



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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BUILDING OKLAHOMA'S FUTURE BY DEGREES

By Chancellor Sean Burrage

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The new year around the corner is a fresh opportunity to shape our priorities and focus our efforts to reflect what we value most. With 72% of jobs across the country requiring education or training beyond high school by 2031, the value of a college degree for individual Oklahomans — and the positive impact on our state's workforce — is greater than it's ever been.

For degree-holders in the workforce, the economic drivers multiply. College graduates have double the yearly income, three times the retirement savings and four times the net worth of non-college-educated Americans. They're also more likely to have a job. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that the unemployment rate for full-time workers over age 25 with a bachelor's or associate degree is nearly 44% or 26% lower, respectively, than for those with only a high school diploma.

The benefits of earning a degree extend beyond higher earning potential and job security. Studies show that college graduates are more likely to have health insurance and better working conditions. Higher education leads to increased community engagement, and college graduates excel at adapting and leveraging technology, leading to enhanced personal and professional mobility.

The number of college degree-holders also impacts how well a state labor force can pivot to embrace innovations in operations and technology. As the composition of employment shifts, jobs are eliminated and jobs are added. Through higher education, learners develop the critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills required to help businesses thrive in an evolving workplace.



Data from the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce show our public colleges and universities generate an average return on investment of nearly \$870,000 per graduate over a career lifetime.

We're working to ensure Oklahomans are prepared to step into critical occupations, jobs considered vital for our state's economic development and wealth generation. Through our strategic plan, [Blueprint 2030](#), the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education are prioritizing alignment of degree programs with employer demand, especially in the science, technology, engineering and healthcare fields. In the last decade, both STEM and nursing degree production increased 22%.

Eliminating barriers to degree completion is key to reaching our goals. We're proud to keep costs as low as possible and expand aid programs to lower the chance finances will be a roadblock for families.

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OSU VET SCHOOL SUPPORT IS VITAL TO THE HEALTH OF ALL OKLAHOMANS

By Dr. Kayse Shrum, President, Oklahoma State University, and Dr. Johnny Stephens, President, OSU Center for Health Sciences

If today you came home to pets you love, dined on locally raised meat or enjoy a relationship with anyone in Oklahoma's agriculture industry, your life has undoubtedly been touched by the state's only veterinary school at Oklahoma State University.

As the president of OSU, I formed a team, led by Dr. Johnny Stephens, dedicated to the vital overhaul of our College of Vet Med. There are numerous parallels to our successful model of educating and training physicians at the OSU Center for Health Sciences — where we train a higher percentage of rural physicians than any medical school in the nation. Creating a world-class veterinary program is something for which we have the experience, expertise and steadfast intent.

Our work on improving OSU's veterinary school by addressing chronic under-funding began two years ago. Under the leadership of the Oklahoma A&M Board of Regents — and continuing now under Chairman Jimmy Harrel — the OSU administration made improving the college a top priority. This led to the creation of the Oklahoma State Veterinary Medicine Authority in a near-unanimous vote by the legislature, who expressed support of our veterinary college's potential and critical role in the state.

Thus far, the authority has allocated more than \$79 million for animal hospital improvements and \$14 million in clinical resources to help us compete on a national level. We are grateful for this and the legislature's ongoing support. Given the age of the existing facilities, more capital funding and operational resources will be needed.

Nearly 20 years ago, our leaders formed the OSU Medical Authority, which created a sustainable trust supporting the OSU Medical Center, our teaching hospital. This move laid the foundation for what has become a pillar in our state to train and retain physicians who serve Oklahomans. The data speaks clearly: according to state records, more than 81% of graduates from OSU's medical school in Tulsa are working in our state five years after graduation.

Today the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine faces similar challenges, particularly with creating a sustainable, 21st-century

teaching facility to train the exemplary students enrolled in our program. Investing in a veterinary school that also includes a teaching hospital is vital to our state because we know that veterinarians also tend to practice near the location where they train.

Despite historical funding challenges, the OSU College of Vet Med consistently graduates confident, practice-ready veterinarians. We've significantly lowered our student attrition rate, from 14% in 2018 to just 2% currently, and our students' pass rates on national exams are consistently well above the national average. Thanks to the legislature's support in the past year alone, we have added additional clinical faculty and hired a new director for our veterinary teaching hospital in Stillwater.

Nationally there is a dire shortage of veterinarians, due largely to an aging, retiring workforce. More importantly for a rural state, only 3-4% of new veterinary school graduates pursue and stay in livestock or food animal practice areas, a major decline from decades ago when about 40% of graduates specialized in this area, according to a report commissioned by the Farm Journal Foundation.

The pandemic provided a glaring example of the interconnectedness of human and animal health. This concept, called "One Health," is a major area of research at the OSU College of Vet Med, and our continued support of such study helps to protect future generations. The American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges ranked OSU College of Vet Med in the top 12 nationally for research in their annual data report which includes statistics, number of grad students and publications, and the number of citations. As a land grant university, OSU's mission is to address society's most pressing needs, and it's difficult to think of a more pressing need than the health care of our state — both human and animal.

Our eyes remain fixed on creating one of the preeminent veterinary schools in the nation, and we know this is a marathon, not a sprint.



Broad support across the state is vital to the future of veterinary medical education in Oklahoma — from legislators, donors, alumni and future students who have long held dreams of becoming a veterinarian.

A version of this narrative was published in the Tulsa World on Nov. 24, 2024.

BUILDING OKLAHOMA'S FUTURE BY DEGREES

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Oklahoma's state system of higher education is one of the most affordable in the nation. At our public colleges and universities, FY25 tuition and mandatory fees are, on average, over 25% less than at regional and national peer institutions. That's why more than 65% of first-time, full-time students graduate from our state system campuses with no federal student loan debt.

There is a lifetime of value in earning a college degree. A degree isn't a destination — it's a passport to more possibilities, opening doors students may not even know exist before they decide to invest in themselves by pursuing higher education. I can't think of a more important investment for our citizens or our state.

OSRHE 2025 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



ADVANCING EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE TRAINING FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Increased support for initiatives that promote workforce development in Oklahoma's critical occupations is essential to the state's economic growth. We propose the creation of a scholarship program designed specifically for adult learners, offering financial assistance to those looking to complete unfinished degrees, obtain certificates or micro-credentials, or pursue reskilling and upskilling opportunities. This program will prioritize high-demand credentials aligned with occupations that are vital to Oklahoma's workforce, helping to bridge the gap between education and employment needs.



OKLAHOMA OPPORTUNITY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP TAX CREDIT

The Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Scholarship Act allows individuals and businesses to receive a tax credit in exchange for donations that support K-12 school tuition assistance for families with financial need. This structure offers significant advantages to donors, often resulting in no realized cost when combined with traditional federal and state deductions. Expanding this tax credit to fund need-based scholarships for students attending Oklahoma's public colleges and universities will support efforts to increase the college-educated workforce in Oklahoma.



OKLAHOMA'S PROMISE

The Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program has been named by the Southern Regional Education Board as a top promise scholarship program in the nation. Goals for the 2025 legislative session include developing an appeal process to assist students facing unique circumstances and extending the application deadline to ensure no qualified student is excluded.



STABILIZE PROPERTY INSURANCE RATES

Our colleges and universities face significant operational cost increases. Rising property insurance rates have created a financial burden that impacts the current and future financial environment for every institution. Examining the property insurance process, practices and market in Oklahoma is an important step to identify long-term solutions to help mitigate this substantial expense across the state system.



ENHANCE CAMPUS SAFETY AND SECURITY

State system institutions must be equipped with the necessary personnel and financial resources to proactively mitigate risks and ensure the safety of their campus communities. This includes addressing both physical and cybersecurity threats, challenges and incidents. Appropriate investment in security infrastructure, trained personnel and cybersecurity protocols is essential to safeguarding students, faculty, staff and institutional assets while also fostering a secure learning environment.



CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

The concurrent enrollment program strengthens student preparation, reduces family college costs and decreases the time required to complete a degree. Focusing on recommendations from the Concurrent Enrollment Task Force and legislative studies, the State Regents will evaluate concurrent participation options, financial models and course delivery modes to strengthen the program for Oklahoma students.

OFFN, SUPERCOMPUTERS, FAST CONNECTIVITY MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE PRACTICAL FOR OKLAHOMA'S HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Supercomputing and high-speed data transfer capabilities have made scientific discovery more practical. As a result, research computing in Oklahoma is growing by leaps and bounds thanks in part to OneNet's OneOklahoma Friction Free Network.

OFFN is OneNet's dedicated research network that provides access to supercomputing resources across the state and the ability to transfer data to research facilities around the world.

"Supercomputing makes the impossible practical," said Henry Neeman, director of Supercomputing Center for Education and Research, University of Oklahoma, who was one of the original designers of the OFFN network. And that's what OFFN is doing for students, faculty and staff at our state's higher education institutions.

OFFN Connectivity

Oklahoma has received nine grant awards from the National Science Foundation since 2013 to create and expand OFFN. OneNet has received nearly \$5 million in funding through six of those awards.

When all of the awarded projects are complete, OFFN will connect 30 higher education locations to OFFN. These projects are increasing bandwidth at participating campus locations to 10 Gbps or 100 Gbps connections.

These connections give campuses access to supercomputers at several universities that

have offered to share their supercomputing resources with other institutions. Researchers also take advantage of OFFN's high-speed data capabilities to move research data to supercomputers or other research facilities throughout the U.S. and Europe.

OFFN Successes

Rogers State University (RSU) connected to OFFN through an early grant, then received a fiber build and upgrade to their connectivity through a later grant. Faculty are using the connection to improve interactive learning for their popular game development courses.

At the Oklahoma State University (OSU) Biomedical Imaging Center, the new OFFN connection will better enable daily high-speed data transfers between the center in Tulsa and the OSU supercomputer in Stillwater. OSU scientists at the center study infant brain development, impacts of adverse childhood experiences on brain development and the body, and addiction and substance use disorders.

OFFN Reach

"As we bring more higher education institutions onto the OFFN network, we reach more students, faculty and staff across Oklahoma with opportunities for learning, discovering and sharing, growing the knowledge base and future workforce for our state," said Brian Burkhart, OneNet's chief technology officer and the principal investigator on the current projects.



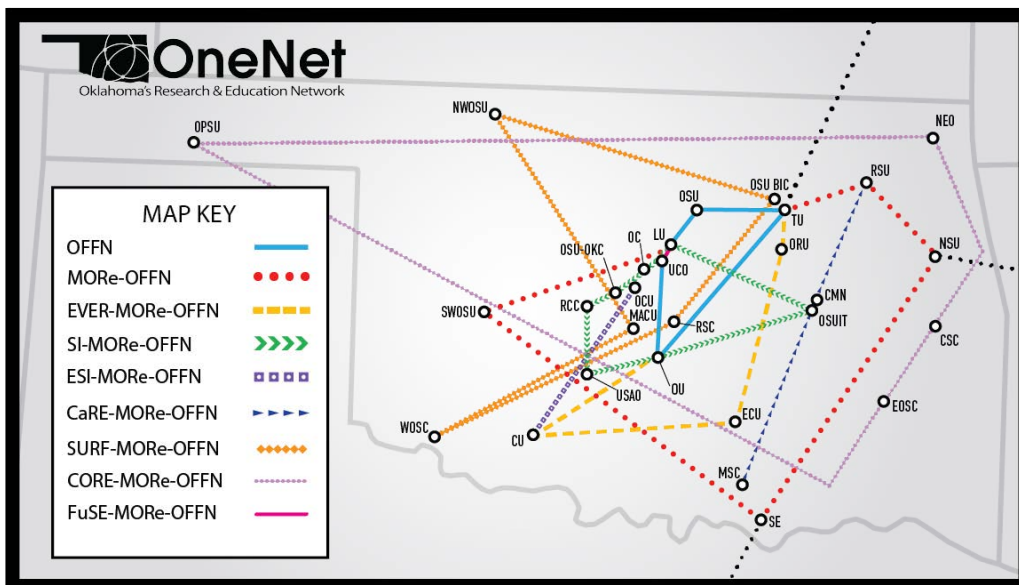
QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [State Regents, CareerTech sign second statewide nursing articulation agreement](#)
- [State Regents approve plan to meet Oklahoma's workforce needs](#)
- [State system fall enrollment increased for fourth consecutive year](#)
- [Sean Burrage sworn in as 10th chancellor of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education](#)
- [College degrees produced by Oklahoma public higher education continue to increase](#)
- [Oklahoma receives fifth consecutive multimillion-dollar federal grant to prepare students, families for college](#)
- [Higher education chancellor joins governor for trade mission in Asia](#)

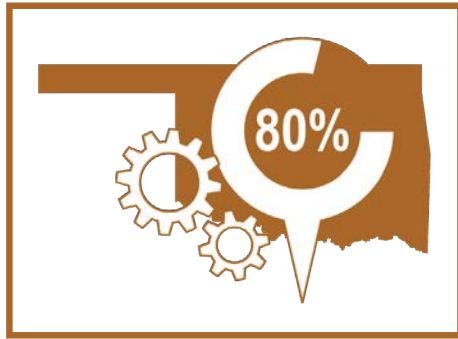


OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

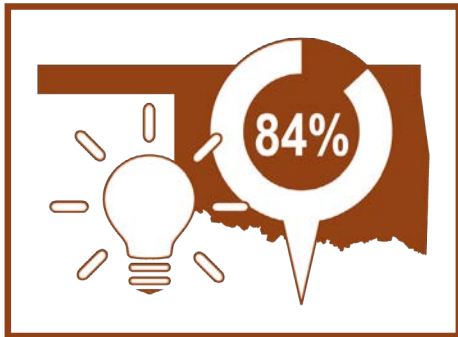
- [State's teacher retention problem the focus of OU's 'Happy Teacher Project'](#)
- [OSU Polytech, industry leaders chart innovative course to drive high-tech workforce development](#)
- [ECU professors save students \\$140k in textbook costs](#)
- [Multiple NSU programs ranked among best in U.S. for 2025 by Intelligent.com](#)
- [OPSU recognized among top institutions in the west](#)
- [MSC, OSU, DPS sign agreement to allow DHS students to take nursing courses while in high school](#)
- [NOC leader credits communities with enrollment boost](#)
- [OCCC, Oklahoma City Community Foundation working together to meet workforce needs](#)



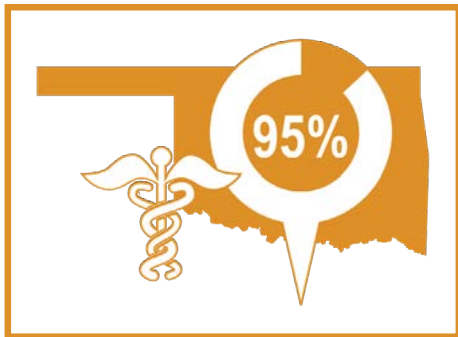
DID YOU KNOW?



Of engineering graduates, **nearly 80%** of bachelor's degree earners are working in the state one year after graduation.



Of STEM undergraduates from our state system colleges and universities, **more than 84%** are working in the state one year after graduation, and **nearly 69%** five years after graduation.



At all degree levels, **nearly 95%** of nursing graduates were employed in the state one year after graduation and **more than 87%** still remained five years after graduation, meeting a critical workforce need.



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