



# 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*



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## OKLAHOMA'S PUBLIC COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY GRADUATES STAY HERE, FILL CRITICAL JOBS

*By Chancellor Sean Burrage*

While our focus as a higher education system is on student success — and rightly so — degrees lift up more than the individuals who earn them. College graduates don't just expand their own career potential; they form a stronger workforce, which boosts our state economy. In fact, every dollar of state appropriations invested in our public institutions generates \$17.48 in economic output. When graduates stay and pursue careers here, it helps secure a more prosperous future for all of us.

According to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's 2024 Employment Outcomes Report, over 91% of Oklahoma residents and more than half of non-residents who graduate from a state system college or university are employed here one year after graduation. Five years after graduation, over 83% of resident undergraduates remain employed in the state.

We know our public college and university graduates both learn and earn here, because our employment rates reflect a data match of records from the State Regents, the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, and the Oklahoma Tax Commission. Data are used to determine the percentage of state system graduates who are employed in the state one year and five years after graduation.

Consistent with our [Blueprint 2030](#) strategic plan, increasing degree production (especially in critical occupations) has been our primary focus as a state system for several years. Retaining that talent in industries like healthcare, education, and STEM is vital to continued economic development and wealth creation. Nearly 92% of resident graduates in Oklahoma's critical occupation fields remain



and work here one year after graduation, and nearly 75% of all graduates in these crucial disciplines are still employed in the state five years later. The capabilities and contributions of these graduates are central to the financial health and longevity of communities across this state.

A review of outcomes for some of Oklahoma's most high-demand jobs shows excellent retention and employment rates. Our teacher pipeline is growing, with over 87% of education graduates working in Oklahoma one year after earning a degree. More than 94% of nursing graduates are employed in the state one year after graduation, and over 86% continue to serve Oklahomans five years after graduation.

Public higher education has been in the workforce development business since 1890, when the first territorial legislature established OU, the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (now OSU), and the Territorial Normal School (now UCO). We thank our Governor and Legislature for their steadfast support, including for the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program, a workforce development engine that delivers a lasting, generational impact.

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## KEEP IN TOUCH WITH OSRHE

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# NOC PROJECT AIMS TO ADDRESS OKLAHOMA'S ATHLETIC TRAINER SHORTAGE

By President Diana Morris, Northern Oklahoma College

In developing the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan for Northern Oklahoma College (NOC), our discussions included a focus on Oklahoma's 100 Critical Occupations and seeking ways to fill workforce gaps that exist throughout the state. At NOC, we've found that the most impactful way to fill such gaps is through strategic partnerships and conversations with industry professionals, which is why Goal 4 of our strategic plan is Maximizing External Partnerships.

Oklahoma is facing a shortage of athletic trainers, especially in the northwest, impacting the region's ability to provide high-quality sports injury prevention and care. Enid Public Schools and NOC each went a year without an athletic trainer on staff before finding the right candidate. When we were without someone in this role, we reached out to area hospitals looking for assistance. They, too, were having difficulty finding qualified individuals. Thus, Enid Public Schools, Great Salt Plains Health and St. Mary's Hospital were quick to join us in an effort to "grow our own" athletic trainers.

Utilizing the first-ever awarded Private-Public Partnership (P3) incentive for Education and Workforce Development from the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, NOC will soon begin constructing a new state-of-the-art Athletic Training and Education Center (ATEC) in Enid. Scheduled to open in August of 2026, this 2,000 square foot facility includes classrooms, labs, and training rooms. The ATEC will act as a catalyst to fill Oklahoma's sports medicine workforce gap in K-12 schools, colleges, and hospitals across the state, while also supplying nursing students and other allied health students with hands-on education and training, equipping them for a smooth transition into our four-year partner schools and, ultimately, sports medicine careers.

Collaboration is key to purposeful growth, especially in workforce development. NOC's new athletic training education center would not have been possible without the support and financial contributions from key partners, like the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Enid Regional Development Alliance, Great Salt Plains Health, St. Mary's, and Enid Public Schools.



Additionally, shared knowledge and support from multidisciplinary partners across the region is a critical component of our ability to properly educate students. Our Coordinator of Academic Services for Workforce Readiness works closely with regional professionals to refine our programs to fit current workforce needs. Our nine external advisory boards, each focused on a different industry, gather annually to provide counsel and perspectives on workforce challenges the college can address.

These regular touchpoints with industry professionals help tailor our curriculum to best prepare our students for real-world careers. We do this because we know education changes lives. In order to provide the most effective educational opportunities to students, continual conversation and collaboration are crucial. Our partnerships directly strengthen our curriculum and put students on brighter paths, while nourishing a resilient workforce for Oklahoma.

## OKLAHOMA'S PUBLIC COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY GRADUATES STAY HERE, FILL CRITICAL JOBS

*Continued from page 1*

One year after graduation, nearly 93% of Oklahoma's Promise recipients work in Oklahoma, and almost 85% are still working here five years later.

Across the country and here at home, studies show again and again that the higher the degree a student earns, the higher the salary they're likely to earn. For a strong economy, resilient workforce, and thriving communities, we must continue helping more Oklahomans earn college degrees, then choose to build their lives here.

# OKLAHOMA'S WORKFORCE FUTURE RUNS THROUGH RUSO — SE SHOWS WHY

By President David Whitlock, Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Oklahoma's economic competitiveness depends on a straightforward reality: a state can't grow faster than its workforce. From education and healthcare to aerospace, energy, business, science and technology, every sector relies on a steady supply of trained, job-ready professionals. That's why the Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO) plays such a central role in the state's workforce strategy — and why Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SE) offers a compelling example of that impact in action.

RUSO institutions occupy a unique space in Oklahoma's higher-education ecosystem. When the state needs teachers in rural districts, healthcare professionals, pilots and aerospace specialists, safety professionals, scientists, counselors and business leaders, it's RUSO universities that consistently deliver graduates prepared to enter the workforce quickly and stay.

SE exemplifies this mission-driven model. The university is among the lowest-cost public universities in the nation, expanding access while maintaining strong outcomes. Enrollment exceeded 6,000 students this academic year — the largest in SE's history. About one-third of students are first-generation college students, and roughly 30% identify as Native American, reflecting the institution's deep connections to tribal nations.

Student success is supported by structure and scale. Ninety-two percent of classes enroll fewer than 40 students, with a 22:1 student-faculty ratio that allows for mentorship and applied learning. Flexible delivery options — including in-person, online, and hybrid formats — support traditional students and working adults alike.

Programs in education, business, computer science, management information systems, aviation, aerospace administration, occupational safety and health, counseling and healthcare administration supply professionals across Oklahoma and the region. Across the last three completed five-year periods, SE awarded more than 17,000 degrees, with substantial growth in high-need fields such as education, business administration, aviation and aerospace, and safety.



Employment outcomes confirm the impact. Among in-state graduates, more than 92% of SE graduates are employed in Oklahoma one year after graduation and five years out, over 86% remain employed here — exceeding the state system average in both categories. These results reflect not only job readiness, but graduates' commitment to building their careers in Oklahoma communities.

SE also aligns its liberal arts programs with workforce needs. Communication graduates, performing arts and art programs blend creativity and business and intentionally prepare students for careers in fields such as media, marketing, graphic design, lighting, audio engineering and arts management. Science programs in biology, chemistry, and fisheries and wildlife science support careers in laboratories, conservation, environmental management and public service.

Every Oklahoma institution contributes to workforce development. But RUSO universities deliver some of the strongest returns on public investment in the state. Among the lowest per-student funding levels, these institutions produce a high volume of employed graduates in critical workforce fields, while maintaining affordability and access.

If Oklahoma is serious about strengthening its economy and communities, continued investment in the institutions producing the state's workforce is fiscally responsible and strategically sound.



## QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [Oklahoma public higher education sees decade-long growth in degrees awarded](#)
- [Oklahoma public higher education system completes review of low-producing degree programs to strengthen workforce alignment](#)
- [Oklahoma State Regents approve \\$3.4 million in AI innovation grants to accelerate AI integration in public higher education](#)
- [Oklahoma State Regents award UpskillOK grants to advance AI literacy, workforce development](#)

# ONENET CELEBRATES 30 YEARS

In 2026, OneNet proudly celebrates 30 years as Oklahoma's trusted research and education network. Over the past three decades, we've focused on our mission: to advance research, education, health care, and government.

From K-12 schools to career technology centers, colleges and universities, OneNet has served as Oklahoma's partner in education. Through our efforts to expand research connectivity across our state, OneNet has been recognized as a leader in the national research and education network community.

Beyond education, OneNet delivers high-speed connectivity to libraries, research institutions, healthcare providers, and government entities.

OneNet provides connection to global research initiatives, digital learning tools, and virtual health care. Through our subscribers, OneNet connects Oklahomans within their communities and across the globe.

## ONENET'S BEGINNINGS

In the early 1990s, Oklahoma's state legislature envisioned an integrated state network that would leverage both public and private infrastructures. This vision led to a public-private partnership model and ultimately, to OneNet.

In 1992, voters approved \$14 million from a \$350 million statewide capital bond issue to fund the network. A business plan established OneNet as a division of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, and by 1996, the network was operational. Today, OSRHE continues to provide leadership, and OneNet's infrastructure remains integrated with higher education institutions, with network equipment housed on campuses across the state.

## ONENET'S INFRASTRUCTURE

OneNet's original design was a hub-and-spoke infrastructure, with hubs in Oklahoma City and Tulsa and spokes extending to all corners of the state. At the time, the network supported a bandwidth of 45Mbps. Three decades later, OneNet delivers core bandwidths ranging from 100Gbps to 400Gbps, powering the high-speed connectivity required by Oklahoma's most critical organizations.

In 2025, OneNet completed a network upgrade, expanding our network capacity to 400Gbps. The first milestone upgraded our connection to the Great Plains Network to 400Gbps. This



connection transports subscriber traffic from Oklahoma to Internet2's 400Gbps network and out to the global internet.

OneNet is better equipped than ever to meet our subscribers' growing bandwidth requirements through upstream connectivity of almost 1Tbps through GPN, Internet2 and other partners.

OneNet engineers also replaced equipment at many of our hub sites throughout the state, upgrading from 10Gbps capacities to new infrastructure that supports between 100Gbps and 400Gbps. This investment improves current performance on our network and positions us for future upgrades to 800Gbps and even 1.6Tbps as technology changes.

These upgrades significantly increase the volume of traffic our network can handle and improve speed and reliability for our subscribers.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As we honor 30 years of service, the OneNet team recognizes the vital services each of our subscribers provides to their communities. Our subscribers serve students, patients, researchers and community members. We know that the connectivity OneNet provides plays an important role in subscribers' success in fulfilling their missions, and we remain committed to our mission of providing the connectivity required for our subscribers to serve our fellow Oklahomans.

## WATCH ONENET'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY HIGHLIGHT VIDEO



## OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

- [OU researchers aim to help more Indigenous Oklahomans access cancer care](#)
- [OSU earns two rankings for sustainability efforts](#)
- [OSU-Tulsa launches 4-year degree programs, expanding access for students](#)
- [NSU ranked second in Oklahoma for best online cybersecurity program for 2026](#)
- [SWOSU launches 100% online Doctor of Community Health](#)
- [SE expands special education offerings with new graduate concentration in autism, developmental disabilities](#)
- [OPSU offers technical education through Panhandle Tech program](#)
- [UCO students solving cold cases with Midwest City Police](#)
- [OCCC expands access through microcredentials, ESL classes](#)
- [TCC to offer first-ever bachelor's degree, aiming to strengthen early childhood workforce](#)

## DID YOU KNOW?



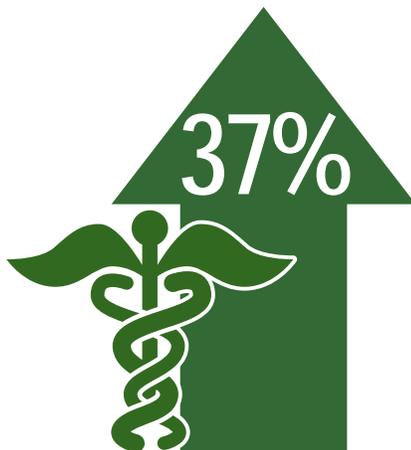
**88%**

Nearly **88%** of degrees and certificates awarded by public colleges and universities in the last academic year were in fields of study aligned with Oklahoma's 100 critical occupations.



**STEM**

Over the last decade, STEM degrees increased nearly **29%** at all levels.



**37%**

Nursing degree and certificate production increased nearly **37%** in the last 10 years.



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