He and his wife, Julie, a Tulsa native and nonprofit consultant, have four sons.

To fill the position, the State Regents established a search committee, comprised of board Chair Dennis Casey, Regent Jeffrey W. Hickman, Regent Steven W. Taylor and Regent Courtney Warmington, who developed the position profile that outlined the qualifications sought in the next chancellor and conducted the national search.

The State Regents are confident Burrage is the right leader to advance Oklahoma's state system of higher education as we continue working to execute the bold strategies in our *Blueprint 2030* strategic plan, including aligning programs and services to meet Oklahoma's changing workforce needs.

DEGREE PRODUCTION IN CRITICAL OCCUPATIONS REFLECTS STATE PRIORITIES

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The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need for skilled healthcare workers. At our public institutions, bachelor's degree production in health professions increased by nearly 37% and nursing degree and certificate production at all levels increased by more than 17% over the last decade.

Producing more graduates in these vital fields is essential to meet current and future industry demand and attract new businesses to operate here. We also need those graduates to stay in the state and thrive in our communities. Nearly 94% of Oklahomans who graduate from a state system college or university remain and work here one year after graduation.

A stronger, more resilient workforce prepared for Oklahoma jobs today and tomorrow requires a solid game plan, the right players, and great teamwork. Your public higher education system is already focused on running the plays to elevate our state and help individual Oklahomans reach their optimal potential. That's worthy of an epic end zone dance.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE A CONDUIT FOR THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EDUCATION

By Mautra Staley Jones, President, Oklahoma City Community College

Education has transformed my life. As a leader in higher education today, it is my responsibility to share the transformative power of education with others.

I was born in Oklahoma City and raised in Ardmore by my grandmother, a firm, yet loving woman who offered stability in an often unstable, uncertain environment. My grandmother encouraged my siblings and me to dream big dreams. Even in our humble means, we were taught to set goals and think about what we wanted out of life. We were told we could accomplish anything we set our minds to if we worked hard and persevered through challenges and obstacles.

My grandmother made sure we were honest, ethical and intentional in everything we did. She also instilled in us the values of faith, family, freedom, the transformative effect of education, the benefits of sacrifice and the importance of service.

Those are the same values that guide me daily, and inspire me to be for the students at Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC) what my grandmother was for me.

Supported by that strong foundation, I studied hard with the dream of college in my future. I engaged in my studies and activities to help drive me toward that goal, guided by an important principle: Finishing the race is far more important than focusing on how the race began.

After high school, I attended the University of Oklahoma and became the first in my family to earn a college degree, a Bachelor of Arts in journalism. It transformed me.

I embarked on a career journey that led me to work in education, eventually settling into higher education, and along the way I obtained additional degrees — an MBA from the University of Phoenix and a Doctor of Education from Vanderbilt University.

I firmly believe that everyone should pursue an education that will help them achieve their dreams. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to help make this happen.

Community colleges are responsible for serving communities by delivering quality education that intelligently, honorably and competently addresses all learners' needs.

That education might be a credit-earning course on an associate degree path, or it might be a micro-credential for upskilling in the workforce. Maybe it's a short-term, noncredit program such as English as a Second Language, high school equivalency courses, or ACT Prep. All of these options, and more, are available at community colleges.

At Oklahoma City Community College, our learners represent all ages — from elementary-age summer program participants to high school concurrent students to adults of all generations. Our campus community represents a complete spectrum of age equity in an educational space, where all are welcome.

We are steadfastly dedicated to the belief that lifelong learning helps adults acquire the knowledge, skills and values needed to lead productive and satisfying lives.

Furthermore, a community college serves as a resource and a thriving hub for the entire community. It's a home for visual and performing arts that the community can enjoy, a recreation center community members can access, and a site where community events can be hosted.



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When students graduate or attend a program at a community college, we want them to leave a better version of themselves through what they have learned and how they have learned it, and we want them to be excited to share it with others. Moreover, our aim is for students to earn degrees and transition smoothly into the workforce, fostering productive careers that benefit their families and our communities.

A community college experience can be transformative for everyone, regardless of age or economic status, because learning is transformative.



STATE REGENTS LAUNCH ADDITIONAL INTERACTIVE DASHBOARDS

In 2023, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education shared [Blueprint 2030: Innovating and Elevating Oklahoma Higher Education for Tomorrow's Workforce](#), a strategic plan that reflects the State Regents' commitment to leading a responsive, forward-thinking, and data-driven state system of higher education.

A key *Blueprint 2030* strategy calls for interactive public dashboards with performance data for both the system and for individual colleges and universities. In February 2024, the State Regents' System Analysis and Reporting division launched three initial dashboards, and recently added two more. The following five interactive dashboards are now available:

LAUNCHED IN FEB 2024	LAUNCHED IN SEPT & OCT 2024
Enrollment	Critical Occupations
Degrees Conferred	Employment Outcomes
Student Success	

These dashboards allow users to gain a comprehensive understanding of vital aspects across state system institutions. View all of our interactive data dashboards at <https://okhighered.org/studies-reports/dashboards/>.



QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [Oklahoma legislators receive Higher Education Distinguished Service Awards](#)
- [Oklahoma public higher education graduates learn here, earn here](#)
- [Oklahoma College App Week set for Sept. 23-27](#)



OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

- [OU offers first four-year degree combined with enhanced FAA initiative](#)
- [OSU partners with Vicinity Energy for sustainable district energy](#)
- [\\$2 million grant awarded to NSU, NEO to help support Native American nursing students](#)
- [Fall semester enrollment up overall for NWOSU, NOC](#)
- [RSU sees second consecutive year of enrollment growth](#)
- [SWOSU, OU nursing partnerships aim to meet workforce needs](#)
- [UCO ranked as a top institution by Wall Street Journal, Niche](#)
- [CU pleased with uptick in fall enrollment](#)
- [OPSU students complete summer internships, gaining hands-on experience](#)
- [USAO ranked in top 20 of U.S. News Top Public Schools — National Liberal Arts Colleges](#)
- [CSC continues enrollment growth](#)
- [MSC enrollment increases to historic levels, sixth consecutive semester growth](#)
- [NEO medical department adds scholarship](#)
- [NOC's digital media program offers the power to create](#)
- [RCC enrollment grows 15%](#)
- [TCC and FAA partner to address air traffic control shortage](#)

NEW FAFSA H.S. GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

Beginning with the 2024-25 academic year, seniors attending Oklahoma public high schools will be required to complete and submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in order to graduate. The FAFSA is essential for students seeking federal and state financial aid to assist with the expenses of postsecondary education.

To support students, parents, and educators, the State Regents and the Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) are offering important resources and publications to facilitate FAFSA completion.

▶ [Oklahoma FAFSA Data Portal](#)

To help K-12 schools track FAFSA progress, we offer the Oklahoma FAFSA Data Portal. This free portal enables educators to monitor FAFSA completion, provide targeted assistance and view submission and completion dates for high school seniors.

▶ [FAFSA Webinars](#)

OCAP is hosting monthly FAFSA webinars to share helpful information and resources to assist Oklahoma high school counselors with the most current FAFSA updates. These webinars include a dedicated session for questions and answers, and all webinars are recorded and made available on [StartWithFAFSA.org](#) for easy access.

▶ [FAFSA FastTrack](#)

OCAP is coordinating FAFSA FastTrack, a series of FAFSA completion events held across the state to assist seniors and their parents with the FAFSA. Our website provides information on the locations, dates and times of these events, enabling families to locate a nearby campus for FAFSA assistance.

▶ [FAFSA Completion Resources](#)

UCanGo2.org provides a wide range of publications and tools designed to help students and parents understand, complete, and successfully submit their FAFSA applications. The UCanGo2 and StartWithFAFSA websites feature booklets, flyers, presentations, videos and educational modules focused on college planning and the FAFSA process. Some of our resources include:

- ▶ [Finish the FAFSA in 5 Steps](#)
- ▶ [FAFSA Dependency Questionnaire](#)
- ▶ [StudentAid.gov Account Worksheet](#)
- ▶ [Items Needed to Complete a FAFSA](#)
- ▶ [FAFSA Parent Flyer](#)
- ▶ [FAFSA Timeline for Educators](#)

▶ [FAFSA Workshops](#)

The OCAP Outreach Team delivers customized workshops, both in-person and via Zoom, for high schools throughout the state. Presentations focus on FAFSA completion, creating StudentAid.gov accounts, finding scholarships and understanding the financial aid process.

OCAP's Outreach team has provided FAFSA assistance and college planning services statewide for more than 15 years, and continues teaching workshops and attending school events to share valuable information and answer questions about completing the FAFSA.

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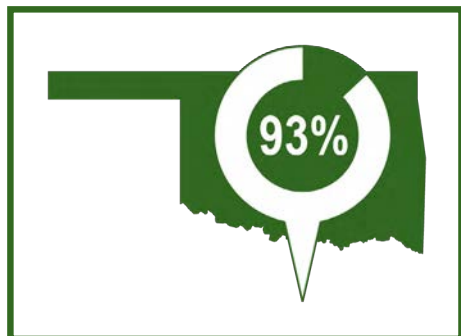
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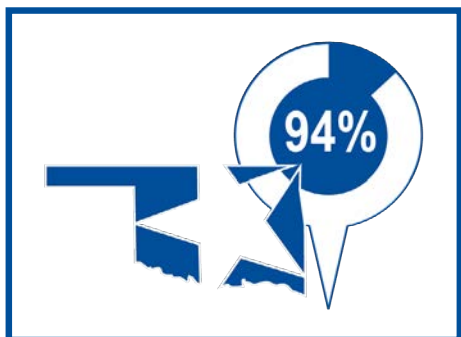
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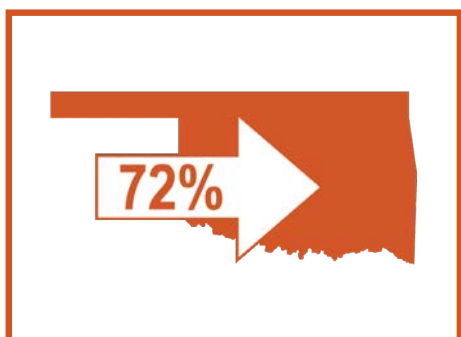
DID YOU KNOW?



Our students learn here, earn here — **over 93%** of Oklahomans who graduate from a state system college or university remain and work in the state one year after graduation.



More than 94% of Oklahoma's Promise graduates are employed in the state one year after graduation, and **over 86%** are still employed here five years later.



Over 72% more freshmen from other states enrolled in Oklahoma colleges and universities than left our state to pursue higher education.



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