



DEGREES OF PROGRESS

eNews from the State Regents for Higher Education

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OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Improving our future by degrees



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Expanding Workforce Opportunities for Incarcerated Oklahomans 2
- OK Higher Ed News..... 2
- Quarterly News at a Glance..... 2
- Pathways to Workforce Opportunities in Southwest Oklahoma..... 3
- FAFSA Completion 3
- 2026 Legislative Agenda..... 4
- 2026 Funding Request..... 5
- How OneNet Connects Oklahoma ... 6
- UCanGo2 Has a New Home 6
- Did You Know?..... 7

A SMART WAY TO GROW OKLAHOMA'S ECONOMY – SUPPORT RURAL HIGHER EDUCATION

By President Julie Dinger, Oklahoma Panhandle State University

Oklahoma's Panhandle helps feed the nation and power the state. Our counties lead in agricultural output, over \$1.3 billion in Texas County alone, and sit over one of the country's largest natural gas fields. That productivity depends on people: paramedics and welders, instrument techs and lineworkers, bookkeepers and supervisors, whose skills are built close to where they live and work. That is where rural higher education, and Oklahoma Panhandle State University (OPSU), matter most.

Panhandle Tech, OPSU's dual-credit technical pathway that launches this week, is a practical example. It allows high school students to earn college credit in hands-on programs such as paramedicine/EMS, welding, and industrial technology. Courses are scheduled mornings, afternoons, and evenings, offered both on campus and online, so students from small, spread-out districts can participate without sacrificing a two-hour commute to campus. For eligible students, concurrent-enrollment tuition is waived, lowering the cost of entry into high-need fields and accelerating time to a real-world credential.

The payoff is not abstract. A welding certificate earned before graduation keeps a young person in the region with skills that local industry needs today. EMS coursework completed in high school shortens the path to licensure in a part of the state where response times are sometimes a life-or-death matter. These are targeted pipelines that stabilize essential services and keep small businesses fully staffed.

Rural higher education is also a fiscally responsible investment. Independent analysis from the Oklahoma State Regents' 2025 Economic Impact study, shows that each dollar invested in OPSU generates over \$14 in



OKLAHOMA
PANHANDLE STATE
UNIVERSITY

return to Oklahoma's economy. In low population density areas, that return is amplified: one credentialed medic or certified welder can be the difference between a community that grows and one that falls behind.

This is not about special pleading for the Panhandle; it is about capacity where it is most efficient. Rural campuses already have the partnerships, facilities, and trust to deliver high-value training aligned with local industry. With consistent support, we can scale what works: modern equipment for technical labs, sustained funding for concurrent enrollment, expanded clinical placements for health programs, and flexible delivery models that meet the realities of rural life.

Oklahoma's workforce strategy succeeds when every region can develop its own talent. Rural higher education makes that possible. If we want reliable energy production, resilient supply chains, responsive emergency care, and strong main streets, we should invest in the institutions that prepare the people who make those things work, right here at home.

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EXPANDING WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCARCERATED OKLAHOMANS

By President Ron Ramming, Connors State College

For nearly 30 years, Connors State College (CSC) has led one of the most impactful prison education programs in the state. Partnering with Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center and Jess Dunn Correctional Center, CSC provides educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals, creating an additional skilled labor force and dramatically reducing recidivism in Eastern Oklahoma.

Prison education programs provide significant benefits to surrounding communities, especially in rural communities where skilled workers are in high demand. Currently, 35% of new jobs advertised require a bachelor's degree, and by 2031, it is projected that over 70% of jobs in the U.S. will require postsecondary education and/or training. To keep up with the ever-changing economic climate, rural communities need to continue to produce skilled workers. Prison education programs offer a unique route for fulfilling that need.

Upon entering prison less than 30% of incarcerated adults hold a high school diploma. However, with educational resources like those that CSC provides, incarcerated individuals are offered new opportunities. CSC's program offers paths to associate degrees and certificate programs. Students benefit from support services provided by CSC, including academic advising, comprehensive student services, and work-release programs. With these programs, individuals can more easily find skilled employment after release and more quickly participate in the economic system.

Programs like those at Eddie Warrior and Jess Dunn facilitate the development of Oklahoma's workforce, while also providing increased safety and security for the community. Individuals are significantly less likely to reoffend if they can obtain employment, and formerly incarcerated people who participate in educational or vocational programs are 13% more likely to obtain employment after release. Studies have consistently shown that incarcerated individuals who participate in educational programs are 43% less likely to return to prison. CSC's prison program works with incarcerated individuals to place them on a path away from reoffending.



CONNORS
— STATE COLLEGE —

Prison education programs also offer a more cost-efficient path and provide a clear return on investment for taxpayers. For every dollar invested in prison education programs, four to five dollars is saved in reincarceration costs. In addition, by reducing the time individuals are incarcerated and speeding up how quickly they are able to return to society, there is an overall decrease in social services dependency.

CSC's prison program produces more associate degrees than all of the similar programs across the state combined, generating national recognition. In 2016, the college was selected as one of 66 institutions nationwide to participate in the Second Chance PELL Project, which provides PELL grants to incarcerated individuals in eligible postsecondary institutions, expanding the program's reach and effectiveness.

Prison education programs offer long-term solutions to combat reoffending, and at CSC, we are proud to offer that important avenue to the incarcerated individuals in Eastern Oklahoma.



OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

- [OU to add first public CRNA program](#)
- [OSU celebrates breaking all-time enrollment record](#)
- [ECU to offer new online Bachelor of Science in Health Care Management](#)
- [NSU announces pre-licensure nursing program](#)
- [RSU reports record-breaking enrollment for fall 2025 semester](#)
- [SE launches M.Ed. specialization in autism, developmental disabilities](#)
- [UCO, Hispanic Chamber partner to expand workforce opportunities](#)
- [CU launches Professional Sales Center to prepare students for careers](#)
- [MSC hits record enrollment this year](#)
- [RCC celebrates 10.4% enrollment growth](#)
- [TCC, Pawnee Nation College solidify partnership with Memorandum of Understanding](#)



QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [Oklahoma College App Week](#)
- [College prep materials available to Oklahoma 8th-12th grade students](#)
- [Oklahoma legislators receive Higher Education Distinguished Service Awards](#)
- [State Regents approve plan to meet Oklahoma's workforce needs](#)
- [State system fall enrollment increased for 5th consecutive year](#)
- [Oklahoma public higher education graduates learn here, earn here](#)

PATHWAYS TO WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES IN SOUTHWEST OKLAHOMA

By President C. Shane Hunt, Cameron University

The future has never been brighter in southwest Oklahoma, and all of us at Cameron University (CU) are committed to helping drive future growth and opportunity. By 2031, it is projected that more than 70% of U.S. jobs will require education or training beyond a high school diploma. Whether we're talking about traditional sectors like agriculture and construction or whether it involves more high-tech professions, America faces a looming talent shortage because a significant portion of the workforce lacks necessary training.

CU, with campuses in Lawton and Duncan, is proudly dedicated to providing valuable education opportunities that empower our local communities and enrich the regional economy. Ninety percent of our students come from Comanche and its surrounding counties, so we are passionately committed to both student and community success across southwest Oklahoma.

CU presents students with opportunities to improve their lives. We offer traditional degree programs in top-earning industries such as engineering and healthcare. We also have micro-credential programs — short-term courses that equip learners with career-specific knowledge and skills to help members of the workforce, regardless of industry or experience level, stay ahead of the curve.

We offer micro-credentials in a variety of fields, including agriculture, business and finance, communication, education, entrepreneurship, management, marketing and STEM-related fields. Classes range from single-day weekend seminars to semester-long courses. Whether workers come back to college to learn additional skills, or visit our campus for the first time, micro-credentials are valuable to anyone interested in furthering their career.

CU also offers concurrent enrollment to qualified high school juniors and seniors. Large numbers of them are taking advantage of that opportunity and this fall we have a record number enrolled in dual-credit programs. Studies show that concurrent students are more likely to go on to finish a college degree — and earn higher wages as adults — compared to their classmates who only finish high school.



Concurrent classes also lower admission barriers for those considering college, since they do not have to reapply to CU.

Oklahoma offers tuition waivers to eligible high school students who take concurrent courses, creating an opportunity for those at every financial level to pursue higher education. Students can get an early start on a degree and move more swiftly through college, enabling them to be better prepared to enter the workforce and do it more quickly. It empowers students — especially first-generation college students like myself — to try out college before leaving the safety net of high school.

At CU, our priority is to partner with local communities to advance a shared mission of academic success, expanded student opportunity, and sustainable economic growth. Because the majority of our students come from southwest Oklahoma, every degree awarded grows the local talent pool, empowers residents to pursue greater economic opportunities, and improves the quality of life across the region. It is a great day to be an Aggie and our best days for CU and southwest Oklahoma are still ahead of us.

#1

FAFSA COMPLETION

In the 2025-26 FAFSA year, Oklahoma achieved the #1 ranking in nationwide year-over-year FAFSA completions, with a 49% increase compared to the 2024-25 cycle. This surge reflects the state's strong outreach efforts following legislative action establishing the FAFSA graduation requirement, which was implemented in the 2024-25 academic year for all Oklahoma public high school seniors.

The FAFSA Data Portal (OK-FDP), a powerful resource offered by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and the Oklahoma College Assistance Program, is a helpful resource for Oklahoma high schools. This free tool enables high schools to monitor student-level FAFSA submission and completion data. Schools can use this data to identify seniors who need additional support and track progress toward FAFSA completion goals. As of September 2025, approximately 430 high schools across the state are actively using the OK-FDP.

This data-driven approach helps educators support students in their efforts to access financial aid for postsecondary success.

2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



ADVANCING WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT THROUGH CREDENTIALS OF VALUE, OUTCOMES, AND ADULT LEARNER SUPPORT

To ensure students earn credentials that lead to strong employment and economic mobility, we support establishment of a standard statewide definition for a “credential of value.” Similar to efforts underway in other states, including Texas, a standard definition would ensure that credentials are aligned with in-demand industries and recognized across education and workforce systems. We also support enhanced wage record data collection to better track post-graduation employment outcomes. Improved outcomes data will allow Oklahoma to measure the return on investment of credentials, align programs with workforce needs, and strengthen accountability for both students and taxpayers. Additionally, 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.



SUPPORTING CAMPUS RESEARCH CAPACITY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Research conducted by colleges and universities plays a vital role in driving a state's innovation, economic growth, and public well-being. The State Regents support legislation that creates additional opportunities and provides resources to our public institutions to serve as hubs of discovery, generating new knowledge and technologies that can lead to breakthroughs in healthcare, agriculture, energy, and more. By attracting federal grants and private investments, academic research stimulates local economies and creates high-skill jobs. It also informs public policy, enhances education, and addresses region-specific challenges. Investing in a strong research ecosystem will empower Oklahoma to remain competitive, resilient, and forward-thinking.



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 2026 legislative session include increasing the annual family income limit to \$100,000, expanding access to more Oklahoma families; clarifying eligibility requirements for students in DHS and foster care and for children of certified public classroom teachers; and refining high school course requirements for students pursuing various post-secondary opportunities through the scholarship.



STABILIZE PROPERTY INSURANCE RATES

Our colleges and universities continue to face significant operational cost increases. Rising property insurance rates have created an ongoing 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 & 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. In addition, establishing an age limit for student eligibility (up to 21) is needed to align high school participation requirements and definitions.

2026 FUNDING REQUEST

FY 2026 BASE APPROPRIATION \$1,027,665,616

FY 2027 BUDGET NEED

Strategic Operational Funding.....	\$57,000,000
A. Critical Workforce Needs.....	\$13,500,000
i. STEM and Critical Workforce Degrees and Credentials	\$11,500,000
ii. Adult Degree Completion Outreach and Financial Aid	\$2,000,000
B. Institutional Excellence and Student Success.....	\$43,500,000
i. Performance-Based Formula Allocations	\$25,000,000
ii. Student Support/Career Navigators/FAFSA Completion/Scholarships	\$10,000,000
iii. Innovation, Shared Services and Efficiency Initiatives	\$2,000,000
iv. Campus Safety, Security and Cybersecurity	\$6,500,000

FY 2027 TOTAL BUDGET NEED \$1,084,665,616

- ▶ **\$ Difference from FY 2026 State Appropriation..... \$57,000,000**
- ▶ **% Difference from FY 2026 State Appropriation..... 5.5%**

Legislative Initiatives and Programming.....	\$21,500,000
A. Strong Readers Act (SB 362, 2024)	\$5,500,000
B. National Guard Educational Assistance Program.....	\$2,000,000
C. Oklahoma Rising Scholars Award	\$8,000,000
D. Concurrent Enrollment Participation Expansion	\$6,000,000

Institution-Specific Allocations	\$347,750,000
A. FY 2027 Deferred Maintenance Projects from OCAMP Apportionment	\$56,250,000
B. State Regents Agency 605 Modernization and Upgrades.....	\$2,000,000
C. Establishment of a Collaboration and Consolidation Assistance Fund.....	\$3,500,000
D. Research Universities — Research and Capital Projects	
i. University of Oklahoma	\$68,000,000
ii. Oklahoma State University	\$68,000,000
E. Regional/Four-Year Universities — Workforce Investment for Allocation	\$60,000,000
F. Two-Year Colleges — Workforce Investment for Allocation	\$20,000,000
G. Constituent Agencies — Operating, Capital	\$70,000,000



HOW ONENET CONNECTS OKLAHOMA

OneNet has connected Oklahomans to essential research, education, health care and government services since 1996. Initially, the network was designed with a hub-and-spoke model that spanned to points across Oklahoma. Today, OneNet connects subscribers in a wide variety of ways, from a robust fiber backbone to state, regional and national partnerships.

OPTICAL FIBER NETWORK

OneNet utilizes an optical fiber network with multiple rings around the state for more reliability and resiliency for the network. The rings provide multiple paths for data to travel from community to community and outside the state.

OCAN

A part of the fiber network is the Oklahoma Community Anchor Network (OCAN), a 1,100+ mile network managed by OneNet. OCAN connects 93 community anchor institutions to high-speed broadband services and delivers connectivity to rural communities in 35 Oklahoma counties.

400G RESEARCH BACKBONE

This year, OneNet upgraded the research backbone from 100G to 400G, with the capacity to grow to 800G in the future. The upgraded research backbone will enable data transfers for nationwide and global research projects.

PARTNERSHIP WITH HIGHER EDUCATION

Many of OneNet's hubsites are strategically located at Oklahoma colleges and universities. This collaboration provides reliable connectivity for campuses and creates a dependable, secure location to house network equipment — a win-win for education and connectivity.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

While OneNet's network connects communities across the state, it depends on partnerships with local telecommunications providers to connect subscribers to the network, called the "last-mile" of service. OneNet partners with approximately 30 private providers in Oklahoma. Over the last 12 years, more than \$140 million has been reinvested with private partners to deliver last-mile services to subscribers.

STATE, COUNTY PARTNERSHIPS

OneNet partners with other state agencies with fiber networks around the state to share access to state-owned fiber routes, saving network construction costs for all agencies. OneNet also has partnerships with county governments to share fiber assets.

OFFN

To support research computing at Oklahoma's colleges and universities, OneNet operates the OneOklahoma Friction Free Network (OFFN). This research network will soon connect 30 campus sites, providing access to high-speed data transfer for global research initiatives and supercomputing resources for research and education.

INTERNET2, GREAT PLAINS NETWORK

OneNet partners with regional and national networks that provide high-speed connectivity for research and education organizations like those OneNet serves. The Great Plains Network connects OneNet subscribers to other organizations throughout the region, while Internet2 moves OneNet's subscriber traffic across the country and around the globe.

DATACENTER

OneNet's Oklahoma City datacenter provides subscribers with options for equipment colocation, disaster recovery and virtual infrastructure. The datacenter features state-of-the-art systems and robust connectivity.

These features and partnerships work together to provide OneNet subscribers with high-speed connectivity that is reliable and resilient. As connectivity requirements have grown over the last three decades, OneNet has expanded its network to meet those requirements. Looking ahead, OneNet is prepared to support upgrades to 800G to offer larger bandwidths for subscribers.



UCANGO2 HAS A NEW HOME

OKcollegestart.org, Oklahoma's comprehensive college and career planning portal is the new home for UCanGo2.org, the college access initiative of Oklahoma College Assistance Program. This transition will streamline access to college planning resources for Oklahoma students, families and educators.

Bringing UCanGo2 resources to the OKCollegestart platform supports a seamless experience for new and existing users who now have a centralized hub to:

- ▶ Complete Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP) activities
- ▶ Explore careers and majors
- ▶ Research colleges and universities
- ▶ Apply for Oklahoma's Promise and other scholarships
- ▶ Complete the FAFSA
- ▶ Find outreach materials and publications

What's New?

Updated 2025-26 publications designed to support students from kindergarten through high school and are now available for free download. Publications include:

- ▶ **Finish the FAFSA in Five Steps**
Tips for completing the FAFSA with the latest information on the new 2026-27 form
- ▶ **Your Transition to College Guide**
A step-by-step resource for high school seniors preparing for life after graduation
- ▶ **College Planning Checklists**
Grade-specific checklists to help students stay on track
- ▶ **Are You Looking for Money?**
An overview of scholarships, grants and additional funding options available to Oklahoma students
- ▶ Many more!

Educators, students and families are encouraged to explore UCanGo2's new home on OKcollegestart.org, the official source for planning a college education in Oklahoma.



DID YOU KNOW?

IN FY 2024, THE STATE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION DROVE **\$461.8 MILLION** IN TAX REVENUE FOR STATE, COUNTY AND LOCAL JURISDICTIONS



THE SHARE OF OKLAHOMANS AGED 25+ WITH AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER INCREASED OVER THE LAST DECADE:



COMMUNITY IMPACT (FY 2024):
\$10.9 MILLION



STUDENTS DEDICATED **3.78 MILLION** HOURS TO EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING, INTERNSHIPS, CLINICAL SERVICES, SERVICE-BASED PROGRAMS

STUDENTS, STAFF, AND FACULTY VOLUNTEERED A TOTAL OF **355,112** HOURS



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