Oklahoma Higher Education: Strengthening Our Workforce Pipeline

Chancellor Glen D. Johnson

The Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce tells us that by 2020, 67 percent of job vacancies in Oklahoma—or 418,000 jobs—will require a college degree or additional postsecondary education and training. Thirty-seven percent of all Oklahoma jobs will require an associate degree, bachelor’s degree or higher. Bridging the skills gap between our current workforce and projected workforce needs is the focus of Governor Mary Fallin’s education and employment initiative, Oklahoma Works. Increasing the number of Oklahomans with a college degree or certificate is more important than it’s ever been.

The state system of higher education is on the move to address Oklahoma’s need for a more highly educated workforce, which we know is crucial for our future economic prosperity. Our state system institutions collaborate with business and industry partners to link academic programs directly to employment needs in the state’s wealth-generating ecosystems and in critical STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) disciplines, including engineering, healthcare, aviation, aerospace, supply chain management and management information systems.

Producing more STEM graduates in our state is essential, as emphasized through Governor Mary Fallin’s annual STEM Summit. Oklahoma is ranked by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation as 16th in STEM job growth in the nation. The number of STEM degrees and certificates conferred at state system colleges and universities reached a record high during the last academic year, with more than 6,000 students receiving degrees and certificates in STEM fields. This progression represents a 28 percent increase in STEM degrees over the last five years.

Governor Fallin recently announced that for the third year in a row, Oklahoma’s public and private institutions and career technology centers surpassed our Complete College America goal, which calls for an average annual increase of 1,700 degrees and certificates conferred. Higher education’s degree and certificate attainment goals reflect our efforts to meet Oklahoma’s forecasted workforce needs, which complement and support Oklahoma Works.

Studies show that states with a high percentage of college degree holders have higher per capita incomes, and workers with a college degree have driven more than 90 percent of national earnings growth over the last decade. While tuition costs have increased dramatically in many other states over the last eight years, Oklahoma’s state system of higher education has kept tuition affordable with an average increase of only 4.5 percent during the same time period—a period marked with both historic enrollment growth and decreased state funding. Additionally, Forbes magazine ranked Oklahoma second in the nation among best states for recent college graduates to work since the 2008 recession, noting our state’s low tuition, higher household income and low unemployment.

Oklahoma higher education will continue to focus on increasing degree and certificate completion and leveraging strong partnerships with common education, CareerTech and the business community to meet the state’s workforce needs. There is no better investment to move Oklahoma forward in this knowledge-based, global economy than the investment our policy leaders make in higher education.
As the coordinating board for public colleges and universities, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education serve several roles, including prescribing academic standards, determining functions and courses of study, granting degrees, and approving institutional allocations and budgets. The State Regents also operate OneNet, the state’s advanced data network for education and government, and the Oklahoma College Assistance Program, which provides important college access, borrower education and default prevention programs and services, as well as numerous scholarships and special programs.

Higher education is a good news story for Oklahoma! Each new year brings a fresh opportunity to reaffirm our objectives and the action steps we take to meet those goals. As we look forward in 2016, the state system of higher education will continue to focus on five key priorities.

**Complete College America.** Increasing the number of college degree and certificate holders in Oklahoma is one of Governor Mary Fallin’s top state priorities. Our Complete College America goal is to increase the number of degrees and certificates earned in our state by 67 percent by 2023, and our state plan is recognized as the national model. CCA complements the Governor’s Oklahoma Works initiative. To date, we have made substantial gains and exceeded our benchmarks.

**Tuition.** The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation ranks Oklahoma fifth in the nation in college affordability, and the State Regents’ long-term goal is to see our ranking continue to improve. In stark contrast to many other states, tuition increases at our public colleges and universities have averaged less than 5 percent since 2009. As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics, average student cost at a four-year public institution in Oklahoma is third lowest in the nation.

**Student debt.** Although student debt isn’t desirable, our state has the eighth-lowest student debt level in the nation, and that is a positive story for Oklahoma. Education loan debt at our public colleges and universities is 30 percent below the national average, and nearly half of all Oklahoma students leave college with no loan debt.

**Campus safety.** As leaders in the state’s education system, we advocate policies and practices that make our campuses as safe as possible. The State Regents’ Campus Safety and Security Task Force works diligently to support ongoing safety for students, faculty, administrators and visitors at higher education and career technology center facilities.

**Strengthening the state system.** There is tremendous merit in our constitutional system of higher education, which is a highly recognized national model that gives the State Regents the essential authority and structure to coordinate higher education efforts across our state. The primary beneficiaries of this form of organization are the students.

With our state experiencing a severe revenue shortfall, higher education’s priorities are critical to meeting Oklahoma’s workforce and economic development goals. We will continue collaborating with partners and stakeholders to enhance access to higher education, improve the quality of public higher education and increase the number of degree holders. Higher education is a good news story for Oklahoma!

---

**Quick Fact**

The estimated return on investment for Oklahoma public higher education is $4.72 for every $1 of state funding.
2015-16 Distinguished Service Awards

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education honored six individuals with 2015-16 Distinguished Service Awards for Higher Education.

State Rep. Justin Wood was honored Oct. 29 in Shawnee for his continued support of higher education, including the Oklahoma’s Promise scholarship program and the Complete College America initiative, as well as his service as vice chair of the House Higher Education Committee.

In Bartlesville Nov. 6, Rep. Earl Sears was honored for his strong support of higher education, including the Oklahoma’s Promise scholarship program and the Oklahoma State University and University of Oklahoma medical programs’ rural health initiatives. As chair of the Appropriations and Budget Committee, Rep. Sears worked to minimize the budget cut to higher education.

Sen. Jason Smalley was honored Nov. 9 at Seminole State College’s Foundation Hall. Smalley is a strong supporter of student veterans and was instrumental in protecting Oklahoma’s Promise from a bill that would have negatively impacted the program.

Rep. Mike Christian was honored Nov. 10 at Oklahoma City Community College. As the House public safety chair, Christian worked to stop legislation that would have changed current law regarding guns on campus. He is also a supporter of Oklahoma’s Promise.

A proponent of online education, Sen. Gary Stanislawski was honored Jan. 19 in Tulsa. Stanislawski is a strong supporter of Oklahoma’s Promise and worked to stop legislation that would have negatively impacted the program.

Speaker Jeff Hickman is recognized for working to minimize the higher education budget cut and assisting with funding the debt service obligation. The award ceremony in his honor will be scheduled in the spring.

The Distinguished Service Awards for Higher Education program was established to recognize individuals who demonstrate exceptional leadership and support of higher education in Oklahoma during the legislative session.

2015 College Application Week

Oklahoma College Application Week (CAW), an opportunity for high school seniors to receive hands-on assistance from knowledgeable volunteers while completing their applications to college, saw exponential growth and success in 2015. At least 5,500 college admission applications were submitted by approximately 5,000 participating high school seniors.

“While these events are designed to help all students,” said Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) Outreach Specialist and Oklahoma College Access Network (OK-CAN) member Letha Huddleston, “they’re especially beneficial for those who’ve never considered going to college or will be the first in their family to attend.”

CAW is part of a national initiative sponsored by the Kresge Foundation, the Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the American Council on Education. At the state level, the project is endorsed by Chancellor Glen D. Johnson of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the Oklahoma State Chamber.

Oklahoma GEAR UP piloted the program in its 24 school districts in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, all high schools across the state were invited to participate. In 2015, OCAP and OK-CAN joined GEAR UP in promoting CAW, which took place the week of Nov. 16-20. Invitations were extended not only to Oklahoma high schools, but also to community partners and technology centers. All 24 GEAR UP districts, 71 non-GEAR UP high schools, six libraries, three technology centers, two community partners and one college campus participated. OCAP offered free promotional materials and trained event coordinators via webinars and conference calls to introduce CAW and step through the program materials and resources.

“This year’s increased participation in CAW further demonstrates the commitment of our counselors and community partners to show the students and families of Oklahoma that a postsecondary education is possible, and many times necessary, in today’s job market,” said OCAP Outreach Services Manager and OK-CAN member, Penny Gandy. “With the tremendous engagement in 2015, we hope to sign up even more schools and community sites in 2016. Everyone believes that if students want to pursue education beyond high school, they should be provided with information, resources and support to help them succeed.”
2016 Legislative Agenda

Higher Education: Strengthening Oklahoma’s Workforce Pipeline

COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

By 2020, 67 percent of job vacancies in Oklahoma will require a college degree or additional postsecondary education and training. Investment in our degree completion initiative is required to meet this critical need and keep our state competitive in a global economy.

Since the September 2011 launch by Governor Fallin, progress continues to reach Oklahoma’s goal of increasing the number of degrees and certificates earned by 67 percent by 2023.

In year three of the Complete College America initiative, the number of degrees and certificates earned in Oklahoma increased by 1,842, surpassing the state’s annual goal of 1,700.

Oklahoma’s Promise

The scholarship program provided college funding for 18,894 students in 2014-15. The state system of higher education strongly supports keeping Oklahoma’s Promise intact as an access program.

No Weapons on Campus

There is no scenario in which allowing guns on campuses will do anything other than create a more dangerous environment for our students, faculty and visitors. Oklahoma higher education does not oppose the Second Amendment or gun ownership. Under current law, campus presidents have the discretion to grant exceptions to the weapons ban when an exception is warranted. The current law is working.

In the past eight legislative sessions, bills have either been introduced or discussed that would allow guns on campus. Each attempt has been successfully defeated to date, and ensuring similar legislation does not become law will continue to be a state system priority.

FY 2017 Budget Need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 2016 Appropriation</th>
<th>FY 2017 Budget Request</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$963,412,106</td>
<td>$963,412,106*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FY 2017 Addendum – Fixed Cost Needs of $22,000,566
2016 Public Agenda
Higher Education: Strengthening Oklahoma’s Workforce Pipeline

The purpose of the public agenda is to provide a better understanding of the critical policy issues, goals and objectives that shape the direction of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education. It is based on the needs of the state as identified through ongoing strategic planning, and it describes the major initiatives that are in place to achieve the policy objectives.

Goals

• Increase the number of college graduates.
• Enhance access and improve the quality of public higher education for all Oklahomans.
• Better prepare students to meet the challenges of a global economy.

Objectives

• Implement Complete College America initiatives to increase the number of degrees and certificates earned in Oklahoma to 50,900 by 2023.
• Enhance capacity to successfully enroll, retain and graduate students.
• Increase systemwide efficiencies and cost savings.
• Strengthen financial support for Oklahoma college students.
• Improve instructional quality.
• Utilize performance funding to enhance student success and academic quality.
• Broaden economic development activities.
• Advance access to and quality of technologies to support systemwide programs and services.

Key Initiatives

• Complete College America
• Mathematics Success Initiative
• Oklahoma’s Promise
• Reach Higher
• OKcollegestart.org
• GEAR UP
• OK EPAS
• Cooperative Agreements
• Concurrent Enrollment
• OneNet

Learn more at okhighered.org/state-system/public-agenda.
Public-Private Partnerships Vital to Delivering Broadband to Oklahoma’s Rural Communities

Since OneNet’s inception, its service model has been built on public-private partnerships. These partnerships have been instrumental in delivering broadband services to research, education, health care and public service communities across the state.

OneNet depends on public-private partnerships because it is a middle-mile service provider. OneNet connects communities across the state and provides an upstream Internet connection to the rest of the world. However, OneNet relies on local telecommunications and cable companies to provide the connection from its network to the customer’s site, which is called the last-mile connection. With this connection, OneNet is able to operate a network that reaches every corner of the state.

“Through these connections, OneNet has enhanced the quality of service for many rural customers and assisted them with finding affordable broadband options,” said Vonley Royal, OneNet executive director. “Many customers would not be able to afford the services they need without the partnerships between OneNet and last-mile providers.”

The viability driven by these public-private partnerships is vital not only to serving rural customers, but also to rural economic development. These partnerships enable OneNet to build upon commercial opportunities within local communities.

OneNet’s efforts to expand services for rural customers drive a need for enhanced network capabilities in areas without Ethernet services. Through last-mile partnerships, OneNet’s leadership advocates for new infrastructure with the broadband capabilities rural customers need. This drive for higher bandwidth creates positive economic opportunities in both the public and private sectors, as last-mile providers are better positioned to serve private industry and residents.

In addition to driving bandwidth growth, last-mile partnerships allow OneNet to support economic development. Although OneNet is a state agency, a majority of its customer fees are invested back into the community through purchasing last-mile services. Last year, OneNet paid last-mile providers $10.8 million to connect customers to its network. These customer fees support local broadband services.

OneNet leadership realizes the key to success in these partnerships is open, effective communication.

“Our leadership team has made it a priority to actively reach out to partners to improve communication and business interactions,” said Royal. “By understanding each other more fully, OneNet and last-mile providers are better able to serve customers seamlessly and create opportunities that will benefit communities across the state.”

OneNet stands committed to growing its partnerships with last-mile providers, which are key not only to OneNet’s success, but also to the success and development of broadband technology throughout the state of Oklahoma.
The 2016-17 FAFSA Is Now Available

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

Why It’s Important
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 in each year they intend to enroll in college courses. Many programs that require FAFSA completion have deadlines early in the year.

Common Misconceptions
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 be aware of 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 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.

Next Steps
Learn how to finish the FAFSA in five steps by watching the video tutorial at StartWithFAFSA.org, available in both English and Spanish, or download the brochure from the website. Remember, the first letter in FAFSA stands for free; students should never pay to complete the FAFSA.

To learn more about planning, preparing and paying for college, visit UCanGo2.org.

Higher Education Day

Tuesday, Feb. 16, colleges and universities will participate in Higher Education Day at the Oklahoma State Capitol. This annual event is sponsored by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and planned in coordination with the state system Council of Presidents.

Higher Education Day is designed to give alumni, faculty, staff and friends of public colleges and universities the opportunity to meet with legislators to discuss campus needs and share their successes. Some of the issues addressed include the state system budget request; key higher education initiatives, such as Complete College America and Oklahoma’s Promise; weapons on campus; and the importance of higher education to our state’s workforce development and economic health. Students also have the opportunity to see how state government works, speak to state legislators about the issues facing higher education and engage as advocates for their institution and other students in Oklahoma.
Front row left to right: Chairman Gen. Toney Stricklin, Businessman, Lawton; Mike C. Turpen, Attorney, Oklahoma City; James D. Jimmy Harrel, Banker, Leedey; Glen D. Johnson, Chancellor; and Vice Chair John Massey, Banker, Durant.

Back row left to right: Secretary Ronald H. White, M.D., Cardiologist, Oklahoma City; Marlin “Ike” Glass Jr., Businessman, Newkirk; Joseph L. Parker Jr., Business Owner, Tulsa; Assistant Secretary Jay Helm, Real Estate, Tulsa; Ann Holloway, Investments, Ardmore.