

DEGREES of PROGRESS

eNews from the State Regents for Higher Education

Volume 11, Issue 4 | Fall 2026



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 Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

 Oklahoma State Regents

RURAL HEALTHCARE GROWTH STARTS WITH LOCAL HIGHER EDUCATION

By President Rodney Hanley, Northeastern State University

Oklahoma's rural communities are vibrant and hardworking. Yet, there is still a shortage of available healthcare workers in rural communities.

Serving the rural communities that built us is vital to the education provided by Northeastern State University (NSU). It is not enough to provide quality higher education to the region, we want to empower our students to serve in rural communities where many of them grew up.

NSU's Doctor of Optometry program is one of the top optometry programs in the country, consistently ranking first or second across all meaningful evaluation categories. Our students receive a high-quality classroom education, while encountering opportunities to go out and provide care in local communities that otherwise would likely not receive quality vision healthcare. After graduation, these students continue supporting Oklahoma eye health — there is a practicing optometrist who graduated from NSU in every Oklahoma county and over 80% of Oklahoma optometrists are NSU alumni. It's likely that if you wear glasses, your optometrist is a proud NSU RiverHawk.

Last fall, we strengthened our optometry offerings for both students and community members with the a \$40 million College of Optometry facility in Tahlequah. The entire first floor of the new 78,000 square-foot building is home to an eye care clinic open to the public that allows students to gain even more hands-on experience. The facility houses laboratory spaces, spectacle fabrication labs, vision therapy spaces for younger children, and many more dedicated student learning areas. It is a milestone facility for providing enhanced eye care to the surrounding region and elevates our educational opportunities for students.



NORTHEASTERN
STATE UNIVERSITY

Our nursing program is growing too, with a new full licensing degree that kicks off this fall semester. NSU has always offered a RN (Registered Nurse) to BSN (Bachelor's of Science in Nursing) program, which helped previously registered nurses earn their BSN degree, as well as a Master's degree program. Our new BSN degree program focuses on students starting from scratch, whether straight from high school or making a career change, and directs them to becoming a RN and earning their BSN degree.

Continued on page 2

THE FUTURE OF MSC IS ROOTED IN OPPORTUNITY

By President Tim Faltyn, Murray State College

When I look at the work we are doing at Murray State College, I see something bigger than almost doubling enrollment numbers, new programs or new buildings. I see pathways — pathways that help students turn their potential into opportunity and, ultimately, into careers that strengthen their families, their communities and our state.

There is no question that Murray State is experiencing tremendous momentum. Since 2021, our enrollment has grown by 45%, strengthening our ability to serve students throughout southern Oklahoma. We are proud of that growth, but growth alone is not our destination. Our focus is on what that growth makes possible.

At Murray State, we are increasingly confident in who we are and in the role we play as one of the nation's leading workforce-focused colleges. We are listening to our students, our communities and the employers who depend on the talent we help prepare. We are developing programs and partnerships that connect education to meaningful careers while creating more flexible ways for students to access higher education.

We are also investing in places where students can learn by doing. The Westheimer Southern Oklahoma Nursing Education Center, our new Gunsmithing facility and the renovation of Historic Chickasaw Hall into The 1919 Hotel are more than construction projects. They are investments in our students and in the workforce we want to strengthen.

Perhaps most importantly, we are seeing the results of this approach in the success of our students. Murray State has experienced three consecutive years of record-breaking graduating classes, and 94% of our graduates enter critical occupations. That tells us something important: what happens in our classrooms is translating into opportunity beyond our campuses.

But preparing students for success requires more than strong academic programs. Students need to feel supported, connected and that they belong. That is why we continue to remove barriers, expand access and invest in scholarships and financial assistance. We want every student who walks through our doors to have the opportunity — and the support — to



finish what they start.

As we look to the future, I believe our greatest opportunity is to build on this momentum with purpose. We will continue to grow where growth creates opportunity. We will continue to invest where investment strengthens our students and our communities. And we will continue to build partnerships that make the path from education to employment more accessible and meaningful.

The future of Murray State will be predicated on our ability to functionally offer degrees that solve workforce shortages and transform our region in positive ways. This would create sustainable success not only for Murray State, but for the state of Oklahoma.

Most importantly, we will continue doing what Murray State has always done best: helping students discover the promise of their potential and giving them the tools, support and confidence to pursue it.

Our success will not ultimately be measured by how many students we enroll. It will be measured by how many lives we help change, how many futures we help build and how much stronger our communities become because of the people who began their journey at Murray State.

That is momentum with a purpose — and I believe our best days are still ahead.

RURAL HEALTHCARE GROWTH STARTS WITH LOCAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Continued from page 1

The physician assistant (PA) degree program is specifically designed to support rural healthcare growth. The program includes 35 hours of clinical training at various medical centers across northeast Oklahoma, including the Northeastern Health System and Cherokee Nation, Muscogee (Creek) Nation Health Centers. With intentional clinics and rotations across NE Oklahoma, our PA students graduate well-prepared for careers in rural health.

Oklahoma ranks 5th in need for more rural healthcare workers, and NSU is doing our part to help fill those gaps and direct care back to those who need it most. Our healthcare degree programs are specifically designed with the intent of supporting rural communities in NE Oklahoma. Because by enriching the small, local communities that built us, we enrich our futures.

SWOSU'S LONG HISTORY OF PREPARING OKLAHOMA'S AEROSPACE, DEFENSE WORKFORCE

By President Joel Kendall, Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Aerospace is in SWOSU's DNA.

Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) has a long history of preparing our students to serve a critical workforce need. It trained military personnel during World War I. It trained pilots during World War II. It sent SWOSU graduates to direct NASA's Gemini and Apollo missions in the 1960s. And today, it places students in top positions within Oklahoma's aerospace and defense employers.

Aerospace is Oklahoma's second largest industry, generating over \$44 billion in annual economic activity and supporting over 206,000 jobs across the state. As the industry continues to grow at this rapid pace, we will need workforce-ready graduates who can help our local industry flourish. SWOSU helps meet that need.

Our aerospace and defense programs are intentionally aligned with requirements within the aerospace and defense sector. With degrees such as Engineering Technology, Engineering Physics, Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence, and more, SWOSU graduates leave campus ready to excel in careers that support Oklahoma's aerospace and defense industry. SWOSU's Engineering Physics program recently earned ABET accreditation, placing its degree at the level of accredited engineering programs across Oklahoma and the nation. The program joins SWOSU's Manufacturing Engineering Technology in holding ABET accreditation.

Another measure of program quality is where our students go. SWOSU students regularly earn internships and positions with aerospace and defense leaders, including Kratos, Boeing, Textron Aviation, NORDAM, and Tinker Air Force Base.

Preparation for those high-quality jobs extends beyond the classroom. SWOSU's Rover Dawgs compete in NASA's Human Exploration Rover Challenge, an annual international competition that challenges student teams to design and build rovers capable of traversing challenging terrain. This year, SWOSU entered both human-powered and remote-controlled rovers, with the teams finishing fourth and fifth in the world.

SWOSU is also strategically located within Oklahoma's growing aerospace ecosystem. Our campus in Weatherford — the "Space



City" of Oklahoma — places our students only 35 miles from the Oklahoma Spaceport at Burns Flat and about an hour away from the aerospace corridor near Oklahoma City. Here in Weatherford, the Stafford Air & Space Museum works closely with our programs and even provides scholarships to qualified students. Our location optimizes our students' ability to connect with employers and increases their likelihood for post-graduate opportunities.

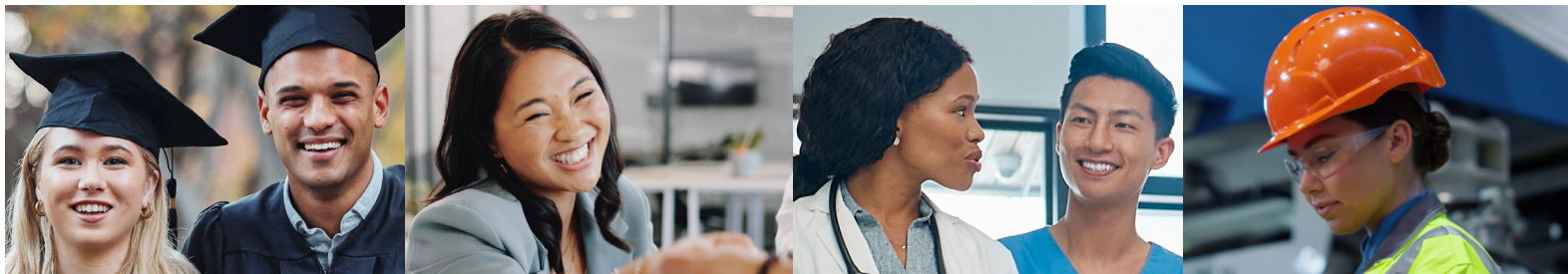
SWOSU consistently ranks as a top value school, due to our commitment to affordability and maintaining a high-quality education for our students. That matters for Oklahoma because SWOSU is educating Oklahomans who stay here. More than 92% of SWOSU students are from Oklahoma, and more than 90% of those students stay and work in Oklahoma after graduation. Plus, nearly 60% of SWOSU's out-of-state students also stay in Oklahoma after they graduate. For an industry that needs a growing supply of highly-skilled workers, those numbers matter.

It is an exciting time for the aerospace industry in Oklahoma and SWOSU aims to help feed the workforce pipeline. For generations, our role has remained consistent: prepare talented people who are ready to do important work. With our high-quality curriculum and experiential learning as well as our dedication to connecting students with industry opportunities, SWOSU ensures those earning a degree are capable and ready for the workforce.



QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [State Regents approve 90-hour bachelor's...](#)
- [Oklahoma College App Week set for Sept...](#)
- [2026-27 college prep materials available t...](#)
- [State Regents' Free Speech Committee h...](#)
- [State Regents approve plan to meet Okla...](#)
- [Oklahoma public higher education grad...](#)
- [Oklahoma Legislators receive Higher Edu...](#)



2027 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education



OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
Improving our future by degrees



SUPPORTING CAMPUS RESEARCH CAPACITY & PARTNERSHIPS

Investing in a strong research ecosystem will empower Oklahoma to remain competitive, resilient, and forward-thinking. 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. Academic research attracts federal grants and private investments, creates high-skill jobs, informs public policy, enhances education, and addresses region-specific challenges.



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. Funding support is requested to ensure we continue to keep the promise to every eligible Oklahoma student.



INSPIRED TO TEACH

The Inspired to Teach scholarship and employment incentive program continues to positively impact Oklahoma's teacher education pipeline. Since inception, enrollment in teacher preparation programs has increased 8%, including a 25% increase in freshman enrollment in education. Goals for the 2027 legislative session include increasing the scholarship amount and providing stipend support for the required student teaching segment of the degree-earning process.



OKLAHOMA RISING SCHOLARS AWARD

The Oklahoma Rising Scholars Award provides scholarships to academically outstanding students who attend an Oklahoma college or university. Rising Scholars receive a scholarship to help cover the cost of room, board, tuition, books and incidental fees for up to eight semesters. The program grew substantially in the last academic year, empowering our state to retain more of the most talented students right here at home. Additional funding is needed to ensure every eligible Oklahoma student receives full financial assistance through the program.



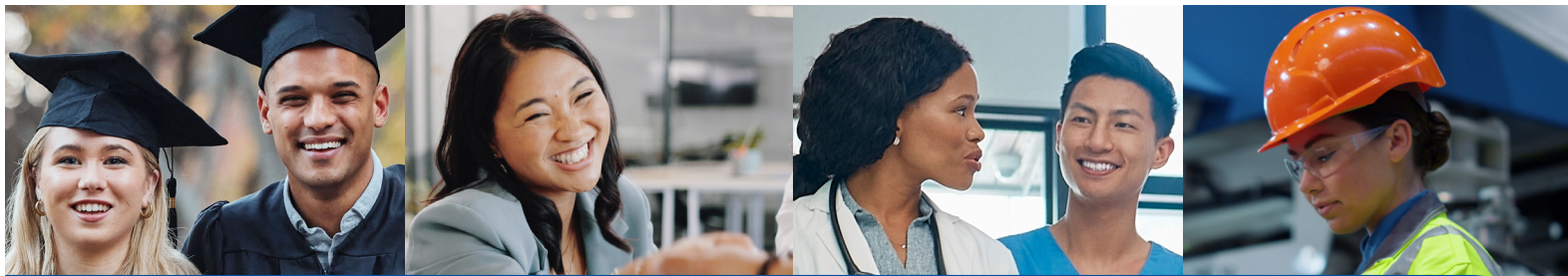
CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

The concurrent enrollment program allows eligible high school juniors and seniors to get a head start on college by taking courses for college credit while still in high school. Participating students may also be eligible to receive a tuition waiver. Concurrent enrollment strengthens student preparation, reduces family college costs and decreases the time required to complete a degree. The State Regents will continue efforts to refine concurrent participation options, financial models and course delivery modes to strengthen the program for Oklahoma students.



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 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.



2027 FUNDING REQUEST

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education



FY 2027 BASE APPROPRIATION

\$1,043,365,616

FY 2028 BUDGET NEED

Total Strategic Operations	\$80,700,000
A. Shared Services and Efficiency Initiatives	\$3,000,000
B. Support for Colleges and Universities Allocated via New Performance Funding Formula	\$35,000,000
C. Research and Innovation Account — Competitive Awards Allocated by the State Regents	\$15,000,000
D. Employee Health Benefits Cost Stabilization	\$21,200,000
E. Campus Safety, Security, and Cybersecurity	\$6,500,000

FY 2028 APPROPRIATION REQUEST

\$1,124,065,616

- \$ Difference in Operations funding from FY 2027 State Appropriation \$80,700,000
- % Difference in Operations funding from FY 2027 State Appropriation 7.7%

Legislative Initiatives and Programming	\$50,000,000
A. National Guard Educational Assistance Program	\$2,000,000
B. Oklahoma Rising Scholars Award	\$4,000,000
C. Concurrent Enrollment Participation Expansion	\$12,000,000
D. Oklahoma's Promise Scholarship	\$32,000,000

Deferred Maintenance — One-Time (Included in Budget Needs Survey) \$75,000,000

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| A. FY 2028 Deferred Maintenance Projects from OCAMP Apportionment
All Colleges and Universities | \$75,000,000 |
|--|--------------|

ONENET EXTENDS SCOPE OF RESEARCH NETWORK PROJECTS

OneNet recently extended two projects to expand the OneOklahoma Friction Free Network (OFFN), Oklahoma's dedicated research network, adding OFFN connectivity for five more college campuses.

OFFN is a research network that provides higher education institutions with a specialized internet connection dedicated to research and education and access to resources with sophisticated capabilities that aren't geographically limited for students and faculty.

The National Science Foundation's Campus Cyberinfrastructure (CC*) program provides funding for OFFN and approved extending the scope of these projects. The CC* program invests in campus-level networking and cyberinfrastructure improvements for science and research projects.

CORE-MORE-OFFN

Originally funded in 2024, the Creating Opportunities for Research & Education Multiple Organization Regional OneOklahoma Friction Free Network (CORE-MORE-OFFN) project connected Connors State College, Eastern Oklahoma State College, Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College, and Oklahoma Panhandle State University. By identifying network equipment cost savings and a change in the needs for the original campuses, OneNet added OFFN connections for Carl Albert State College (CASC) and Tulsa Community College (TCC). At CASC, OFFN will support STEM education, including nursing program clinicals training, game development, database development, cloud-based labs for computer forensics, and cloud resources for

microcomputer applications learning. TCC will utilize OFFN for cybersecurity, aviation, and engineering technology programs, as well as database and interactive learning tools for general academics.

FUSE-MORE-OFFN

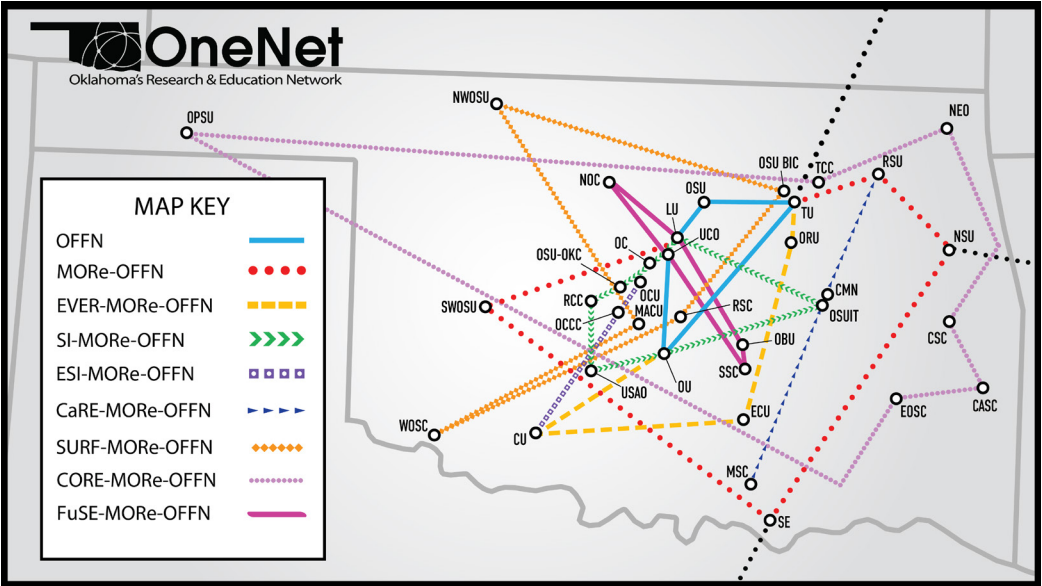
Also funded in 2024, the Furthering Scientific Endeavors Multiple Organization Regional OneOklahoma Friction Free Network (FuSE-MORE-OFFN) project provided upgrades to OFFN connectivity for Langston University and the University of Central Oklahoma, which were first connected to OFFN in 2013. Thanks to network equipment cost savings, OneNet added new connectivity for Northern Oklahoma College (NOC), Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), and Seminole State College (SSC). At NOC, OFFN will help advance NASA green house gas data collaboration, rural confluence research, and energy assessment activities (in partnership with Oklahoma State University). OBU will use OFFN for educational programs, such as cybersecurity, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and interdisciplinary computing activities. SSC will leverage OFFN for computing initiatives, including hands-on computing, cybersecurity, programming, and technology-enabled instruction.

The CORE-MORE-OFFN project is set to be completed in March 2027, and the FuSE-MORE-OFFN project will close in December 2027. When these projects are completed, OFFN will connect 36 Oklahoma campus locations to cyberinfrastructure resources and capabilities that create opportunities for students and faculty that weren't available in the past.

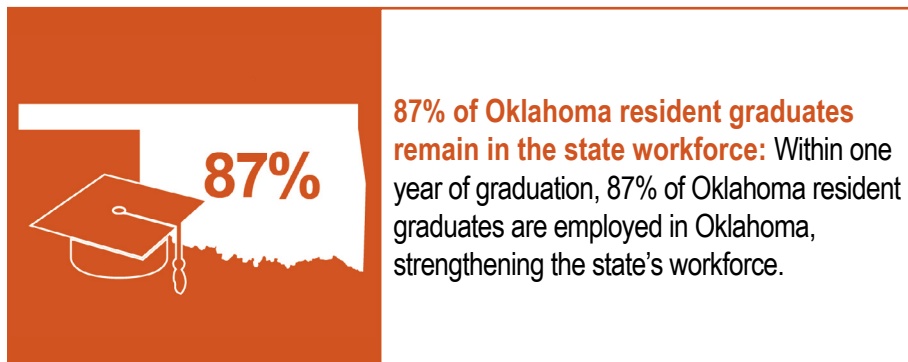
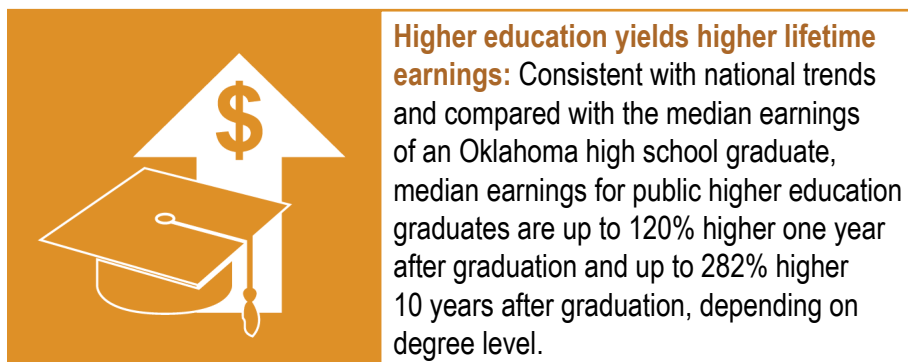
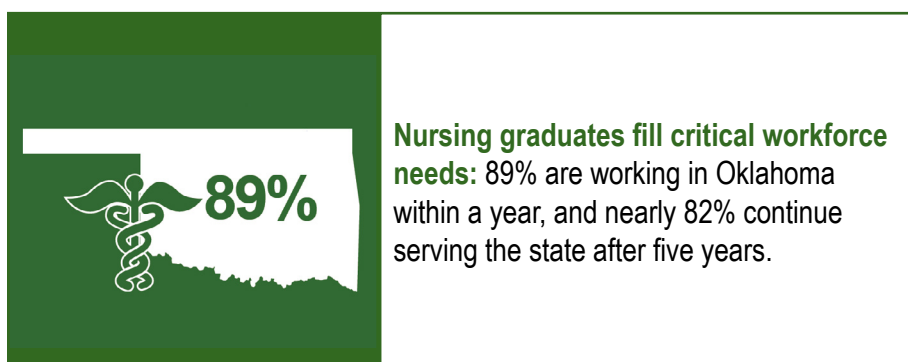


OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

- [New OU scholarship to cover tuition, av...](#)
- [OSU reports highest Oklahoma enrollm...](#)
- [NSU, CASC launch joint institution to e...](#)
- [Cherokee Nation, RSU sign workforce ...](#)
- [SE ranked No. 6 among nation's Top 1...](#)
- [SWOSU expands degree opportunities...](#)
- [CU partners with Caddo-Kiowa Tech C...](#)
- [NEO's Physical Therapist Assistant an...](#)
- [OCCC, Memorial Health team up for ne...](#)
- [RCC celebrates record fall enrollment, u...](#)
- [TCC reports highest enrollment since 2...](#)



DID YOU KNOW?



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Improving our future by degrees

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