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LEADERS GUIDE



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of campus

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FROM THE EDITOR



MATTHEW MOORE/OU DAILY

The Bizzell Memorial Library serves as a hub for student life at OU.

Meet the faces of campus leadership

Dear readers,
Leadership looks different in every corner of campus. You'll find it at the front of a lecture hall, on the sidelines of a game, behind the scenes of a student organization or quietly in a study room when someone decides to speak up, show up or start something new.

As students, we often imagine leaders as people with titles, such as presidents, captains and CEOs. But the truth is, leadership has never been about position alone. It's about presence. It's about how we listen, how we reach out and how we show up for our community.

When I first walked into the OU Daily newsroom, I didn't know what leadership looked like. I just knew I wanted to learn from the talented and passionate reporters, photographers, videographers and editors. Over time, I learned that leadership is less about having all the answers and more about creating space for others to find their voice.

Now, as editor-in-chief, I'm lucky to see that lesson come alive every day. The newsroom hums with collaboration, people bouncing ideas around, debating headlines, challenging each other to dig deeper and do better. That collective energy is what leadership really is: the act of inspiring others to care, to think critically and to move with integrity.

This issue celebrates the many forms of leadership that define our campus — the visible and the quiet, the experienced and the emerging. Inside, you'll find stories of students and staff who foster civic engagement for the community, those pioneering changes on campus through artificial intelligence and the faces of some of OU's most iconic spaces.

Here's to finding your voice,
Anusha Fathepure



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WHERE OU MEETS THE FUTURE OF AI

First-ever chief AI officer shares vision for artificial intelligence's role on campus

**BY MACEY THAXTON •
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Shishir Shah's new office was bare, aside from a few textbooks on the bookshelf and a balloon sign that read "Welcome Dr. Shah," a reminder of his new position as OU's first university-wide chief artificial intelligence officer.

"Truthfully speaking, I didn't have much time to visit Norman before I joined (OU)," Shah said. "We're still in the process of finding a place to stay. Most of our evenings are spent looking for a home."

In August, Shah was announced as OU's new chief artificial intelligence officer and director of the School of Computer Science.

Before coming to OU, Shah spent over 20 years in the department of computer science at the University of Houston as a professor and in various leadership positions.

Shah also directed research at the University of Houston's Quantitative Imaging Laboratory, focusing on an AI field called "computer vision," where machines are able to process and make decisions based on videos and images.

"A significant portion of what we perceive is what we see. ... That kind of sensing is critical in us doing a variety of cognitive-level tasks," Shah said. "The question is, 'Can we figure it out and allow computers to mimic that process?'"

Shah attended the University of Texas at Austin, where he earned his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 1994, his master's degree in 1995 and his doctorate in electrical and computer engineering in 1998.

As an undergraduate student, he designed robotic arms, actuators and feedback control systems.

"In order to do feedback-driven manipulation, you needed sensing. Then I got exposed to using cameras as a way to do perception and sensing of the environment," Shah said.

After joking that he originally did it for the money, Shah said his academic career was mostly influenced by working with faculty on research as an undergraduate student.

"My first involvement in research with the faculty members was mostly driven based on the fact that I could get a monthly stipend for it," Shah said. "But in hindsight, I would argue that it helped me connect a lot of things that I was learning in my courses to something that was translatable into solving problems (and) gaining hands-on experience."

Future of AI at OU

In 2020, OU launched “Lead On, University,” an eight-year strategic plan centered around five pillars to represent significant goals set by the university. As part of the plan, which was refreshed in March, the university aims to prepare students to navigate artificial intelligence effectively after graduation, according to a mass email announcing Shah’s appointment in August.

“By advancing a comprehensive, university-wide strategy to lead in AI innovation, research, education, and implementation, we are reimagining curriculum and academic opportunities to integrate AI across the student experience,” the email read. “This ensures our graduates enter the workforce not simply as literate AI-users, but as responsible, informed ones who know how to leverage this technology for maximum impact.”

Shah said OU is one of the few universities strategically implementing AI in its plan for the future.

“As universities grapple with the presence of AI within our environments, universities need to think about, ‘How does this affect our teaching mission?’” Shah said. “Having an ability to strategically think about how we integrate AI and how we make it available so that we can support what universities need to do.”

About a quarter of the university’s research is rooted in AI, according to the mass email. Shah said the university’s AI research ranges from developing AI systems to integrating AI into ongoing research.

Shah said his goal is to provide additional resources to faculty members to continue their research and share knowledge across all OU campuses.

“If we can provide a way so that it’s more easily shareable information, those experiences can be translated and help someone jumpstart and accelerate their research efforts,” Shah said.

Shah said responsible AI use includes understanding the capabilities of AI and holding a foundation of ethics.

“Sometimes it becomes difficult to understand whether we are using (AI) to complement or augment what we are doing, or are being driven by what AI is suggesting,” Shah said.

Shah said that AI will ideally be integrated into degree programs at different scales to increase exposure and engagement with AI.

Pillar five of the strategic plan outlines tactics to “leverage OU’s AI-related expertise across disciplines and in research centers and institutes.” The strategy also aims to position Oklahoma to be a leader in AI fields.

“Certainly for academia, it’s changing the way we are learning (and) the way we are able to access information, ... but there are aspects of this that are bringing efficiency to what we used to do,” Shah said.

Shah said that students will be taught about the environmental impact of generative AI.

AI is largely powered by data centers that store data and deploy information, and as AI increases in popularity, the demand for data centers increases. These centers generate heat and rely on fresh water to stay cool.

Larger centers can consume up to 5 million gallons of water per day, according to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute.

“Computer resources have an environmental impact, just



PHOTOS BY ESTHER HODSON/OU DAILY

Balloons in Shishir Shah’s office welcome him to Norman and his new position at OU.

“SOMETIMES IT BECOMES DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND WHETHER WE ARE USING (AI) TO COMPLEMENT OR AUGMENT WHAT WE ARE DOING, OR ARE BEING DRIVEN BY WHAT AI IS SUGGESTING.”

SHISHIR SHAH, CHIEF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

like almost every other thing does,” Shah said. “We’re consuming a lot of energy in order to see something happen at our fingertips in real time.”

Shah said that an element of responsible AI use includes fact-checking information that is generated by AI.

“We want to be able to build an understanding of how to fact-check and how to understand what’s right and what’s not right,” Shah said. “That part is a learning experience because it’s new to us and, in some cases, it may seem redundant.”

Shah compared the use of generative AI to the invention of calculators, stating that it is still important to know how to do math if there is a calculation error, similar to how he sees responsible AI use.

“There’s a balance to be found somewhere along the way,” Shah said. “We have already found that balance with calculators. In time, we’ll find our balance with these large language models.”

‘IT NEEDS TO BE DONE’

Meet the student distributing funds to organizations across campus

BY KEATON SHAFFER •
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Every morning at 8 a.m., Jacob Schonfield is one of the first members of OU Student Government Association to arrive at the Conoco Student Leadership Center in the Oklahoma Memorial Union.

Schonfield’s not alone for long, as different student leaders often pop in to talk about money.

That’s because — as interest in registered student organizations, the prices of being a college student and student population rise — Schonfield and his Ways and Means Committee make the primary funding decisions for every registered student organization.

‘I loved it from the first day’

Born in Bristow, a town of fewer than 5,000 about 40 minutes southwest of Tulsa, Schonfield originally set out to leave his home state for college. Struck with the challenge of paying for school, he decided to stay in-state and join the National Guard.

“With the free tuition and fees waiver, I was like, ‘Well, OU is the best school in the state, I’ll just go to OU,’” Schonfield said. “Here I am. I didn’t think I’d like it.”

However, Schonfield was quickly proven wrong.

“I loved it from the first day that I set foot on campus,” Schonfield said.

Schonfield had never been on OU’s campus until he moved into his residence hall. From there on, he aimed to get involved in everything he could.

“I got an email talking about the general application for SGA, and I filled out every single thing on it,” Schonfield said. “The only thing I heard back from was the (Undergraduate Student Congress).”

The Undergraduate Student Congress is the undergraduate assembly of the legislative branch of SGA. Membership is composed of 48 representatives from each of the academic districts, as well as non-voting associates.

Schonfield became an associate member of the University Policy Committee, which addresses student concerns about OU policies and programs or the lack thereof.

Unhappy with the pace he was working at, Schonfield

decided to get involved in the Ways and Means Committee, which deals with the expenditure and appropriation of student funds, particularly in allocating primary funding for the branches of student government and registered student organizations.

By his sophomore year, Schonfield became the Ways and Means Committee secretary. By his junior year, he became the committee chair — the role he still serves in today.

‘The great thing about this job’

Schonfield said he enjoys managing finances and the flow of money and economic processes.

“The great thing about this job is it’s all spreadsheets, so there’s no math, ...” Schonfield said. “But the real reason I joined (ways and means) is because, out of everyone in SGA, (ways and means) is the only one that, regardless of who was in the position or how motivated the people on it were, they were always going to be accomplishing something.”



The student activity fee, which is mandatory with enrollment, is the sole source of funding for student government and registered student organizations.

Schonfield said in the past two academic years, the student activity fee increased from \$7.45 to \$7.53 per credit hour and then to \$7.60 per credit hour. This year, the fee is proposed to increase to \$7.65.

“The funds we have as (ways and means) to give out are very limited,” Schonfield said. “So although I understand that we have more organizations, more people, the pool of money really should be bigger than it is. This is the reality that we have facing us.”

Schonfield said SGA was able to collect an additional \$40,000 for primary funding last year and it allocated those funds as usual, with each organization that had previously received funding being allocated the same amount or slightly more. After allocating funds for new organizations, Schonfield said SGA had about \$10,000 remaining.

"If we hadn't gotten that \$40,000 raise, we would have been negative to start with," Schonfield said. "That's just me trying to give a little bit of perspective with regard to the amount of funds we're playing with versus the number of people asking for money."

Schonfield said he requires organizations requesting funding to attend workshops he is hosting this semester or his office hours.

"People need to understand the process so they're not quite so angry whenever they see that their amount wasn't fully funded," Schonfield said. "I'm a part of another RSO outside of SGA. I understand that you need money to do things, and I want to give people money. Again, that's why I joined (ways and means), but there's only so much we can do with the resources we have."

Ways and Means Committee Vice Chair Mecca Fisher said he met Schonfield during his first year. Now a senior, Fisher said it has been fun to work on so many initiatives with Schonfield throughout the years.

Fisher said Schonfield was instrumental in finding contacts for the development of a list of funding sources available for registered student organizations outside of SGA.

"I feel like working there, we help expand ways and means some more," Fisher said. "(From) just a committee that just gives funds, we are trying to help RSOs be able to help fund themselves."

Fisher said Schonfield is an efficient and caring leader.

"There's a reason why, for ways and means, our nickname is 'WaM-ily,' ..." Fisher said. "He makes sure that we get the job done, but also does it in a fun manner, ... and also tries to make sure everybody's involved and also gain some type of experience."

'I want to make Oklahoma better for everybody'

When he was in high school, Schonfield wanted to be a senator, but as he developed his own sense of what politics should be, he decided he could do more good "on a bench somewhere," whether as a county judge or on an appellate court.

"The reason why I've always been interested in public service, and whether that be in the legislature or in the courts, is just to have a positive impact on the world around me and the community around me, and those are ways that I can see myself doing that," Schonfield said.

Schonfield said that while he would have the opportunity to make meaningful change as either a judge or a senator, he would be concerned about having to align with a party.

"The issue that I see is the most harmful to American politics today is tribalism and the need to vilify the other side, ..." Schonfield said. "I do hope that our generation will have some positive effect on that and be able to walk things back a little bit."

Despite originally wanting to attend college out of state, Schonfield said he now hopes to serve in an Oklahoma public office in the future.

"I've really come to really love my state, and I want to make it better," Schonfield said. "That's why I want to stick around. I want to make Oklahoma better for everybody."

Schonfield said he hopes to become a judge one day, but he might end up teaching for a few years after graduation.

"I really love teaching people things," Schonfield said. "I don't actually know that I'll end up being a teacher, we'll see,

but that's the intention right now, is to teach for a little bit and then go to school again."

'Something that really inspires you'

Schonfield said his biggest takeaway from his experience at OU and SGA is the different ways to lead people.

"People get in this mindset that there's only one way to do it well, and that you have to model yourself after whoever it is that you think does a good job," Schonfield said. "But I really think that you have to lean into who you are as a person and what it is that you're trying to accomplish."

Schonfield has gone through basic training and advanced individual training for the National Guard and is still immersed in Army leadership every month. He said people respond better when leaders create a personal connection rather than simply telling them what to do.

"One thing that you're never going to go wrong with in a leadership position is treating people with kindness, across the board," Schonfield said. "People respond better to getting the sense that they're understood as a human better than they will in any other context."

There was a time, Schonfield said, that the Undergraduate Student Congress' Ways and Means Committee had far less collaboration and interaction from committee members than it does today.

"Getting actual input from committee members and coming to a consensus, rather than me saying a number and getting consent from the group, it's a very different outcome and it's a very different experience, both for myself and mem-

bers of the committee," Schonfield said.

Schonfield said having a well-defined "why" is crucial.

"It's what got me through basic training, through my freshman year; it's what got me through everything I've dealt with so far in my life," Schonfield said. "Knowing why you're doing what you're doing and making sure that it's something that really inspires you and drives you."

"Because at the end of the day, if you know why you're doing something, there's very little that you're gonna let stop you from accomplishing your goals."

"I'VE REALLY COME TO REALLY LOVE MY STATE, ... I WANT TO MAKE OKLAHOMA BETTER FOR EVERYBODY."

JACOB SCHONFIELD, SGA BUDGET CHAIR



PHOTOS BY ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

Beyond SGA, Jacob Schonfield is involved in the National Guard, having gone through basic and advanced individual training.



FINDING A SPACE AT OU

Parking director's road to managing campus transportation

BY AUDREY MCCLOUR • AUDREY.K.MCCLOUR-1@OU.EDU

OU alum Kris Glenn thought he would spend his career working in public relations and marketing.

Twenty years later, Glenn serves as director of OU Parking and Transportation Services where he manages university parking, shuttles and vehicle fleets.

Surrounded by signed music posters and sports memorabilia in his office, Glenn recalled his initial career plans and how he became OU's parking director.

In college, Glenn majored in journalism and worked at the OU Daily from 2002-2003 as a news reporter. Through journalism, he discovered his passion for marketing and public relations.

"I really enjoyed writing a feature story on something that was positive," Glenn said. "I realized that you could really do that with marketing and public relations."

As he neared graduation, Glenn realized he wanted to stay in Norman.

"I loved OU so much I started looking for jobs at OU," Glenn said. "It just so happened that the marketing PR job in this department came open."

Glenn became the marketing and public relations specialist for the parking department after graduating from the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication in 2005. He was the first to fill the newly established role.

"I was 24 years old — right out of college at the time," Glenn said. "I had a lot of ideas and a lot of energy."

As the marketing and public relations specialist, Glenn maintained department websites, ran marketing campaigns and sold advertisements on shuttles.

Glenn worked in the position for about five years before accepting a job offer from KREF, a sports radio station serving the Oklahoma City metro area. Glenn became the station's account executive and sold radio advertising. After a year at KREF, Glenn became the general sales manager for Tyler Outdoor Advertising Company where he ran the sales division of the company's billboards.

In 2015, Glenn returned to OU as the digital innovations strategist.

"I had a parking background, and there was a lot of technology starting to come into parking," Glenn said. "Our vice president was like, 'You've got a parking background. I want you working on these technology projects. I want you to take whatever technology is the latest (and) greatest in parking and try to implement it on this campus.'"

It was in this role that Glenn implemented lights in two campus parking garages to indicate whether a space is open. He said this was the first light system of its kind in Oklahoma.

"Ten years ago, that was very innovative," Glenn said.

In July 2017, Glenn received an email telling him that the parking director at the time, Doug Myers, was going to move from overseeing both OU's Norman and Health campuses to only working for the Health campus.

"I think that the administration just thought that was too much for one person," Glenn said.

Glenn was offered the role of parking director for OU's Norman campus.

"It was an immediate yes," Glenn said. "It was a position that I'd always

held in a really high regard.”

Susan Coldwater, manager of operations for Campus Area Rapid Transit, said Glenn doesn’t micromanage her work.

“Kris is great to work with,” Coldwater said. “He stays involved, but he’s not one that looks over your shoulder and tries to put his finger on everything.”

Now, Glenn works with department leaders and staff across campus. He said his daily responsibilities vary from monitoring parking numbers to handling football parking plans.

“There’s never a typical day,” Glenn said. “It’s just a lot of communication about what we do.”

Glenn said the university’s switch from the Big 12 Conference to the Southeastern Conference has brought higher parking numbers during football season.

“There’s more people that come from out of town from other teams. There’s more people who come just for the weekend. ... And then there’s more special events,” Glenn said. “There’s just more demand on our parking resources, our lots and our staff. So it’s exciting, but it is definitely a lot of work.”

The parking and transportation department has seen another recent change: virtual parking passes.

Starting this semester, parking services issued virtual passes that work by scanning license plates to enforce parking regulations.

Glenn said OU was the last school in the SEC to make the switch from parking officers on foot to license plate readers.

“The timing was right,” Glenn said. “It’s been a really smooth transition.”

Glenn said the virtual passes have increased efficiency for both staff and students. He said the passes allow parking officers to scan license plates from a vehicle rather than having an officer check individual permits on foot. The switch has kept students from waiting to pick up or receive physical passes, according to Glenn.

Managing parking at peak hours

OU currently has 3,638 commuter parking spaces, Glenn said. The university sold 7,851 commuter passes for the 2025-26 school year, according to Glenn.

Glenn said that despite this difference, the numbers aren’t what matters when it comes to parking.

“I’ll state the obvious, a lot of people get hung up on how many spaces we have and how many permits we sell,” Glenn said. “To me, that’s not really important. What I look at is how many cars are in the parking lots at the most peak times.”

Glenn said 10-11 a.m. is the most challenging time for parking.

“Even with that number of permits sold versus spaces, that one hour is the only challenge we have,” Glenn said. “But there’s still spaces out there.”

Though his office sold 200 fewer parking permits this school year compared to last, Glenn said the first-year class has created a “domino effect.”

OU’s class of 2029 is the largest first-year class in state history with 6,251 students, breaking the university’s enrollment record for the fifth-consecutive year.

“This semester has been challenging. I’m not going to sit here and pretend that it hasn’t,” Glenn said. “We were going to open more commuter parking than last year, but because of the large freshman class, we weren’t able to do that.”

Glenn said his department will be adding parking for the next academic year.

“There’s no way around it whenever our freshman classes continue to grow,” Glenn said. “We will add parking until it

makes sense because we have to keep up with the demand. ... I wouldn’t be doing my job if we just did nothing.”

Glenn said added parking would likely be a surface lot, rather than a parking garage.

“THIS SEMESTER HAS BEEN CHALLENGING. I’M NOT GOING TO SIT HERE AND PRETEND THAT IT HASN’T.”

KRIS GLENN, OU PARKING DIRECTOR

“It’s \$30,000 a space to build (a garage) versus \$5,000 a space to build a surface parking lot, ...” Glenn said. “I know that before next year, or even the following year, we wouldn’t have the time or the money to put up a new parking garage. However, we are looking at areas where we can build more surface parking.”

Glenn noted parking opportunities at Lloyd Noble Center and said the shuttle service is a great resource.

“We’re one of the few schools that still has a free park-and-ride shuttle system. A lot of schools charge for that service,” Glenn said. “There’s literally no way that the campus could operate without that shuttle, because if you had 4,000 more cars trying to park on campus, it would be pure chaos. Those shuttles are vital to what we do.”

Public perception

Glenn said the parking directors of other SEC schools deal with the same reputation he does.

“We’re not the most popular department, and we know that,” Glenn said. “That’s just the way that the people view parking on college campuses. ... It’s no different in Arkansas than it is here than it is in Alabama.”

Gary Epperson, manager of OU parking services, said Glenn handles criticism well.

“He never shies away from any complaints or questions or suggestions,” Epperson said. “He wants to do everything he can to help the students and the staff find parking.”

Despite public opinions of OU parking, Glenn said his hope for his department is to serve students and staff in a professional and caring manner.

“I’ve been accused many times of being the most lenient parking director in OU history, and I’m fine with that title,” Glenn said. “I believe in a lot of leniency and a lot of grace.”

Epperson said Glenn differentiates himself from other leaders with his attitude toward staff.

“Any time any of our staff has had any kind of family issues, mental health issues, any kind of health issues at all, usually his first response is, ‘Take all the time you need.’ And he means that,” Epperson said. “With the dynamics of parking and some of the abuse that comes through, that’s hugely important to have in a director — somebody that’s sensitive to those things.”

Glenn said people have felt the same about OU parking for decades.

“The opinion of parking here hasn’t changed since my mom went to school here in the ’70s,” Glenn said. “When I was a student here, there was a lot more available parking than there is now, and people still complained. So it’s just the nature of it.”

Glenn said working in the department for so long has helped him deal with the criticism he faces.

“I grew up in this department,” Glenn said. “I don’t take it personally. ... I get it. It’s a hot button issue on any college campus.”



JENNA BURRESS/OU DAILY

One of Kris Glenn’s many duties is monitoring parking numbers for campus lots.

CITY COUNCIL TO STAFF SENATE

Former council member's journey
of public service

BY MADELINE HOFFMANN • MADELINE.G.HOFFMANN-1@OU.EDU



Elizabeth Foreman was always drawn to making a difference in the Norman community.

Foreman saw different opinions about city issues on social media and felt that local leaders were not listening, which prompted her to run for city council in 2019.

“If (I was) going to plant roots, I wanted it to be in a community that is supportive and listens to us,” Foreman said. “I just went in headfirst — I was sold.”

In 2020, Foreman won the Ward 6 seat, beating incumbent Bill Scanlon with 52.5% of the votes. Foreman was reelected in 2022, beating candidate Alexander Torvi with 53.5% of votes cast.

Norman Mayor Stephen Tyler Holman sat beside Foreman at the council dais for four years while serving as Ward 7 council member. Holman noted that Foreman often brought her daughter to council meetings after picking her up from school.

“It was important to Councilmember Foreman to set a good example for her daughter of being involved and participating in local government,” Holman said.

During Foreman’s first term as a council member, the country was grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and a summer of Black Lives Matter protests following the in-custody death of George Floyd.

Foreman said it felt like the world was on fire.

Feeling pressure from all sides, Foreman said it took mental and emotional work to deal with the fallout from voters.

“People don’t know who I am — they just know that I’m on city council and I’m the enemy,” Foreman said about her first term in office. “It was exhausting to stand apart from the rest of my council and be seen as an individual and not (as a) collective.”

In 2020, Foreman voted against cutting \$865,000 in funding from the Norman Police Department’s proposed budget increase and reallocating the funds to a community outreach program. Council approved the reallocation and later reapproved it in 2021. However, the council later voted to fund nine additional officer positions and provide extra funding for existing salary increases in 2022.

**“I FEEL VERY POINTED
TOWARD PUBLIC SERVICE AND
SERVING PEOPLE, AND GETTING
TO DO THAT AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF OKLAHOMA IS JUST
A WIN ALL AROUND.”**

ELIZABETH FOREMAN, STAFF SENATE

“That was a very divisive time for the city of Norman. It ripped us in two, ...” Foreman said during a public forum in 2024. “When it came to refunding the police, I refunded the police.”

Even with hard or divisive decisions, Holman said that Foreman always firmly stood for what she believed in.

“She never shied away from explaining her votes, why she was going to vote for something or vote against it,” Holman said. “(She) made sure the public understood, even if they didn’t agree with her, ... and I think that’s a good sign of a leader.”

Despite initial challenges, Foreman said she has no regrets about her time on city council.

“I would make those same votes again, even on the hard ones,” Foreman said. “I voted my conscience, and I’m proud of myself that I can walk away and say that I was never intimidated or pressured into voting one way or another.”

In 2023, Foreman announced she would not run for reelection to pursue new interests and career avenues.

Shifting from city to campus service

During her final year as a council member in 2024, Foreman turned her focus to running for the Oklahoma Senate. Though she lost to Republican candidate Lisa Standridge, Foreman said running for Senate felt like a dream come true.

“I was happy to talk to everyone, and everybody was really supportive,” Foreman said. “It didn’t go in my favor, but I just knew that that was OK, the right thing was going to happen.”

Foreman said the loss made her think about returning to OU. Now, she works as the director of human relations and finance for the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History and serves on the OU Staff Senate.

The Staff Senate serves as the elected voice of OU’s employees, representing their interests and concerns across the university. Foreman, who applied for the role at the recommendation of Janet Braun, director of the Sam Noble Museum, said joining seemed like an obvious decision.

“It was just a no-brainer to want to do. I feel very pointed toward public service and serving people, and getting to do that at the University of Oklahoma is just a win all around,” Foreman said. “Not to sound cheesy, but I really do love it.”

Fundraising and staff governance are main aims of the Staff Senate. Despite being a part of the Staff Senate for only a few months, Foreman said fundraising for the group is a struggle.

“There’s funding issues across the board at the university, ...” Foreman said. “I don’t think it’s unique to Staff Senate, but (we have to) make sure we’re able to maintain the same level of experience for staff, and then try to improve.”

Foreman is the chair of an ad hoc committee for fundraising and development. Foreman said she is also a member of the Policy Review Committee. Drawing on her experience fundraising as a council member, Foreman said she intends to organize events such as a 5K race to raise money for the Staff Senate.

From a university employee’s perspective, Foreman said it can be a scary time to navigate university politics with intense scrutiny of education on a state and federal level.

In September, OU Daily reported the Division of Access and Opportunity sent a memo on the first day of classes to OU deans, directors and department chairs advising instructors to avoid course content that could fall under diversity, equity and inclusion.

Belinda Higgs Hyppolite, vice president for Access and Opportunity, wrote in the email that as federal and state interventions shape the approach to course content in higher education, faculty members should be cautious in how they



PHOTOS BY ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

Elizabeth Foreman works as the director of human relations and finance for the Sam Noble Museum of Natural Science.

teach material related to race and gender.

“Courses must avoid methods that could be construed as discriminatory or hostile,” the email reads. “For example, privilege walks, race- or sex-based assignments, or requiring students to affirm certain beliefs may trigger enforcement action.”

This follows Gov. Kevin Stitt’s executive order issued in 2023 banning DEI in Oklahoma higher education. The move prompted the Office of the President to release guidelines for how OU planned to comply with the order, answering questions about how it may impact the university.

In the first days of his second term, President Donald Trump issued a series of executive orders targeting DEI in higher education. Trump has also filed lawsuits and threatened to cut funding from universities relating to DEI in academic curricula.

“Universities are in a really difficult position, and they’re having to make these hard decisions,” Foreman said. “Just like on (city) council, on the surface something might seem very obvious, ... (but) you have to weigh the stuff that usually people don’t consider. Could we lose our funding? Would we close?”

Though she is involved in university politics, Foreman said she does not want to re-enter the sphere of city politics, jokingly dubbing herself a “recovering council member.” Still driven by a duty to public service, Foreman said the experience forged something within her.

“It’s made me stronger and much wiser on how to approach things, and (taught me) how to be effective at communicating and negotiating,” Foreman said. “When you have those skill sets, you can’t help but want to use them.”

'IT'S A CALLING'

Retired OUPD chief reflects on law enforcement career

BY ABBY YOUNG • ABIGAIL.F.YOUNG-1@OU.EDU

Former OU Police Department Chief Nate Tarver first met Johnny Lee Clary outside Moore High School in 1980. Tarver, the first and only Black police officer in the city at the time, was in uniform while Clary was in his Ku Klux Klan robe and hood.

The KKK was rallying at Moore High School to recruit students, and Tarver was the first to arrive on scene. As Klan members took up the area next to the street in front of the school, many students were angry they were there and threw balls of dirt and pebbles at them.

"Well, Nate," Tarver remembered his supervisor Lt. Leighton Stanley asking, "what are you going to do about this?"

Tarver told Stanley the Klan had the right to be on that property, so it was the students who were wrong to harass them — an answer that was legally right, if personally challenging. Officers got the students under control and the Klan eventually left, but Tarver and Clary would meet again soon.

Tarver retired in September after 46 years in law enforcement, a field he said gave him the opportunity and purpose to show compassion and respect to people in the community.

'Someone who looked like me'

Tarver graduated from OU in 1978 with a degree in broadcast journalism but couldn't find a reporting job. While paying his utility bill at Moore city hall, he saw an advertisement posting to hire police officers. He had never considered working in law enforcement, but he needed a job. The Moore Police Department hired Tarver in 1979.

"It was something that I wanted to try. Once I got it, I found out that I really, really liked the job," Tarver said. "I really liked what it stood for as an opportunity to help people and to make some change."

Most Moore residents were accepting of Tarver, but there were some officers and residents who didn't want him there. He said residents would call him names, slam doors in his face and report stolen police cars because they couldn't believe a Black man was allowed to drive one.

"They just couldn't believe that someone who looked like me would be in a police uniform," Tarver said.

The KKK rally at Moore High School happened about a year into Tarver's tenure at the Moore Police Department. After the rally, Tarver continued to see Clary around town. Tarver would greet him, but Clary would only stare back.

A few years later, Clary got into a fight with another KKK member. Tarver was again the first to arrive on scene.

When Tarver found Clary, he had been hit over the head with a shotgun, his head cut open and bleeding. Tarver wrapped a towel around Clary's head and attended to his wound until medical help arrived. After



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Nate Tarver started his career in law enforcement with the Moore Police Department in 1979.

police arrested the man who assaulted Clary, Tarver testified in court on Clary's behalf.

"(Clary) said, 'I can't believe you testified on my behalf,' and of course, I said, 'Well, you know, that's my job,'" Tarver said. "He thanked me, and he said that he was going to have to re-evaluate his thoughts regarding the Klan."

People call the police in their worst moments, Tarver said, so officers must be compassionate and helpful. Driven by his faith in God, Tarver said he believes each person has value, and his faith gives him the strength to treat them as such — even if they don't respect him in return.

'Overcome your fear'

After 10 years at the Moore Police Department, Tarver moved to the Oklahoma City Police Department in 1989. He said he's seen much suffering including tornado damage, deaths and homelessness. However, Tarver said nothing compared to witnessing the destruction of terrorism: the Oklahoma City bombing.

"The carnage and the people, ... when I walked around to that building and saw that, I felt like, for a moment or two, ... I just stood there with my mouth hanging open and just couldn't believe what I saw," Tarver said. "I'm sure it wasn't that long, but it just seemed like it because it was a shock to the system."

Tarver said God protected him throughout his career as he remembered bullets whizzing past his head and seeing tragic deaths. Tarver said he has never killed anyone or been hospitalized with a work-related injury. Being an officer requires running into danger, and Tarver said his sense of duty helps him push past fear.

"Police officers have to kick it in gear, and you have to overcome your fear. You have to overcome your trepidation to get the job done," Tarver said. "That's why it's a calling."

Still, mental health is a struggle for many officers, Tarver said, and improving their mental health helps protect them from the suffering they've seen — things most people will never witness.

Last year, Tarver said he saw a little girl's clothes catch fire while she roasted a s'more at a football game. He helped put the fire out, and the girl was fine.

But Tarver wasn't fine. He said the incident took him back 10 years, to a wrecked car engulfed in flames on Hefner Parkway in Oklahoma City. The fire was so intense Tarver couldn't help the man trapped inside.

"(The) feeling of helplessness, that's one of the worst things for police officers," Tarver said. "To feel like there's nothing you can do because there wasn't anything I (could) do. I couldn't get close enough to it because of the fire. I watched this guy burn to death."

Tarver was cleared by a counselor, but he said it's important for officers to talk about their mental health.

In 2015, Tarver became the deputy chief for the OU Health campus police department. He was promoted to chief in 2017.

In 2020, OU administration decided to unite its three police departments — previously separated by the Norman, Health and Tulsa campuses — under one department and one chief. Eric Conrad, OU's chief operating officer at the time, wanted



From working as a Black police officer in 1979 to conversations in 2020 surrounding race and policing, Nate Tarver said he has been dedicated to affecting change from the inside.

Tarver to take the job, but Tarver declined. After a failed national search, Conrad pleaded with Tarver, and Conrad's faith in Tarver's abilities changed his mind. Although the challenges of campus policing made him nervous, he said yes.

As chief, Tarver prioritized talking with students to hear their concerns and be a familiar face. He said he felt the weight of parents trusting him with their kids' safety.

"We want them to come to the University of Oklahoma," Tarver said. "(I was) in the education business, all right, because there's no education without students."

'We want to change too'

Tarver stepped into the role of chief in September 2020, a few months after George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis and while the Black Lives Matter movement was underway.

Tarver said OUPD was operating with only 25 officers at the time due to decreasing recruitment numbers and many officers quitting.

Tarver ensured officers were trained in human rights protection and de-escalation to better handle campus protests. He also told officers they needed to listen to concerns about police aggression because residents would only allow policing as much as they want to.

Tarver said 2020 revived necessary conversations about race and policing.

"After dealing and living through the things I've lived through in the early part of my career, I didn't sweat a lot of that stuff because I was already ready," Tarver said. "I was built to hear those conversations. I was built to have those conversations and talk to people."

Tarver spoke with Black officers in other cities and addressed questions from Black students in greek life.

"We hear you, and we understand what you're saying, and we want to change too," Tarver said. "That's why we got in this business. We want to affect change from the inside."

David Surratt, vice president for Student Affairs and dean of students, said his conversations with Tarver in 2020 were frank and meaningful as they worked together to deal with social issues on campus. As a minority in a leadership position at OU, Surratt said he related to Tarver in ways few others understood.

Surratt said Tarver's support in difficult situations made him feel seen and encouraged.

"It's a special moment in history that takes remarkable people to stay committed to that work," Surratt said. "It was even more difficult then, in managing all the pressures."

OU's Norman campus Deputy Chief Kent Ray said Tarver is a man of character who generously pays for people's meals, volunteers with the Engaging Men group for the Oklahoma City YWCA and makes time to listen to all people. Ray said Tarver leads by example in being out in the field with officers.

"He always saw everybody as valuable, contributing individuals, and he always treated people good," Ray said. "He was one of those who would always respect people no matter what their station was in life, what their position was, what their financial situation was, what their mental situation was. ... What else can you ask for a person?"

Now retired, Tarver plans to travel with his wife and spend time with his three daughters.

Years after Tarver last saw Clary, he received a letter from him. Clary had renounced the KKK and became an ordained minister in a Black church.

"I know there are Black people that are good people because I've met them, and you're one of them, and you were always kind to me," Tarver said Clary wrote to him. "You always treated me with respect."

"POLICE OFFICERS HAVE TO KICK IT IN GEAR, AND YOU HAVE TO OVERCOME YOUR FEAR. YOU HAVE TO OVERCOME YOUR TREPIDATION TO GET THE JOB DONE."

NATE TARVER, FORMER OUPD CHIEF



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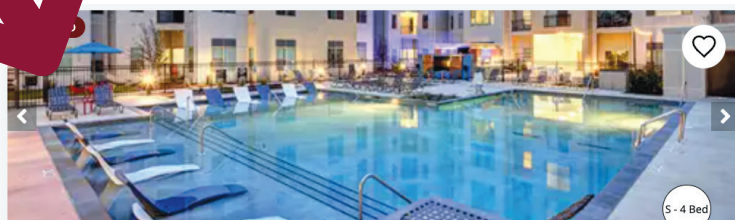
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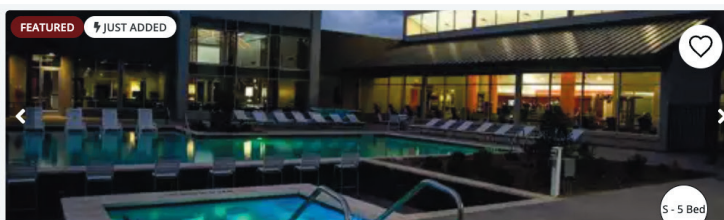
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