

DEGREES of PROGRESS

eNews from the State Regents for Higher Education

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STRENGTHENING OKLAHOMA'S FUTURE BY DEGREES

By Courtney Warmington, Chair, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

To remain a worthwhile investment for families and for our state, higher education cannot stand still. Oklahoma college students aren't just choosing a career path; they're placing a bet on their future. That future depends not only on expanded access to higher education, but on the relevance of the degrees students earn.

That's why the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education recently conducted a comprehensive statewide review of low-producing degree programs. Not as an exercise in cutting, but as a thoughtful step toward strengthening opportunity for students and the state alike.

Showing remarkable leadership, our public colleges and universities examined 357 programs with low enrollment or completion rates, resulting in strategic changes at the campus level. Ultimately, campuses are phasing out some degree programs, pausing others and reinvesting in many more to boost enrollment, modernize curriculum and better connect students with careers. As part of this process, degrees that directly serve Oklahoma's workforce pipeline are protected even when enrollments are modest, a signal that workforce preparation is not just about numbers, but about meeting real needs in a way that is future-focused and responsive.

Critics may see program closures as a loss. But the reality is more nuanced — and more hopeful. This effort underscores our commitment to aligning academic offerings with workforce demand, elevating student success and prioritizing responsible stewardship of state resources. This is not regression; it is reinvention.

The state regents also recently approved a new performance funding formula for public colleges and universities that reflects public



higher education's *Blueprint 2030* strategic plan, echoes state priorities and incentivizes improved student access and success.

Beginning in FY27, a growing share of state funding for state system institutions will be tied directly to results — from student retention and degree completion to graduate employment and wages. This shift reflects a broader reality and makes a clear statement: beyond enrollment, institutions must help students finish what they start and leave with skills that translate to meaningful jobs. Linking funding to key outcomes like degree production and employment in critical occupations unites our higher education system with the demands of today's workplace.

Notably, the new performance funding model recognizes that not all institutions have the same mission. Research universities, regional universities and community colleges each play distinct roles and serve various audiences. The new methodology acknowledges those differences while holding campuses accountable for results.

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ECU SUPPORTS A STRONG WORKFORCE FOR OKLAHOMA

By President Wendell Godwin, East Central University

What do you remember about college? Maybe it's a test you aced or an event you attended. Most likely, it's the friends you made, the clubs you joined and the relationships you built. At its simplest, college is about earning a degree, but at East Central University (ECU), we know it's best when these years become highly engaged experiences on campus. We prioritize providing students with a well-rounded residential college experience, which includes both quality, cost-efficient education, as well as a tight-knit community of support.

Nursing, our largest degree program, is a prime example of ECU's success in creating a quality degree program. For example, the entire graduating class of nursing students for Fall 2025 received their diplomas having passed the NCLEX (the nursing certification test) and having already acquired a job. Over 84% of our nursing students will stay to work in Oklahoma, and a vast majority of them are working in rural communities, offering much-needed support to the region.

To continue driving support for our nursing program, we are quickly approaching the opening of the new Dan Hays STEM Center, a \$41 million dollar project funded through community contributions and \$7 million in ARPA funds. The new 64,000 square-foot facility will include more than 25 hands-on simulation labs and advanced STEM classrooms. The new site will exponentially increase our capacity to admit and train nursing students by 60%. ECU already has the highest enrollment growth rate in the state, and the new STEM Center is expected to help increase our enrollment rate even further.

It's not enough to solely provide training opportunities to our students. Partnerships are critical to developing well-rounded graduates. Faculty and staff at ECU work closely with employers and professions in and around Ada to coordinate shadowing, mentorship and networking opportunities for students in industries relevant to their studies. This helps bolster student resumes and creates strong ties to the community, which helps keep many students local upon graduation.

We've fostered strong, mutually beneficial relationships with the City of Ada, the



Chickasaw Nation, community organizations, and employers large and small to help propel the local workforce forward. From their support of the new Dan Hays STEM Center to providing scholarships to help draw students to ECU, these partnerships buoy ECU and in turn we produce graduates the region needs to thrive.

As a regional university, we're also able to provide significantly lower costs of attendance compared to our larger university peers. About 41% of our graduates leave college with zero debt, and those that do on average owe less than \$6,000 in student loans. But affordability doesn't signal lower quality. In fact, this year, ECU was ranked as the number one best value school in Oklahoma by Research.com and ranked 92nd in the nation for best value.

As an alum of the university myself, I know firsthand how beneficial ECU's well-rounded educational experience is to a career and a life. It's important to me to continue providing impactful and first-rate college experiences to the next generation of ECU students.

STRENGTHENING OKLAHOMA'S FUTURE BY DEGREES

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Performance-based funding is not a silver bullet, but a step toward a more transparent and consequential system. Implemented thoughtfully, it ensures that public investment delivers what matters most: graduates prepared to thrive in our state's most crucial labor sectors.

Higher education has a responsibility not only to the students we serve, but to the communities in which we operate and to the economy our work impacts. Together, we embrace accountability, emphasize adaptability and execute vision. In a rapidly changing economy, that kind of responsiveness is not optional. It is essential.

EASTERN OKLAHOMA'S WORKFORCE BUILT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS, INNOVATION

By President Jay Falkner and Jaime Henson, Carl Albert State College

Carl Albert State College continues to serve eastern Oklahoma as a regional leader in workforce development through strategic partnerships, professional development, academic expansion, industry alignment and innovation.

One of the most notable areas of academic expansion has been within the Child Development program. Enrollment and engagement have grown exponentially, supported by strong partnerships with the Cherokee Nation, Adventure Head Start, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, and LeFlore County Youth Services. These collective alliances are supplying a skilled pipeline of early childhood professionals across the region, which is presently experiencing substantial voids in childcare options for working adults.

In addition to program growth, instructor Rhonda Few leads workforce readiness efforts within strategic partnerships. She is working closely with the Cherokee Nation to support the launch of their newest child development centers across the region by coordinating and delivering staff development training for employees prior to each center's opening. This proactive approach ensures new childcare facilities are staffed with well-prepared, highly trained professionals.

Significant needs related to shortages in healthcare professionals, specifically in rural Oklahoma, have been a catalyst for growth for our institution. We have utilized funding streams from state appropriations, endowed professorships from the CASC Development Foundation, as well as grant funding to enhance our Allied Health Sciences division. Provisions of new innovative technological resources, increased faculty support, and intensified professional development have paved the way for crucial growth. Our Nursing and Physical Therapist Assistant program participation

numbers have increased by 25% over the past few years. This incredible growth is directly correlated to heightened financial support.

CASC has also expanded our workforce training portfolio through the addition of nine new microcredentials. These short-term, skills-focused credentials are embedded across the Criminal Justice, Occupational Health and Safety, and Child Development academic areas. The microcredentials are designed to provide students and working professionals with targeted, industry-relevant competencies that can be utilized in the workplace, enhancing employability and career advancement opportunities.

Further supporting workforce alignment, Carl Albert has introduced a new Faculty Externship Program through a collaborative alliance between the college, CASC Development Foundation, and industry partners. This provides faculty opportunities to engage with local industries and employers in a structured, hands-on setting. Faculty will gain current, real-world insights into industry practices, evolving technologies, and employer/workforce needs. Participants will complete on-site practicum hours, collaborate with industry partners on meaningful projects and/or observations, and develop a summary of their experience outlining key takeaways and applications for classroom instruction. Attainment achieved from the externships will strengthen curriculum relevance, foster employer relationships, and ensure that students are gaining skills that directly align with regional workforce demands.

All of these efforts reflect Carl Albert State College's continued commitment to meeting the evolving needs of students, employers, and communities through responsive, high-quality workforce development programs. These initiatives have been integrated throughout the institution at all operational levels, as well as



future strategic planning. We take great pride in our role serving our local/regional communities in multi-faceted educational enterprises that will build a better future for all stakeholders.

RCC EXPANDS WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIPS IN OKLAHOMA

By President Jena Marr, Redlands Community College

Meeting Oklahoma's workforce needs requires more than great programs. It requires strong partnerships, innovative thinking and a commitment to removing barriers that stand between students and successful careers.

That philosophy has guided Redlands Community College as we continue to expand opportunities for students while responding to the workforce needs of Oklahoma employers. One of the most exciting examples is our growing partnership with Oklahoma Career Technology Centers.

Since launching these collaborations in 2022, Redlands has worked with Career Technology Centers across the state to give students the opportunity to earn specialized technical training while also completing an associate degree. Instead of asking students to choose between college and career technology, we have created a pathway that combines the strengths of both systems.

The result is more than a credential. Students graduate with technical expertise that allows them to enter the workforce quickly while earning the broader academic foundation that comes with a college degree. That combination develops not only job-specific skills but also critical thinking, communication and problem-solving abilities that employers consistently value. It also creates greater flexibility for graduates who may choose to advance into leadership roles or continue their education later in their careers.

These partnerships prepare students for careers in a variety of high-demand fields, including computer programming, surgical technology, medical coding, aviation maintenance technology, and industrial automation and robotics technology. These industries are essential to Oklahoma's economy and continue to face growing workforce shortages.

The need for these opportunities continues to grow. In 2025, Oklahoma had more than 41,000 jobs requiring an associate degree, and demand for associate-degree holders is projected to continue increasing through 2030. Redlands is committed to ensuring students are prepared to meet that demand while

providing Oklahoma employers with a pipeline of highly skilled graduates who are ready to contribute immediately.

Our commitment does not stop with an associate degree. Through our partnership with OSU Institute of Technology, graduates of Redlands' Applied Technology programs can seamlessly transfer into its Bachelor of Technology in Applied Industry Leadership program. Students who begin with technical training can continue building their education without losing credits or momentum, opening the door to supervisory and leadership positions while remaining connected to Oklahoma's workforce.

Affordability is another essential part of the equation. While expanding educational opportunities and developing new workforce partnerships, Redlands has held tuition and mandatory fees flat for nine consecutive years. At a time when the cost of higher education can be a challenge, we believe affordability should never stand in the way of opportunity. Combined with scholarships, student support services and innovative academic pathways, this commitment helps students complete their education with less debt and enter the workforce sooner.

Collaboration, innovation and a shared commitment to student success are vital to addressing the challenges facing Oklahoma's workforce. At Redlands, we are proud to work alongside Career Technology Centers, business and industry, and university partners to create educational pathways that strengthen our workforce, support economic growth and provide students with the opportunity to build rewarding careers close to home.



OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

- [Oklahoma Children's OU Health, OKCPS partner to staff pediatric behavioral health center](#)
- [OSU partners with Love's Alternative Energy to power transit buses with RNG](#)
- [NSU expands nursing degree with two new focuses](#)
- [RSU preparing Oklahoma's workforce for what's next](#)
- [UCO, Millwood Public Schools launch concurrent enrollment partnership](#)
- [RCC, RSC, SSC book deal to share library work](#)
- [TCC dual credit program earns national accreditation](#)

ONENET COMPLETES 400GBPS NETWORK UPGRADE

OneNet put the final touches on a 400Gbps network upgrade — deployed in phases throughout 2025 and spring 2026 — to deliver higher bandwidth and more reliable connectivity for OneNet subscribers across Oklahoma.

As part of the final design phase, OneNet engineers and technicians deployed new equipment to 48 hubsites, expanding capacity to move traffic throughout the state and connecting subscribers, whether they're teaching, learning, delivering care or supporting essential services.

Capacity was significantly increased from 10Gbps to 400Gbps in most locations, boosting bandwidth and reducing traffic latency, so subscribers will see better performance as network demand continues to grow.

The project included upgrading OneNet's 100Gbps connectivity to Dallas to 400Gbps, strengthening capacity to move traffic out of the state and improving the paths subscribers use to reach cloud services, applications and partners.

RESEARCH CONNECTIVITY

One project goal was to increase network capacity for research traffic to enable researchers at higher education institutions to participate in global research projects without network constraints.

The upgrade was driven by the data movement requirements for global research projects at the University of Oklahoma and the new OAK Supercomputing Center at Oklahoma State University. The 400Gbps connections to these two campuses will support the increasing research computing requirements for faculty and researchers, and

the expanded capacity will provide space for future growth in research traffic for universities.

This upgrade adds the required capacity to the network backbone to ensure bandwidth not just for campus connectivity, but for researchers who need to transfer large datasets both across OneNet and to other peer institutions via Great Plains Network, Internet2, ESnet, and others.

RURAL CONNECTIVITY

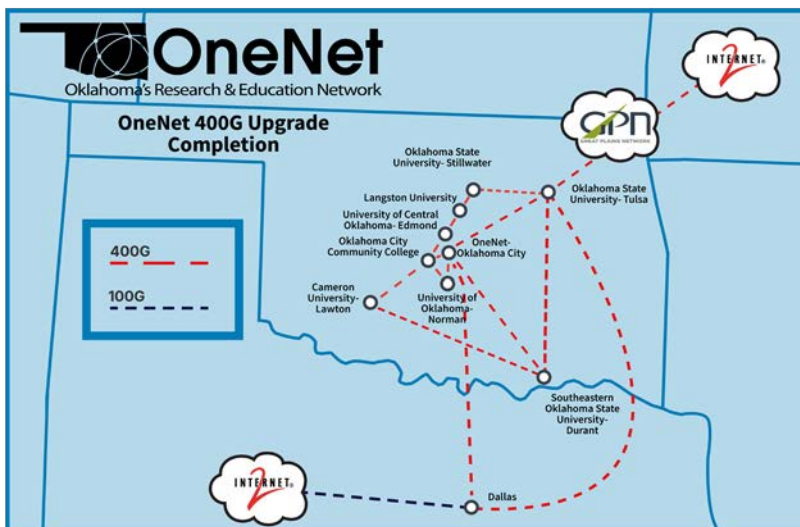
The upgrade also increases capacity for OneNet's rural subscribers, supporting dependable connectivity for K-12 schools, libraries, career technology centers, hospitals, medical clinics and government agencies in smaller communities.

The new 400Gbps backbone extends to Woodward in the northwest part of the state, to Durant in the southeast, and many other communities across the Oklahoma Community Anchor Network. This upgrade helps to meet the ever-increasing bandwidth needs of rural schools and libraries driven by the increased use of technology and internet-based learning resources.

FUTURE CONNECTIVITY

While this upgrade advances most of the network to 400Gbps, it also prepares OneNet to meet subscribers' future connectivity requirements.

When selecting new equipment, one goal was to create an easy upgrade path for 800Gbps and beyond. The new core routers in Oklahoma City and Tulsa are currently 800Gbps capable. Many of the other routers at the higher education institutions will also be able to support 800Gbps.



This project may include content that was generated in part with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools.



QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [State Regents approve new performance funding formula, allocate funds for Oklahoma colleges, universities](#)
- [State Regents approve policy structure for consideration of 90-hour bachelor's degrees](#)
- [State Regents' Council for Online Learning Excellence honors outstanding work of faculty, administrators, departments, team](#)
- [Beller, Pemberton sworn in as new State Regents](#)
- [Five outstanding seniors named Chancellor Hans Brisch Scholars](#)
- [State Regents continue to keep tuition affordable](#)
- [Officers elected to lead State Regents](#)
- [Seamless course transfer through the CEP continues to strengthen Oklahoma's workforce pipeline](#)

NEW PERSONAL FINANCIAL LITERACY STANDARD MODULES AVAILABLE ON OKMM

Oklahoma students now have a new way to learn the financial skills they need for success in high school, college and beyond. Oklahoma Money Matters (OKMM) has launched a comprehensive collection of learning modules for each of Oklahoma's 14 core Personal Financial Literacy (PFL) standards. These resources are now available on the newly redesigned OklahomaMoneyMatters.org website, making it easier than ever for students, educators, and families to access high-quality financial education.

Financial literacy is an essential life skill. From creating a budget and understanding taxes to managing credit and planning for retirement, students need practical knowledge to make informed financial decisions. The new PFL section of OklahomaMoneyMatters.org was designed to help students build these skills through engaging, self-paced learning modules that support Oklahoma's high school graduation requirements and financial literacy goals.

INTERACTIVE LEARNING FOR PFL STANDARDS

Dedicated learning modules covering each of Oklahoma's 14 Personal Financial Literacy standards include:

1. Earning an income
2. State and federal taxes
3. Managing financial accounts
4. Savings and investing
5. Planning for retirement
6. Renting vs. buying a home
7. Consumer credit
8. Borrowing money
9. Interest, credit card debt, commerce
10. Identity theft
11. Insurance
12. Gambling
13. Bankruptcy
14. Charitable giving

Each module provides easy-to-understand content designed to help students develop real-world money management skills they can use throughout their lives.

BUILT-IN QUIZZES, PROGRESS TRACKING

To reinforce learning, every module includes a short quiz that allows students to test their understanding of the material. Through the PFL Quiz Hub, students can track their progress and share quiz results with educators, making the platform a valuable classroom resource as well as an independent learning tool.

SUPPORTING OKLAHOMA EDUCATORS

The new website was created to support financial literacy both inside and outside the classroom. [Educators](#) can use the modules to supplement lessons, assign specific standards for review, or provide students with additional opportunities to strengthen their financial knowledge. The user-friendly design makes it easy to locate resources and navigate between financial literacy topics.

In addition, OKMM offers outreach support for schools and organizations interested in expanding financial education opportunities for students. The OKMM team is available to assist schools with PFL instruction and related financial literacy presentations.

EXPLORE THE NEW WEBSITE TODAY

The redesigned OklahomaMoneyMatters.org website offers a streamlined experience with updated resources, educational tools and financial literacy content for students, parents, and educators. Whether you're preparing for graduation requirements, exploring personal finance topics, or looking for classroom-ready resources, the site provides valuable information to help build lifelong financial success.

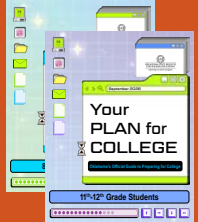
Visit the Personal Financial Literacy Standards section of OklahomaMoneyMatters.org and start exploring the 14 interactive learning modules today.

2026-27 COLLEGE PLANNING PUBLICATIONS

This fall, the State Regents will offer free online college planning publications for Oklahoma students and school counselors.

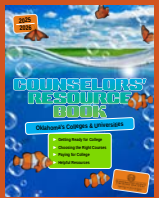
YOUR PLAN FOR COLLEGE

These digital brochures for students in grades 8-10 and 11-12 outline the courses they must take in high school to be admitted to an Oklahoma public college or university, as well as financial aid information, estimated college costs, salary expectations for various jobs and information about campus comparison and selection.



COUNSELORS' RESOURCE BOOK

This online publication for school counselors provides information about preparing for college, choosing the right courses, college costs, financial aid and additional helpful resources.



OKLAHOMA FINANCIAL LITERACY STANDARDS



OKMM
OKLAHOMA MONEY MATTERS

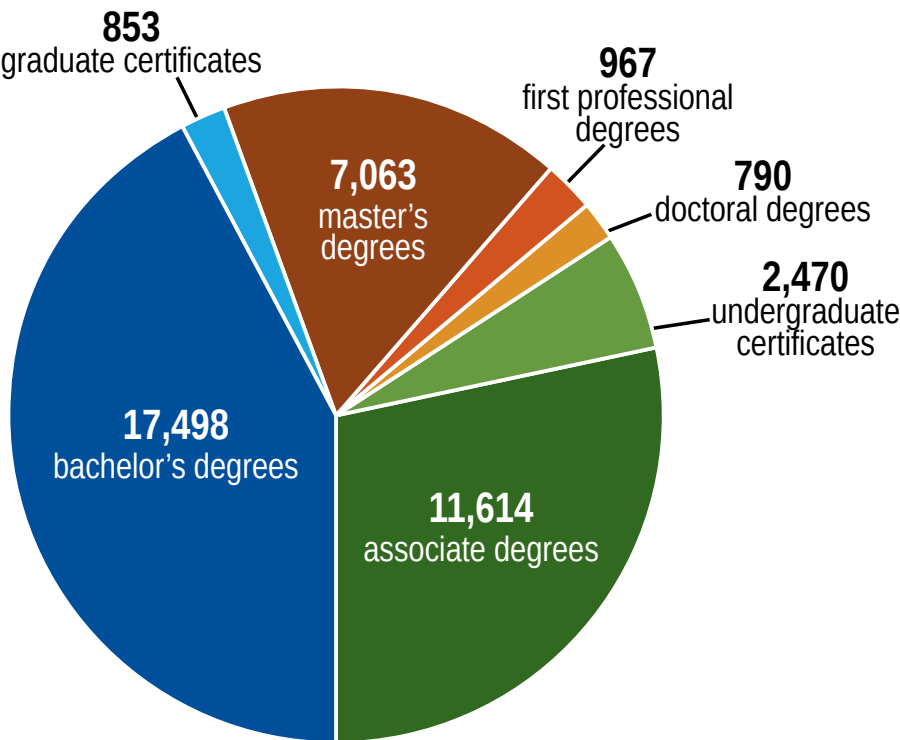
Degrees and certificates awarded
in AY25: **41,255**



Of AY25 undergraduate degrees
and certificates awarded, percent
in critical occupations: **90%**



OF AY25 DEGREES AND CERTIFICATES AWARDED:



<https://okhighered.org/studies-reports/dashboards/>



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Improving our future by degrees

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