Supporting our higher education institutions and providing adequate resources for them is a priority that Americans can agree on. Higher education is the backbone for American ingenuity and innovation, and Oklahoma is home to many colleges and universities committed to quality education. Along with groundbreaking research and enhanced learning opportunities, we must recognize that it takes a dedicated team to establish solid programs. From the security officers that keep our campuses safe to the academic advisers that improve student success, each role is crucial to the vitality of our colleges and universities.

Critics continue to refer to “administrative bloat” in higher education, yet in reality, state system campuses have invested significantly more in academics than in administration over the last nine years. Oklahoma public higher education institutions have increased investment in academic services from 75 to 78 percent of total budgeted revenue while decreasing administration costs from 6.6 to 5.7 percent.

Recent criticism has focused on the number of non-instructional staff in higher education, as though these positions contribute less to overall student success. In reality, these positions manage the very systems that support the academic enterprise.

The expansion of in-state healthcare services provided by the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and the Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences resulted in a combined 67 percent increase in non-instructional staff over the last 15 years, including physicians, clinicians, and researchers. In fact, approximately 74 percent of employee growth during that time period is directly tied to healthcare services and research, both of which are largely supported by non-appropriated dollars, including revenue from medical practice plans, health research grants and private donations.

Growth in non-instructional staff also reflects specific requirements to meet federal and state regulations, such as provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Title IX compliance, and other essential functions, including financial aid, academic advising, campus safety and security, and student mental health services. In the wake of budget cuts to higher education exceeding $153 million for FY 2017, higher education institutions have made every effort to protect these academic and student support services, which are critical to continue reaching our college degree and certificate completion goals through Complete College America.

The value of Oklahoma’s state system of higher education cannot be overstated. Our 25 public colleges and universities are projected to bring $666 million in sponsored and federal funding into our state in FY 2017. Funding from out-of-state sources cycles into our economy and bolster state revenues with dollars that could not be generated without our higher education system. Simply put, no other entity in state government strengthens economic and workforce development as directly and comprehensively as public higher education.
Oklahoma's public colleges and universities are careful stewards of the state's investment in higher education. While state system institutions have experienced record enrollment increases since FY 2001 -- at the highest point, serving more than 42,000 additional students - the $810 million appropriation to public higher education for FY 2017 is $4.8 million less than the amount appropriated in FY 2001. Effectively, state support for Oklahoma's higher education system has been set back nearly a full generation. With the 2017 legislative session starting next month and our state facing another budgetary shortfall, our goal is to make the case that investing in higher education must be a top state priority.

Public institutions have taken many significant steps to maximize efficiencies and cost savings as we proactively work to continue responding to our state's workforce and economic development needs. State system campuses systematically evaluate academic program productivity, departmental spending, and staffing levels to ensure the most efficient use of funding.

Our colleges and universities are utilizing a wide variety of cost reduction measures to maximize the efficacy of limited resources, including:

- **Lowered personnel costs.** Faculty and staff positions have been eliminated, unfilled and furloughed, salary and benefit packages have been refined, and early retirement programs have been implemented. Several institutions collaborate to secure healthcare coverage for employees, and many have joined a self-insured Risk Management Consortium, both at significant annual savings.

- **Academic innovations.** To maintain quality and service levels, campuses are offering joint degree programs and sharing faculty; restructuring and consolidating academic offerings to focus on high enrollment, high employer-demand programs; and eliminating low enrollment, low employer-demand programs.

- **Technology innovations.** Our Higher Education Chief Information Officer collaborates with the institutions through the Council on Information Technology to establish technical priorities, share best practices, and aggregate technology purchases through consortium agreements and shared contracts, maximizing educational discounts. Campuses are implementing virtual desktop computers to mitigate the ongoing replacement of traditional desktop systems, which lowers equipment costs and license fees, improves system security and simplifies system updates.

- **Energy savings.** Facility modifications, operational adjustments and behavior-based initiatives are resulting in significant annual savings across the state system. Institutions are expanding use of vehicles powered by compressed natural gas and reliance on wind power as they strive to improve energy efficiency and adopt environmentally friendly programs.

- **Consolidation of locations, administrative positions, and administrative functions.** Learning sites have been closed or consolidated. Some campuses are sharing key administrative staff, and many institutions are reorganizing and realigning units and divisions to streamline operations.

Through the state system's commitment to maximizing academic and administrative efficiencies, energy conservation, leveraging contract purchases, supply reductions and technology savings, projected operational and information technology cost savings from FY 2014 through FY 2018 are approximately $221.2 million. These dollars have been redirected and budgeted for instruction and the academic enterprise, including Complete College America degree completion initiatives; to address mandatory cost requirements, such as utilities and insurance; and to fund scholarships.

Our public colleges and universities remain dedicated to cost effective operations as they work to provide sufficient faculty and classroom space to meet student demand for course sections, keep the cost of health benefits manageable, and address the increasing cost of utilities, library acquisitions, and technology.
2016-17 Distinguished Service Awards

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education has designated four individuals to receive Distinguished Service Awards for Higher Education during 2016-17.

On Oct. 13, 2016, Oklahoma Rep. Todd Thomsen was recognized with a Distinguished Service Award at the Chickasaw Business and Conference Center at East Central University. Thomsen was recognized for his continued support of higher education. A member of the House Education Committee, Thomsen helped stop legislation that would have had a negative impact on the Oklahoma’s Promise scholarship program, assisted with securing OneNet’s ability to provide internet access to schools, hospitals and libraries at a low cost, and took a strong stance for funding higher education.

On Oct. 20, State Sen. Kay Floyd was honored during the State Regents meeting for her continued support of higher education, including Oklahoma’s Promise, a strong stance against weapons on campus and her support of funding for higher education.

On Dec. 1, State Sen. David Holt was honored during the State Regents meeting for his continued work on behalf of higher education, including support for the Endowed Chairs program, one of the best public/private partnerships in the nation.

State Rep. Katie Henke was recognized Jan. 24, 2017, at Tulsa Community College for her service as Vice Chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education and as a member of the House Higher Education Committee, where she worked diligently to stop legislation that would negatively impact higher education. Henke is also a strong supporter of funding for higher education and the Oklahoma’s Promise scholarship program, and has taken a strong stance against weapons on campus.

State Rep. Weldon Watson will be honored Jan. 27 at the University of Oklahoma – Tulsa for his service to higher education. As a member of the House Rules Committee, Watson was a vocal opponent of several pieces of legislation that passed through committee that would have negatively impacted higher education, including allowing weapons on campus.

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.

OKMM and Oklahoma Colleges Bring Financial Education to Students

Institutions in the market to offer personal finance workshops for students during the spring semester need look no further than Oklahoma Money Matters (OKMM), the financial education initiative of the Oklahoma College Assistance Program and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. This spring, OKMM is teaming up with Oklahoma colleges and universities to help students succeed at managing their money and eliminating unnecessary debt by offering engaging, customized financial education sessions.

Quick Fact

During 2016, OKMM provided 86 workshops, teaching nearly 2,500 people basic money management principles.
2017 Legislative Agenda
Higher Education: Strengthening Oklahoma’s Workforce

Historic Budget Cuts
State support for Oklahoma’s higher education system has been set back almost a full generation. The $810 million appropriation to public higher education for FY 2017 is $4.8 million less than the amount appropriated in FY 2001.

FY 2018 Budget Need
FY 2017 Appropriation...........................................$810,022,109

FY 2018 Budget Need:
1. Degree Completion Programs and Initiatives $122,700,000
   a. Instruction and Academic Enterprise Requirements $94,200,000
      • Includes mandatory fixed costs of $21,500,000
   b. Facility Renovation/Physical Plant Maintenance $18,600,000
   c. Institutional Scholarships $9,900,000
2. Financial Aid Programs $12,700,000
   a. Restoration of Scholarship Programs $6,300,000
   b. Full Funding of Concurrent Enrollment Program $6,400,000
3. Capital Requirements $11,400,000
   a. 2005 Capital Bond Issue Debt Service Payments $9,600,000
   b. Restoration of Maintenance and Repair Budget Reduction (Section 13 Offset) $1,800,000
4. Restoration of Shared Service Programs $1,100,000

FY 2018 Total Budget Need.........................................$957,922,109

• $ Difference from FY 2017 State Appropriations $147,900,000
• % Difference from FY 2017 State Appropriations 18.3%

Lifetime Earnings
A student with a college degree will earn $1.1 million more in a lifetime than a high school graduate.
Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau

Students Who Learn Here Earn Here
Eighty-four percent of Oklahoma residents who graduate with a bachelor's degree remain in the state and are employed in the state one year after graduation.
Source: 2016 Employment Outcomes Report
COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA
Progress continues to reach Oklahoma’s goal of increasing the number of degrees and certificates earned by 67 percent by 2023.

In the first four years of the CCA initiative, degrees and certificates earned in Oklahoma increased by 8,462, surpassing the state’s benchmark of 6,800.

Oklahoma’s Promise
The state system of higher education strongly supports keeping the Oklahoma’s Promise scholarship, which provides college funding for approximately 18,900 students, intact as an access program. More than 70,000 Oklahoma students have received the scholarship since the program’s inception.

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 nine 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.

Concurrent Enrollment
The concurrent enrollment program allows outstanding juniors and seniors to earn college credit while still in high school. In 2015-16, there were more than 11,700 student enrollments in concurrent enrollment courses generating more than 103,000 credit hours. The State Regents earmarked $2.3 million of returned FY 2016 funding to support concurrent enrollment at campuses across the state.

Workforce & Economic Impact of Public Higher Education
Governor Mary Fallin’s Oklahoma Works initiative is designed to bridge the skills gap between our current workforce and workforce needs. By 2020, 67 percent of jobs in Oklahoma will require a college degree or additional postsecondary education and training, and 37 percent will require an associate degree, bachelor’s degree or higher. Oklahoma higher education links academic programs directly to employment needs in the state’s wealth-generating ecosystems, including our top four areas of degree production: business, health occupations, engineering, and education.

Degree and certificate production in critical STEM disciplines has increased 28 percent over the last five years.

Our public higher education system generates more than $9.2 billion in economic impacts. For every dollar of state appropriations invested in higher education, $4.72 is returned to Oklahoma’s economy.

Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Panhandle State University
2017 Public Agenda
Higher Education: Strengthening Oklahoma’s Workforce

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 by 67 percent 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
- Cooperative Agreements
- Concurrent Enrollment
- OneNet
- Online Education Task Force
- Campus Safety and Security Task Force

Learn more at okhighered.org/state-system/public-agenda.

Concurrent Enrollment Funding Restored

In September, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education earmarked a portion of surplus FY 2016 funds to restore funding to the concurrent enrollment program, an important component of Oklahoma’s nationally recognized Complete College America strategic plan.

The state system of higher education received a return allocation of $20.7 million, and the State Regents immediately distributed the funds to the institutions to help partially offset the $153 million budget cut for FY 2017. Of the returned funding, $2.3 million was dedicated to support concurrent enrollment at campuses across the state.

“Concurrent enrollment is a critical initiative that drives student success,” said State Regents’ Chairman John Massey. “Students are our top priority, and we will continue to partner with our colleges and universities to increase the number of students earning college degrees and certificates.”

While the concurrent enrollment budget request has never been fully funded, these earmarked dollars restored funding from 35 percent to 62 percent of the total cost to the institutions.

In this extremely difficult budget environment, the returned funding helped support this vital campus service that strengthens student preparation. In addition to improving college readiness, the concurrent enrollment program lowers family costs for college and reduces the time required to complete a degree.

Since its inception in 2005, the concurrent enrollment program has allowed outstanding juniors and seniors the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. Seniors may also be eligible for a tuition waiver of up to six credit hours per semester for concurrent courses. In 2015-16, more than 11,700 students enrolled in concurrent courses, generating more than 103,000 credit hours.
OneNet & Internet2 Facilitate Oklahoma Research Initiatives through 100Gbps Connectivity

Oklahoma’s research organizations are performing world-class experiments. From crucial weather radar data to the human genome, the state’s brightest minds are shaping the future. But high-level research isn’t just lab coats and test tubes; the data generated by experiments at Oklahoma’s research facilities requires supercomputing speeds for processing large datasets and collaborating with researchers across the globe.

As Oklahoma’s partner for digital education, OneNet is able to provide these organizations with a connection to Internet2, the fastest nationwide connectivity dedicated to research.

Internet2 is a member-owned technology community that operates the nation’s largest and fastest research and education network. OneNet has provided Internet2 connectivity for the state since 1999. In 2012, OneNet was the first to connect to Internet2’s newly deployed 100 gigabit-per-second (Gbps) network, and in 2015 OneNet connected its own 100Gbps fiber ring to the Internet2 network. This gives the University of Oklahoma (OU) in Norman, Oklahoma State University (OSU) in Stillwater and Oklahoma State University-Tulsa a 100Gbps fiber connection linked to Internet2’s nationwide research network.

This connection is specifically beneficial because it allows researchers to transfer and receive high-volume data without slowing speeds across the rest of their institution’s network. Without this dedicated research network, high-level experiments would be impossible.

Researchers at OSU rely on Internet2 connectivity for processing massive amounts of data and transmitting it across the nation. Bioinformatics research allows researchers to make assumptions about massive datasets without having to individually track each data point, allowing scientists to efficiently map the human genome and perform other groundbreaking experiments. Scientists at OSU frequently collaborate with researchers across the country, and processing massive data like this is only possible through OneNet’s partnership with Internet2.

OneNet’s participation with Internet2 eliminates the need for Oklahoma’s research institutes to develop their own costly connections to facilitate research. The size of Internet2 has led to a nationwide peering collaboration that lowers costs for OneNet and the organizations it serves. Without Internet2, OneNet would have to purchase massive bandwidths from commercial providers, which would dramatically increase costs. Because Internet2 membership is only open to research networks, commercial providers would not be able to provide these organizations the same comprehensive connectivity at such a low rate.

Oklahoma’s Internet2 connection has enabled dozens of grants and created numerous programs that generate millions of dollars for research within Oklahoma. Internet2 connections aided OU’s efforts to become a center of atmospheric research and also power the National Weather Center in Norman. Without a dedicated research connection, these high-level projects would not be possible and research initiatives would be stifled.

In a digital age, fast, reliable connectivity is the foundation for the groundbreaking research initiatives taking place in Oklahoma. OneNet’s partnership with Internet2 allows research universities to pursue projects and grants with confidence, creating a legacy of innovation.

All of Oklahoma’s educational institutions, including K-12 schools, higher education campuses and career technology centers, and research organizations like GE Global Research benefit from the greater bandwidth and speeds offered through the 100Gbps network.

2017 Higher Education Day at the State Capitol

Tuesday, Feb. 14, 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 students, 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.