Higher Education Must Be a State Funding Priority

Chancellor Glen D. Johnson

It is time to talk plainly about the importance of investing in public higher education.

Budget cuts to Oklahoma's state system of higher education are the deepest in the nation. With current appropriations below 2001 levels, funding has been set back a full generation. In FY88, state support accounted for 74 percent of public college and university funding. With the FY18 appropriation, state support now comprises less than 30 percent of public campus funding. Reviewing our state's investment in public higher education in the national context creates additional cause for concern.

A recent study from Illinois State University reports that cuts to Oklahoma state appropriations for higher education between FY12 and FY17 resulted in the largest decrease in the nation. According to the report, the only other states that show a net decrease in public higher education funding over the last five years are Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kansas and West Virginia.

The negative impacts of these cuts on academic programs, personnel, student services and degree completion initiatives are devastating. As state support for a college education continues to drop, more of the cost shifts to parents and students. In this environment, a college degree could become financially out of reach for some Oklahomans at a time when it has never been more valuable.

Strengthening Oklahoma's workforce through Complete College America (CCA), our degree and certificate completion plan, continues to be our top priority. Working with private institutions and career technology centers, we have surpassed our degree completion goals to date, but we must acknowledge the detrimental effect successive budget cuts will have on our ability to continue meeting these critical benchmarks. While other states are investing in degree completion initiatives, the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) association reports that Oklahoma is ranked last among the 33 CCA states in percentage change in state appropriations from FY12 to FY17.

Nationally, more than 30 percent of adults older than age 25 hold a bachelor's degree or higher. In Oklahoma, that number is just above 24 percent — and the deadline to increase degree and certificate completion to meet our state's workforce needs is fast approaching. The Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce reports that by 2020, 67 percent of all Oklahoma job vacancies will require an associate degree or additional postsecondary education and training, and 37 percent will require an associate degree, bachelor's degree or higher. The State Regents continue working with Governor Fallin through CCA and the Oklahoma Works and Launch Oklahoma initiatives to bridge the skills gap.

Public higher education requires adequate resources to produce the additional degrees necessary to meet Oklahoma's business and industry workforce needs. If we can't meet these workforce needs, our state's economic growth and prosperity are at risk.

In this challenging budget environment, difficult choices must be made. Appropriately funding our higher education system must be a top state priority. Higher education remains the best investment our Legislature and citizens can make to strengthen our economy and ensure a brighter future for all Oklahomans.
Guest Commentary: The Danger of Further Cuts to Oklahoma Higher Education

Devery Youngblood, CEO, Oklahoma Tomorrow

Oklahoma has a huge problem. Our state does not produce enough college graduates in engineering, information technology, financial analysis, nursing, management and other economy-changing fields to fill 18,000 jobs we have open now.

Projections show this skills gap will continue to get worse over the next several years. Unfortunately, the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs (OCPA) is pushing an anti-education campaign which would further exacerbate the situation.

Our group, Oklahoma Tomorrow, was formed by business leaders tired of our state being 49th in everything. Part of our mission is raising awareness about the reality of higher education funding in Oklahoma.

Many people don’t realize state government pays only 30 percent of college costs, while students and families carry 56 percent of the burden. This is a complete reversal from 2001, when the state paid 62 percent and families 25 percent.

In short, Oklahoma has created a hidden tax on families. It stands as one of the primary reasons Oklahoma is not keeping pace with the nation, and why employers can’t fill critical jobs.

This is a serious problem requiring serious answers based on reality, not ideology. Blindly saying universities can sufficiently train our workforce with less money, as OCPA suggests, ignores basic facts.

The higher education system receives less money today than it did in 2001.

Can anyone imagine paying less today for health insurance, utilities or information technology than they did a decade and a half ago? Costs have been rising for colleges and universities, just as they have been for our businesses and households.

Still, OCPA proposes cutting the current funding amount by 46 percent. The group pretends this would not make it harder for students to afford school, and would not limit the programs colleges and universities can provide.

Their methods would require the complete shutdown of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City and the Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences in Tulsa. These are the foremost providers of medical services to the poor and needy.

Engineering and nursing schools throughout Oklahoma are already at capacity. They turn away qualified candidates because the schools cannot afford to buy the labs, technologies and learning tools required to educate modern professionals. Slashing funding will only make things worse.

If we choose not to properly train the people who build bridges, maintain computer networks and save lives, 18,000 jobs will go unfilled, and Oklahoma will fall further behind the rest of the nation.

OCPA’s arguments flunk basic math, and they would set Oklahoma up for failure and destitution for generations.

Oklahoma Tomorrow invites all citizens to join us in crafting real solutions to real problems. That is the Oklahoma spirit and the only way we can solve our problems.
Hickman Sworn in as New State Regent

Former House Speaker Jeff Hickman was sworn in as a member of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education in May. Katherine E. Thomas, Special District Judge for Payne County, administered the Oath of Office.

Regent Hickman’s appointment by Gov. Mary Fallin was confirmed by the Senate Education Committee and full Senate earlier in May. He will serve a nine-year term that expires in May 2026. Hickman replaced Regent Jimmy Harrel, who completed his second nine-year term on the board.

Regent Hickman was elected to the House of Representatives in 2004. He served as Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives for three legislative sessions, from 2014-16, but was unable to seek re-election due to legislative term limits. Prior to his election as Speaker, Hickman served as Speaker Pro Tempore and chairman of the Revenue and Taxation Appropriations & Budget Subcommittee, Public Safety Appropriations & Budget Subcommittee, and Insurance and Retirement Committee.

Before his election to the Legislature, Regent Hickman served as vice president of Omni Media Group in Woodward. He spent seven years working in higher education at the University of Oklahoma, where he served as university press secretary, public affairs special projects coordinator and as an assistant to the president and to the athletic director.

Regent Hickman holds a bachelor’s degree with distinction from OU. Since leaving the Legislature, Hickman has served as chief communications and compliance officer for the Great Salt Plains Health Center, with four sites in Alfalfa, Garfield, Grant and Blaine counties. Additionally, he has been involved with his family’s farming operation in Alfalfa and Woods counties since childhood, and is now the fifth generation in his family to own and farm land near Dacoma and Cherokee in northwest Oklahoma.

Two Seniors Named Chancellor Hans Brisch Scholars

Two Oklahoma high school seniors have been named Chancellor Hans Brisch Scholars for outstanding leadership, civic involvement and academic talent.

Jace Konner Neal, Broken Bow High School, and Andrea Dawn Hopper, Sharon-Mutual High School, will each receive a $2,000 award through the Chancellor Hans Brisch Scholarship program.

The Chancellor’s Scholars Program was created in 1990 with private funds. The program was renamed in 2006 to honor Brisch, who served as chancellor of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education for 15 years. Brisch retired in 2003 and passed away in February 2006.

The 2017-18 Chancellor Hans Brisch Scholars were selected from nominations made by high school principals statewide.

Both students distinguish themselves academically and through their active involvement in their local communities. Neal graduated with a 4.619 grade point average and plans to attend Northeastern State University in the fall. Hopper is valedictorian, graduating with a 4.0 grade point average and receiving the title of honors graduate and the diploma of honor at her graduation. She plans to attend Southwestern Oklahoma State University in the fall.

Brisch Scholars are academically talented high school seniors with outstanding leadership ability and a commitment to the enhancement of their communities as demonstrated through their involvement in high school and/or community programs or projects that have resulted in an improvement of the learning environment of the school or the social betterment of the community.

In the more than 25 years since its inception, the Chancellor’s Scholars program has provided scholarships for 97 deserving students. Private gifts, including professional honoraria from the current and past chancellors, support the program, which honors not only Brisch but the office of the chancellor and all individuals who serve Oklahoma in that position.
State Regents Receive Lumina Foundation Grant

The Oklahoma State Regents were recently approved for a grant of more than $777,000 over a three-year period from Lumina Foundation to support the Oklahoma Adult Promise program. The grant is designed to provide opportunities for adults to return and complete degree programs with funding and support from partnerships developed to ensure student success. As a foundation, Oklahoma will build upon the current Reach Higher adult degree completion program, which offers three discrete degree plans for working adults who have earned a minimum number of credit hours and want to complete an associate or bachelor’s degree. The expanded adult degree completion program will offer assistance to individuals willing to pursue degree programs deemed by business, industry and other state partners to meet specific workforce needs as defined by Oklahoma Works’ 100 Critical Occupations.

Lumina grant funding will support outreach, mentoring, coaching, and advising services and facilitate adult student access to other key assistance programs, such as child care, tutoring, emergency funding, book/fee assistance, transportation, nutritional assistance and housing assistance.

The State Regents were informed of an opportunity to support and expand Reach Higher through the State Higher Education Executive Officers and Lumina Foundation in 2016, when SHEEO received Lumina Foundation support to develop a feasibility study of aid programs geared toward adult students. Oklahoma was one of six states that participated in preliminary discussion of pilot programs with SHEEO and Lumina, and the State Regents convened stakeholders from the Governor’s office, Oklahoma Works, tribal education offices, local workforce boards, colleges and universities, business and industry, core state agencies and other entities to frame the development of a final proposal to Lumina for funding consideration.

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. Lumina envisions a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results and meets the nation’s need for talent through a broad range of credentials. The Foundation’s goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy.

State Regents, TEDNA Sign Memorandum of Understanding

In May, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and the Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (TEDNA) signed a memorandum of understanding that expands collaboration and support between the agencies through shared resources, expertise and technical assistance to Tribal Education Departments involved in Oklahoma higher education initiatives.

“State Regents and TEDNA share a mutual interest in improving educational opportunities and outcomes for American Indian and Alaskan native students,” said Chancellor Glen D. Johnson. “The State Regents are proud to formalize this partnership with TEDNA to further assist our state’s Tribal Education Departments as they seek to enhance higher education programs and services.”

Founded in 2003, TEDNA is an independent national non-profit organization that retains active membership of Tribal Education Departments and Tribal Education Agencies. The organization seeks to foster effective relationships with other governmental and educational agencies and organizations; facilitate communication and cultivate consensus among members by providing current, accurate and pertinent information and support; and encourage goals for its students, families and communities.

TEDNA supports higher education programs that provide opportunities for tribal nation populations, and the partnership agreement provides the framework for a concerted effort to promote college degree completion.
Newman Civic Fellows

Determined to find solutions for the challenges communities face throughout the country, 10 inspirational students from Oklahoma’s colleges and universities were recognized as 2017-18 Newman Civic Fellows during the State Regents meeting in April.

Katherine Davis, Northern Oklahoma College; Jack Nickelson, Northwestern Oklahoma State University; Cody Milner, Oklahoma Christian University; Shelbi Gambrell, Oklahoma State University; Jessica Villar, Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City; Rhyder Jolliff, Rogers State University; Ashton Shepler, Rose State College; Devin Smoot, Southwestern Oklahoma State University; Rebecka Snyder, Tulsa Community College; and Jaylon Thomas, University of Central Oklahoma, are among 273 students from 36 states, Washington, D.C., and Mexico who comprise this year’s Newman Civic Fellows.

The Newman Civic Fellows program was established by Campus Compact in honor of co-founder Frank Newman, who dedicated his life to creating opportunities for student civic learning and engagement. The award is designed to recognize college students who have demonstrated an investment in finding solutions for the challenges faced by communities across the nation through service, research and advocacy. Each of Oklahoma’s fellows will receive a $500 scholarship from Oklahoma Campus Compact. Students are nominated by their college or university president.

COLE Awards

The Council for Online Learning Excellence (COLE), an initiative of the State Regents’ Online Education Task Force, recently honored Dr. Maria Christian, assistant professor of higher education leadership at Northeastern State University, with the Oklahoma Online Excellence Award for Individual Faculty Member/Staff Member, and the Learning Design Team at the Center for eLearning and Connected Environments at the University of Central Oklahoma with the Oklahoma Online Excellence Award for an Institution Team or Program.

Christian has been recognized by her colleagues at NSU for her efforts to enhance and strengthen the university’s Master of Science in Higher Education Leadership program, as well as for her involvement with university-wide online course offerings.

In support of UCO’s growth of fully online course offerings, the Learning Design Team developed effective, sustainable practices for maintaining high-quality, engaging online design, teaching and learning experiences, and their Online Course Quality Principles Rubric communicates rigorous standards for online courses from inception to completion.

The State Regents created the Online Education Task Force in 2012 to review the delivery of online education throughout the state system and to determine the extent to which the delivery of online education was accessible, efficient and effective. COLE, formed by the task force in 2016, is comprised of faculty, staff and administrators representing each tier of Oklahoma’s public and private colleges and universities, as well as other entities connected to online learning technologies.

For the inaugural 2017 Oklahoma Online Excellence Awards, nominations were submitted by peers and judged by a committee of COLE members. Nominees were scored using a standard rubric based on the metrics of leadership, innovation, collaboration and results.

Quick Fact

In the last academic year, approximately 52% of all Oklahoma college and university students took at least one online course.
OneNet Cybersecurity Initiatives Safeguard Network

Cybersecurity is a growing concern for technology providers and the customers they serve. Many of OneNet’s customers are prime targets for cybersecurity threats. Securing OneNet’s network, from its core network right up to its customers’ networks, is a top priority for OneNet’s leadership and engineering team.

Every day, OneNet deploys measures to secure its customers’ digital assets, and the OneNet team works to bring its customers together to share best practices that secure the entire system. OneNet’s engineering team continuously monitors its network infrastructure to mitigate malicious activity, malware, distributed denial of service attacks (DDoS) and other cyber threats. Current threat intelligence is monitored and information is distributed to the affected customers, providing them assistance to respond as needed.

One example of the use of intelligence monitoring is state testing for K-12 schools. State testing periods are high-activity times for OneNet in defending DDoS attacks on the schools it serves. Thanks to strategies and proactive security controls, OneNet engineers can often detect a DDoS attack before a school even recognizes its effects on their network. Without OneNet’s help in mitigating DDoS attacks, many schools would not be able to complete their state testing. DDoS mitigation is a priority initiative for OneNet. OneNet’s engineers mitigate two to three DDoS attacks each week and are continually looking for innovative technologies to combat these attacks.

Malware mitigation is another top priority. OneNet alerts customers when malware detections are reported through various security information organizations. OneNet can also help identify potential information system vulnerabilities for customers by performing external vulnerability scans of the customer’s network perimeter. These vulnerability scans test for misconfigurations, systems in need of patching or information disclosures that can impact a customer’s external security defense.

To stay informed and prepared for the needs of tomorrow, OneNet is continually engaged with cybersecurity industry vendors. Security issues change quickly—sometimes on a day-to-day basis. To stay safe, an organization must be proactive in educating its security staff on the latest developments in the industry and the environment in which it operates. OneNet strives to take proactive measures to stay informed and keep its customers informed, as well.

By investigating best practices and new technologies, OneNet finds new solutions to these ever-changing security issues. OneNet’s security analysts conduct proof-of-concept trials to test the benefits of new technologies that can help solve current and future challenges in its active defense strategy. Staying on the leading-edge of cybersecurity defense positions OneNet to keep its network safe today and tomorrow.

In addition to securing its network, a top priority for OneNet’s leadership is to bring its customers together to better protect all of the organizations on the OneNet network. Through customer forums, security alerts and customer listservs, OneNet provides opportunities for its customers to learn more about cybersecurity and take part in its initiatives. By educating its community of customers, OneNet’s leadership hopes to create a better-secured state network for Oklahoma.

Cybersecurity Quick Facts

- 22.9 Billion Connected Devices
- 17 Million DDoS Attacks by 2020
- Expected Average DDoS Attack Size for 2017: 1.15Gbps
- 1Gbps Attack Will Take Most Organizations Offline

An unmitigated 1 Gbps attack would take most organizations offline.
Need Money for College? Start With FAFSA!

Students starting or returning to college should complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is used to apply for all types of federal financial aid, some types of state financial aid and many scholarships, too.

The new 2018-2019 FAFSA will become available Oct. 1. Families are encouraged to complete this application as early as possible, while federal and state funding is available. FAFSA results are also sometimes required for certain scholarship applications, so timely completion serves multiple purposes.

The Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) FAFSA awareness campaign will begin in August. OCAP’s UCanGo2 outreach team has reviewed and updated their FAFSA and college planning materials, and the new High School Counselor Toolkits will be mailed to over 1,100 counselors in late August. The outreach team has already been busy scheduling FAFSA events for the upcoming months at schools and organizations across the state.

Last year, the outreach group provided over 90 FAFSA completion workshops. These presentations are designed to show students and families that the FAFSA can be completed easily, with online assistance on every screen of the application, as well as links to informative charts that explain the FAFSA process in detail. If there are still questions, students are encouraged to call OCAP or the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 800.4.FED.AID (800.433.3243).

There are many misconceptions about the FAFSA that keep students from applying. For example, many believe their parents make too much money to qualify for financial aid, while others think completing a FAFSA will automatically commit them to borrow student loans. Neither is true. Most people do qualify for some type of financial assistance regardless of their income situation. Student loans are offered to applicants based on their FAFSA results, but additional paperwork is required before the loan is accepted. The FAFSA isn’t a contract; it’s simply an application that helps students identify their financial aid options.

UCanGo2 is an initiative of OCAP, an operating division of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. For additional information, join OCAP’s mailing list to receive the most important FAFSA updates.

2017-18 College Planning Publications

This fall, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education will distribute thousands of publications to help Oklahoma students plan and prepare for a college education. Counseling will also receive publications to assist with students’ college planning.

What’s Your Plan for College?
These brochures for eighth- through 10th-grade and 11th- through 12th-grade students 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: Oklahoma’s Colleges and Universities
This online publication for high school counselors provides a profile of each college and university in Oklahoma and includes information about preparing for college, college costs and financial aid.

High School Counselor Toolkit
UCanGo2, a college access initiative of the Oklahoma College Assistance Program, produces these kits to support educators’ outreach to students and parents. Each kit includes an Instructor’s Guide, a Plan of Action to help counselors make the most of UCanGo2 materials throughout the year, student tools and FAFSA education resources.