Data Show Higher Education’s Value and Priorities
Chancellor Glen D. Johnson

Recent public statements have included erroneous data about Oklahoma’s state system of higher education. I believe Oklahomans want and deserve the facts.

Despite what some will say, as state support for a college education continues to drop, more of the cost shifts to parents and students. As a result, a college education could become out of reach for some Oklahomans — at a time when a college degree has never been more valuable.

With budget cuts exceeding $153 million from FY 2016 to FY 2017 and current appropriations below 2001 levels, funding for public higher education has been set back a full generation. Nevertheless, keeping college affordable remains a top priority for the State Regents. For example, annual tuition increases at our public colleges and universities have averaged only 4.9 percent since FY 2009, while many states have seen double-digit increases.

The respected U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation ranks our state system of higher education as the fifth-most affordable in the nation, and the National Center for Education Statistics reports that the average student cost at a four-year public institution in Oklahoma is third-lowest in the nation. Student loan debt at our campuses is 23 percent below the national average, and nearly half of all Oklahoma students leave college with no loan debt.

Over the last nine years, higher education has invested significantly more in academics than in administration. As a percentage of total budgeted revenue, Oklahoma public institutions have increased investment in academic services from 75 to 78 percent while decreasing administration costs from 6.6 to 5.7 percent during this time period. That is a fact — the percentage of administration costs has decreased.

Oklahoma public higher education fares very well in comparison to the 16 peer member states of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). SREB’s State Data Exchange 2014–15 Indicators Report shows that Oklahoma’s public four-year colleges and universities have the lowest annual tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students; the third-highest increase in the number of degrees and certificates conferred; and the second-lowest full-time faculty salaries. That is a fact — Oklahoma colleges are good stewards of the taxpayer’s money.

We will not waiver from our commitment to degree completion, because increasing the number of Oklahoma college degree and certificate holders is key if we are to meet the state’s workforce needs by 2020. Nationally, more than 30 percent of adults over the age of 25 hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. In Oklahoma, that number is just above 24 percent — we have work to do. Working collaboratively, public and private institutions and career technology centers have surpassed our Complete College America degree completion goals to date, accomplishments achieved during a time of dwindling state support.

More than 90 percent of national earnings growth over the last decade has been driven by citizens with a college degree. It is imperative our state reverse course and start investing again in Oklahoma’s higher education system to help us build a better and brighter future for all.
Degrees of Progress | Fall 2016

Guest Commentary: Higher Ed Support Needed to Strengthen and Diversify Oklahoma Economy

Secretary Natalie Shirley
State Secretary of Education and Workforce Development, President of Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City

With the resolution of last year’s historic budget shortfall in our review mirror, a glance back reveals the collateral damage left in the wake. Higher education in Oklahoma will be picking up the pieces for years to come as state colleges and universities deal with a 16 percent across-the-board cut in state appropriations for fiscal year 2017.

Who bears the brunt of this cut? Regrettably, it will be the economic well-being of our state and its citizens at a time we can least afford it.

Unfortunately, while some sought to find solutions for our colleges and universities, others chose to vilify higher education with little regard for the critical role it plays in our state.

Let’s set the record straight.

Even with the recent tuition and mandatory fee increases necessitated by staggering budget cuts, Oklahoma is still among the most affordable states to get a college degree. Student loan debt here is among the lowest in the nation. Most importantly, there is a critical need for college degrees and certifications. By 2020, the Oklahoma Educated Workforce Initiative estimates 64 percent of Oklahoma jobs will require postsecondary education. We are not on track to meet that demand. According to U.S. Census information, only 37 percent of Oklahomans will have the level of education needed to fill those jobs.

Oklahoma has worked hard to earn bragging rights for our pro-business environment, putting us at the top of several impressive national rankings. Dramatic budget cuts that limit higher education’s ability to produce an educated and skilled workforce could quickly knock Oklahoma out of the competition for new jobs.

As a former secretary of commerce, I can tell you that college graduation rates rightfully play a significant role in a company’s decision to locate or expand in Oklahoma.

Over the past several years, we have diversified business opportunities in Oklahoma in a way never before seen in our state’s history. The expansion into other industry segments came on the promise of a qualified workforce. It is critical that Oklahoma secures a foothold in a high-skill, high-tech economy. In order to make that possible, we need to strengthen Oklahoma’s higher education system instead of relentlessly attacking it.

Earning a college degree is the cornerstone for a strong middle class. Spend a day on our OSU-OKC campus (or any other in the state) and you will see first-generation students, working adults and recent high school grads all working to achieve more for themselves and their families.

These students understand that higher education will help them reach career goals that are likely unattainable without a degree. Policy leaders should recognize that what is true for these students is also true for our state. If Oklahoma desires to become a more prosperous state, we need to invest in our future by educating our people. The entire state will see the return.

Photo courtesy of Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City.
Chancellor Johnson Elected SHEEO Executive Committee Treasurer and SREB Vice Chair

Chancellor Glen D. Johnson was recently elected treasurer of the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) Executive Committee. He was also reelected vice chair of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) for a fourth term.

SHEEO, the national association of the chief executives of statewide governing boards and coordinating boards for postsecondary education, assists state efforts to develop and sustain excellent systems of higher education. The Executive Committee is responsible for shaping SHEEO’s federal priorities and strategies and for leading its communications with Congress, the U.S. Department of Education and other federal agencies.

The SREB is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works with 16 member states to improve public education at every level. As vice chair of SREB’s 80-member board, Johnson works with governors, legislators and state education leaders to improve public education and student achievement across the region from pre-K through the postsecondary level.

Johnson was named chancellor of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education in January 2007 following a national search. Before assuming the role of chancellor, he served as the 16th president of Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant for 10 years. He was also director of public policy and adjunct professor of law at the University of Oklahoma College of Law. Prior to his work at OU, he served in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 1982 to 1996 and was speaker of the House from 1990 to 1996. At the time of his election as speaker, he was the youngest sitting speaker in the United States.

2016 Campus Safety and Security Summit

Monday, Nov. 7, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education’s Campus Safety and Security Task Force will hold the 2016 Campus Safety and Security Summit in partnership with the Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security, Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, City of Midwest City and Rose State College.

The summit’s opening plenary will be given by Dr. Katie Treadwell of the Office of First-Year Experience at the University of Kansas. Dr. Treadwell, a published expert in crisis management and response, will focus on campus and community healing in the wake of crisis.

The keynote address will be given by Vanessa Becker, a trustee at Umpqua Community College. Becker will focus on lessons learned from the Umpqua Community College mass shooting that occurred Oct. 1, 2015.

Concurrent session topics will include specialized services for veterans, bystander training, social media crisis management, Title IX litigation, emergency planning for campus events, and much more.

The State Regents established the Campus Safety and Security Task Force to support best practices for the ongoing safety of students, faculty, administrators and visitors at higher education and technology center campuses. Task Force members represent public and private institutions, technology centers, and key state agencies, including the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security. For more information about the Campus Safety and Security Task Force or to register for the Summit online, visit www.okhighered.org/campus-safety.

SUMMIT PARTNERS
2017-18 FAFSA Now Available

Students planning to enroll in college classes next fall should submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is the application used to apply for all types of federal financial aid, some types of state financial aid and many scholarships, too.

Previously, the FAFSA became available Jan. 1 each year. Beginning this year, the FAFSA is now available to students three months earlier: Oct. 1. This gives students and their parents more time to complete the FAFSA. Students are also now able to use an earlier year’s tax information to complete and submit the FAFSA.

Consistent with the new release date, the Oklahoma College Assistance Program’s (OCAP) FAFSA awareness campaign began early. OCAP’s outreach team began preparing for the new FAFSA campaign almost as soon as the last one ended. Timeframes shifted significantly, FAFSA and college planning materials were updated and counselors and partners were notified of upcoming changes. OCAP’s outreach team has since been busy presenting FAFSA information to students and parents and helping counselors adjust their own FAFSA completion campaigns to reflect the new availability date. “We see these new changes as a positive step in helping ease the stress of tight timeframes and early deadlines, which we hope increases the number of students who submit a FAFSA and apply for financial aid,” said Penny Gandy, Manager of Outreach Services.

The FAFSA is required for students seeking federal financial aid, such as Pell Grants and federal student loans. Other financial aid programs, including some scholarships, also require information provided on the FAFSA. All high school seniors and current college students should submit the FAFSA as soon as the new form becomes available for each year they intend to enroll in college courses.

Many aid programs that require FAFSA completion have deadlines early in the year, so earlier access to the FAFSA can make applying to those programs even easier.

There are many misconceptions about the FAFSA that OCAP’s Outreach team works to dispel. Some students don’t submit the FAFSA because they believe their families make too much money to qualify for financial aid. However, most people qualify for some type of aid, and it’s best to know all options available. Others don’t submit the FAFSA because they’re concerned about committing to borrow student loans. The FAFSA is not a contract; it’s simply an application that shows students their financial aid options. Further action is required to accept loans and other types of aid for college. Parents who submitted the paper version of the FAFSA in previous years are often concerned that the process is tedious and complicated. With the online FAFSA, however, submitting the application has never been easier. Help is available at every step along the way and new tools, like the IRS data retrieval feature, have significantly improved and streamlined the process.

Join OCAP’s mailing list to receive the most important FAFSA updates and visit OCAP’s FAFSA education blog at StartWithFAFSA.org.

Quick Fact

Since Jan. 2016, StartWithFAFSA.org has reached more than 100,000 people.

Watch this video from Gov. Mary Fallin to learn about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.startwithfafsa.org/videos/.

startwithfafsa.org
Higher education leaders and policymakers representing Oklahoma, Arizona, Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey and New York recently came together to discuss state policy strategies and best practice financial aid models that increase higher education degree completion.

The Strategy Labs Peer Learning Opportunity meeting, hosted at Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City by Oklahoma Secretary of Education and Workforce Development and OSU-OKC President Natalie Shirley, was supported by HCM Strategists’ Strategy Labs and the Lumina Foundation. The Oklahoma’s Promise scholarship program was a featured topic during the meeting.

“In the current budget climate, statewide financial aid programs with targeted commitments are ideal,” said Jimmy Clarke, Senior Director of State Policy for HCM Strategists and director of the Lumina Foundation’s Strategy Labs. “Oklahoma’s Promise is an exemplar given its sustained effectiveness at increasing college enrollment and completion among low-income students.”

Oklahoma higher education Chancellor Glen D. Johnson and members of the State Regents’ staff led discussion regarding the history of Oklahoma’s Promise, key components of the scholarship, program administration and communication strategies for sustainability.

“We are so pleased to be a part of this worthwhile effort,” said Chancellor Johnson. “This forum created a unique opportunity to highlight the continuing success of the Oklahoma’s Promise scholarship program, a transformational model that combines emphases on academic preparation and financial support for college. More than 70,000 Oklahoma students have received the scholarship since the program’s inception.”

The Oklahoma’s Promise scholarship program is nationally recognized as one of the country’s best college access programs. Formerly known as the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program (OHLAP), Oklahoma’s Promise was created in 1992 by the state Legislature to help more Oklahoma families send their children to college.

“By 2025, it is estimated 64 percent of Oklahoma jobs will require either a two or four-year degree,” said Secretary Shirley. “At our current pace, we are not on track to have the graduates to meet that demand. Oklahoma’s Promise provides a financial pathway for Oklahomans to become college graduates and thus help the state meet its workforce needs.”

Oklahoma’s Promise pays tuition at any Oklahoma public college or university until the student receives a bachelor’s degree or for five years, whichever comes first. It will also cover a portion of tuition at an accredited Oklahoma private institution, but does not cover the cost of fees, books or room and board.

To be eligible, students must apply during the eighth, ninth or 10th grade, and their family’s annual income must not exceed $50,000 when they apply. A student’s family income also must not exceed $100,000 at the time the student goes to college.
OneNet Helps OETA Upgrade Technology and Improve Services for Viewers

For the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority (OETA), facilitating meaningful educational experiences through free public broadcasting is first priority. With more than 1.8 million viewers weekly, OETA impacts almost every Oklahoma household and consistently ranks in the top five public television networks nationally. Interim Executive Director Mark Norman is passionate about providing service to all 77 counties.

"We hear from parents all the time about how much they appreciate our programming," Norman said. "Dependability and quality of service are essential for us."

Norman believes OETA allows all Oklahomans to engage in significant cultural events that happen in Oklahoma. While most work is put into generating content to share with the state, the sharing method is just as vital.

For years, OETA leased national satellite time to disseminate their signal to Oklahoma. While the satellite was a simple solution, it was extraordinarily expensive and quality was dependent upon many factors.

The satellite company recently required that all broadcasting agencies make changes that resulted in lower quality levels than OETA broadcasts. That change, along with the high costs, caused OETA leaders to consider other options.

OETA contacted OneNet, and together they developed a plan to switch OETA’s service to a statewide fiber network. This would maintain OETA’s level of service at a fraction of the cost.

As an extension of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, OneNet was eager to develop a solution for OETA because of the educational value the organization holds.

“OETA’s commitment to using technology to provide quality educational programming to all areas of Oklahoma makes them an invaluable asset to our state,” said Dr. Glen D. Johnson, higher education chancellor and chairman of the board for OETA. “Technological partnerships of this nature serve to make educational opportunities more available to all citizens. The State Regents continually seek opportunities to create efficiencies and generate cost-savings for those we serve. This collaboration exemplifies that commitment.”

This new partnership generates substantial cost savings and extends OETA’s mission of enriching Oklahomans’ lives. With the upgraded network, OETA looks forward to the benefits of this partnership in the future.

OETA is constantly challenged by the evolution of technology, and when innovation is tied to game-changing solutions, collaborations result in beneficial results for all involved. This partnership leverages resources between two state agencies that were challenged to come up with an innovative cost-saving system that serves all Oklahomans. The OneNet team working with OETA engineers and third-party providers made this project possible, allowing OETA to determine how to extend its signal and service around the state.

Those savings allow OETA to focus on other aspects of the organization to best serve Oklahoma. Norman believes the innovative, streamlined system will allow OETA to continue focusing on delivering the greatest content.

“What we’re doing is pretty unique,” he said. “Our partnership with OneNet provides the engineering expertise, technical support and economic flexibility required for OETA to serve all Oklahomans effectively.”
College Prep Materials Shared With Oklahoma 8th-12th Graders

Thousands of Oklahoma eighth- through 12th-grade students will receive valuable information to help them plan and prepare for a college education.

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education recently distributed approximately 241,000 copies of preparing for college brochures to middle, junior high and high schools statewide.

State Regents officials produced two grade-specific brochures for eighth- through 10th-grade students and for 11th- through 12th-grade students. Both versions of *What’s Your Plan for College?* inform students about the courses they must take in high school to be admitted to an Oklahoma public college or university.

The publications feature financial aid information and details regarding admission standards and placement scores, as well as information about OKcollegestart.org, the state’s online college planning and preparation portal for students, parents and school counselors. The brochures outline estimated college costs, salary expectations for various jobs, and information about campus comparison and selection.

The brochures were sent directly to public school counselors to distribute to their students. In addition, brochures were sent to counselors at private schools accredited by the State Department of Education or Oklahoma Private School Accreditation Commission-recognized accrediting associations. The brochures will also be sent to home-school organizations, libraries and various educational, tribal and faith-based organizations.

High school counselors were also provided a link to the online *Counselors’ Resource Book: Oklahoma Colleges and Universities*, which profiles each Oklahoma college and university and includes information about preparing for college, college costs and financial aid, including grants, scholarships and federal student loans.

The State Regents believe now is the time for students to begin thinking about their future plans after high school. These free publications provide students and their parents the tools they need to make their plans for college.

Students, parents and counselors can view, print or order the materials online at [www.okhighered.org/students/publications](http://www.okhighered.org/students/publications).

For additional information about planning, preparing and paying for college, visit [www.OKcollegestart.org](http://www.OKcollegestart.org), call the State Regents’ toll-free Student Information Hotline at 800-858-1840 or email studentinfo@osrhe.edu.

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