

DEGREES of PROGRESS

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NURSING PROGRAMS SUPPORT HEALTH CARE IN SOUTHWEST OKLAHOMA

By President Chad Wiginton, Western Oklahoma State College

Health care is a critical industry in constant need of workforce supply. No community can exist without health care professionals keeping workers in every other industry healthy. However, across the country, communities are dealing with health care shortages. It is especially prominent in rural communities. Local higher education opportunities in health care address these issues head-on and directly reinforce our local health care systems in caring for our communities.

Since our nursing programs launched in 1981, Western Oklahoma State College (WOSC) has been dedicated to serving the communities surrounding our three campuses. All three of our nursing school locations have partnered with a local hospital to place students directly on-site where they can make a difference and receive hands-on training. With partnerships in Altus at the Jackson County Memorial Hospital, in Elk City at the Great Plains Regional Medical Center (GPRMC) and in Lawton with the Memorial Health Systems of Southwest Oklahoma, our students are actively caring for residents across Southwestern Oklahoma before they even graduate.

These on-site training opportunities benefit everyone. It prepares students to become well-trained, compassionate health care professionals. They provide immediate support for our rural health care system. Many of these students graduate from WOSC with job offers from those same hospitals. WOSC nurses build up the local health care workforce, both in quantity and in quality.

Ensuring our curriculum is current to match the high-quality on-site training at these partner hospitals is important to us. Each semester,



WOSC organizes advisory boards, composed of education professionals and local industry professionals, to evaluate our programs and offer guidance on how we can bolster our offerings.

I'm proud that over the past few years, WOSC has updated a number of our labs to keep our programs innovative and ensure our students receive the highest quality education experience. Last year, GPRMC acquired property and has given us full use of that facility to expand our classroom and lab space at the Elk City location, enhancing the overall learning environment. During the 2024 Congressionally Directed Spending cycle, we received funding through a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant and renovated our nursing skills simulation labs to provide higher quality hands-on training.

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AN EDUCATED WORKFORCE SUPPORTS OKLAHOMA'S INDUSTRY GROWTH

By President Don Raleigh, Rogers State University

As Oklahoma's economy diversifies, the need for workers to fill a vast array of jobs continues to grow, and the state's public universities and colleges are working to meet the workforce needs of business and industry.

Rogers State University, with its main campus in Claremore, and branch campuses in the MidAmerica Industrial Park in Pryor and in Bartlesville, is rapidly expanding its curriculum to meet the call of policymakers and advocacy groups like the State Chamber of Oklahoma.

RSU is located in the heart of Oklahoma's industry expansion, within minutes of Tulsa, MidAmerica Industrial Park and the Tulsa Ports.

In recent years, RSU had added fields of study like chemical engineering, cybersecurity, robotics, drone technology and teacher education to meet workforce demands.

Student demand for these programs is strong. In its first two years, enrollment in chemical engineering was nearly two times what was projected. All 28 students enrolled in the program were from Oklahoma and 24 of them resided in the 918 area code.

Local students who study locally are more likely to remain in the area after graduation.

In recent weeks, RSU officials have met with leadership from Oklahoma Primary Aluminum to discuss workforce need at their proposed new site at the Port of Inola. CBC Global Ammunition has also reached out to RSU about needs at its new facility at the MidAmerica Industrial Park.

RSU is investing to meet the demands of students and industry. In March, the university broke ground on the new Robson Center for Science and Technology. This new \$35 million, 44,000 square foot facility will be the home of its growing STEM related programs.

Funding for the project was accomplished through a public-private partnership, with the State of Oklahoma contributing \$10 million and donors contributing \$13 million, including a gift of \$4 million from the Cherokee Nation.



Moving forward, RSU is working on programs in new areas, such as advanced manufacturing. Accelerated degrees and partnering with K-12 schools and CareerTech to develop multiple pathways to a degree are also an institutional focus.

RSU's story is an example of higher education's commitment to address Oklahoma's workforce issues. Continued investment in higher education from the Legislature is needed to retain and bolster the momentum.

Under the leadership of Chancellor Sean Burrage, the State Regents for Higher Education, and institutional governing boards, Oklahoma's public universities and colleges will play a pivotal role in both the economic growth of the state and the prosperity of Oklahoma families.

NURSING PROGRAMS SUPPORT HEALTH CARE IN SOUTHWEST OKLAHOMA

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Furthermore, ARPA funds through the state of Oklahoma along with financial support from Memorial Health Systems of Southwestern Oklahoma have completely renovated the Lawton campus.

We welcome all types of students, from traditional college students, students who have done concurrent enrollment, and students returning to the classroom after working in the field. At WOSC, we want to provide ample learning opportunities for any locals seeking their degree through our RN program or LPN to RN online program. Students may take courses at one location, but receive their in-person training at a different WOSC training hospital location — we do our best to make earning a degree achievable and eliminate any potential barriers.

Our students, especially our nursing students, remain and work in the region after graduation, directly impacting the strength and long-term health of our region's health care workforce. At WOSC, we want to consistently provide high-quality, comprehensive and cost-effective educational opportunities to support the needs of Southwest Oklahoma. Through collaboration and industry insights with our local partners, we're able to provide a valuable resource that aligns with the needs of our area.

OKLAHOMA FAFSA COMPLETION: BY THE NUMBERS

With the passage of Senate Bill 93 in 2023, Oklahoma public high school seniors are now required to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to graduate. The mandate went into effect beginning with the 2024-25 academic year and the numbers are showing favorable results.

FAFSA completion is the gateway to financial aid for college and career training. Most federal and state need-based financial aid programs, including Oklahoma's Promise, require students to complete the FAFSA to determine eligibility. Many scholarship programs, even those that aren't need-based, ask students to complete the FAFSA to confirm basic eligibility or verify financial information.

Beginning with the class of 2025, in the first year of the FAFSA graduation mandate, FAFSA completion in Oklahoma increased **29.7%** compared to the previous year and Oklahoma **ranked #1 in the nation** for year-over-year growth. By Nov. 28, 2025, **56.4%** of 2025 seniors had completed the application.

Momentum continues with the class of 2026. With an earlier opening of the FAFSA this academic year, seniors are outpacing last year's completion rates. As of March 20, 2026, **40.8%** of 2026 seniors — **21,192 students** — have completed the FAFSA. This represents a **20.8%** increase compared to the class of 2025 at the same point in the application cycle.

OCAP'S ROLE IN FAFSA COMPLETION

The Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) plays a key role in supporting the progress of FAFSA completion in the state. UCanGo2, OCAP's college access initiative, provides customized FAFSA and college-planning presentations, both in person and

virtually, along with free online publications and personalized support for schools' financial aid efforts. Between July 1, 2025, and March 31, 2026, the UCanGo2 outreach team facilitated **140 FAFSA-related outreach events**, including presentations, workshops, and college and career fairs. These efforts reached **more than 6,500 students**, parents, counselors and tribal partners statewide.

OK-FDP

OCAP also supports schools through the Oklahoma FAFSA Data Portal (OK-FDP), a free online tool that helps counselors and other school staff monitor seniors' FAFSA completion in real time. The portal allows educators to verify completion status and identify signature or submission issues requiring follow-up, offering schools the opportunity to provide more individualized assistance to their students. During the 2025–26 academic year, **421 schools serving nearly 49,000 students** are enrolled in the OK-FDP.

To learn more, visit UCanGo2.org and OKHigherEd.org/ok-fdp.

2026 STEM SUMMER ACADEMIES

This summer, middle and high school students will have the opportunity to experience life on a college campus while exploring exciting fields of study at the free 2026 Summer Academies in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

STEM Summer Academies, sponsored by the State Regents, are open to upcoming eighth through 12th graders. Each academy explores the latest trends in science, technology, engineering and math through fun, hands-on activities and innovative technology as students experiment both in the classroom and outdoors. Many academies also include field trips to some of the state's top companies and science facilities.

The 2026 academies will be offered by 12 Oklahoma colleges and universities in May, June and July. The 16 unique academies will be offered statewide and last from four 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. This year, there are seven residential academies and nine unique commuter academies.

Registration for academies opened March 1. Academies are free and enrollment is limited; students are encouraged to apply early. To qualify, students must be entering eighth through 12th grade this fall. The academies are not exclusively for top students but instead are designed to give all students an opportunity to increase their interest and confidence in STEM fields and, ultimately, expand their career and educational aspirations.

The full list of 2026 Summer Academies is available on the [OKcollegestart website](https://OKcollegestart.org).



EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH ADVANCED CONNECTIVITY AT ROSE STATE COLLEGE

By President Travis Hurst, Rose State College

At Rose State College (RSC), innovation is rooted in access: access to education, to opportunity, and increasingly, to the advanced technologies shaping today's workforce and research environment. Expanded high-speed research connectivity is helping us extend that access in powerful new ways for our students and faculty.

Through participation in Oklahoma's OneOklahoma Friction Free Network (OFFN), RSC is gaining access to a high-performance research network designed to support data-intensive work, advanced analytics and collaboration at scale. This opportunity, supported by a National Science Foundation initiative enabled through partnership with OneNet and the State Regents, positions RSC to strengthen both academic programs and applied research efforts.

For RSC, OFFN represents a strategic investment in programs aligned with the future workforce, especially in data science, artificial intelligence and machine learning. These fields depend on the ability to move, analyze and interpret large and complex datasets. With friction-free, high-capacity connectivity, faculty can incorporate more advanced tools into instruction, while students gain hands-on experience using technologies and workflows that mirror real-world environments.

This expanded connectivity also opens the door to growth in biotechnology and bioinformatics, areas where data analysis, computational tools and biological research intersect. As the life sciences become increasingly data-driven, access to advanced cyberinfrastructure is essential. OFFN provides the foundation for exploring new instructional pathways, research initiatives and partnerships that support emerging biotech applications.

Beyond individual programs, the broader impact of OFFN lies in collaboration. Faculty can engage more easily with research partners across the state and nation, pursue interdisciplinary projects and mentor students in authentic research experiences. Students benefit from exposure to complex problem-solving, collaborative research models and career-relevant skills that extend well beyond the classroom.



ROSE STATE COLLEGE

RSC's participation in this statewide research network reflects our commitment to ensuring that students at a community college have access to the same advanced learning opportunities found at larger universities. By aligning infrastructure with academic vision, we are building capacity not only for today's programs but for future innovation.

As technology continues to reshape higher education and the workforce, RSC is leveraging advanced connectivity to stay responsive, relevant and student-focused. Through OFFN, we are expanding what's possible, preparing our students to succeed in data-driven fields and positioning our institution for continued growth in research, collaboration and discovery.



QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

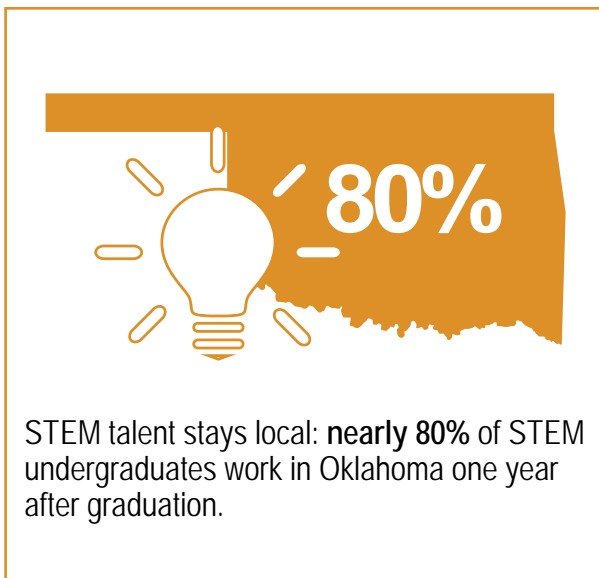
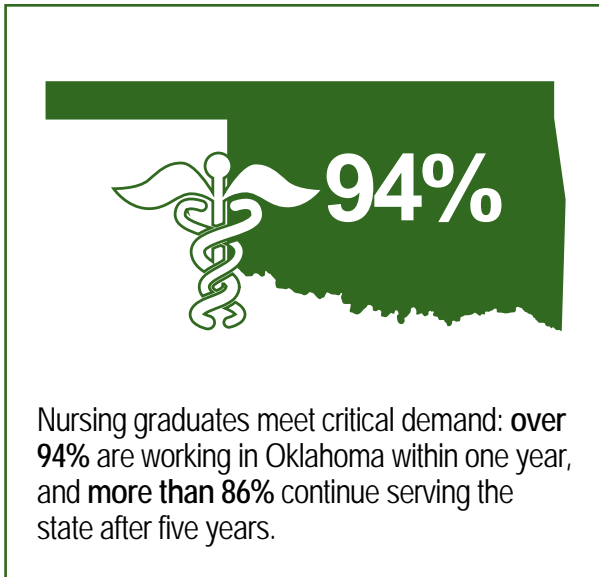
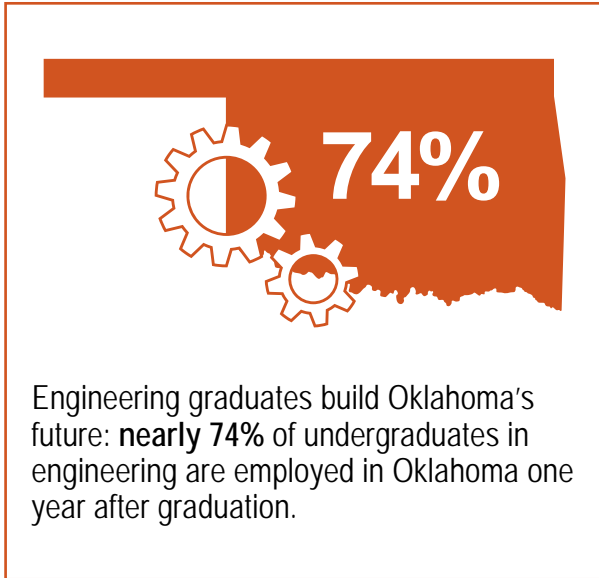
- [Seven Oklahoma high schools named Scholarship Champs](#)
- [Students, higher education representatives gather at State Capitol for Higher Education and Oklahoma's Promise Day](#)
- [Oklahoma 529 Plan growth echoes value of higher education](#)
- [Innovative institution, business partnerships receive Regents Business Partnership Excellence Awards](#)
- [Jeffrey W. Hickman, Dustin J. Hilliary named State Regents Emeriti](#)



OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

- [OSU nursing program grads addressing health care shortages](#)
- [NSU, Cherokee Nation launch Cherokee Futurists Leadership Program](#)
- [SWOSU named 2026 Best Online College Program in Oklahoma by Research.com](#)
- [NEO receives \\$50,000 Cherokee Nation Community Assistance Grant](#)
- [Enrollment increase continues at RCC](#)
- [Coffee Bunker partnership gives TCC nursing students unique patient care experience](#)

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Improving our future by degrees

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