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OU DAILY GUIDE

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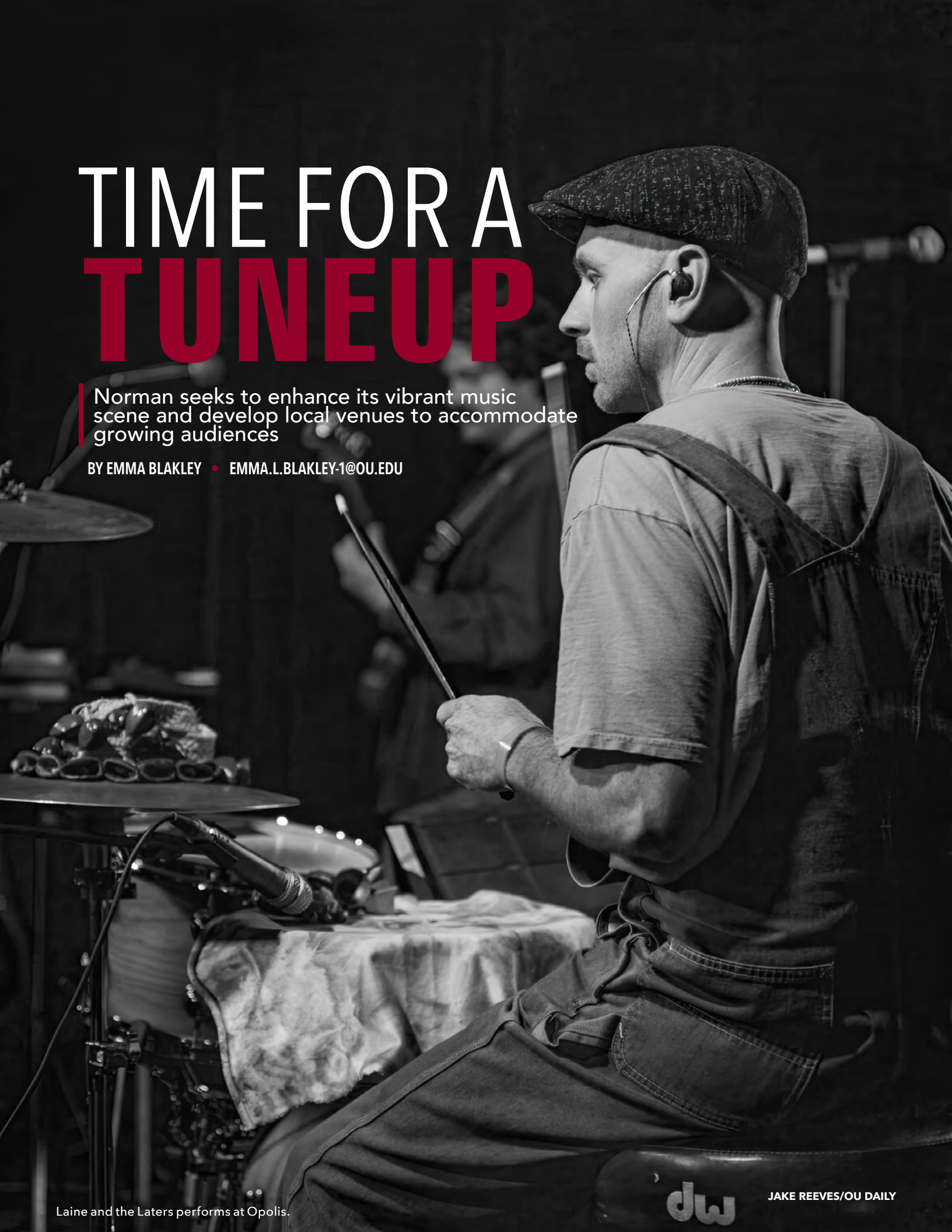
TIME FOR A TUNEUP

Norman seeks to enhance its vibrant music scene and develop local venues to accommodate growing audiences

BY EMMA BLAKLEY • EMMA.L.BLAKLEY-1@OU.EDU



Laine and the Laters performs at Opolis.

JAKE REEVES/OU DAILY

OU's move to the Southeastern Conference invites a host of new visitors and shines a spotlight on Norman's entertainment industry. With the city's history of a carefully curated music scene that has been home to an inspired, connected and community-driven group of artists, the future of live music is receiving new interest in the face of looming change.

The entertainment landscape has had to adapt due to challenges including ever-changing music trends, the turnover of businesses and the COVID-19 pandemic that shuttered live music opportunities around the country. However, the perseverance of a network of local businesses, the Norman Arts Council, the Norman Music Alliance and an abundance of dedicated artists has helped the community continue to thrive.

On any given night in Norman, live music can be found across the city by those who seek it.

On Campus Corner, live music spills into the streets from The Deli, a longtime hotspot that hosts a range of artists from blues to rock, 365 days a year. A couple blocks away, the smell of Italian food and the sound of rich music flows out of Othello's Italian Restaurant.

Located downtown, Norman's oldest bar, Bluebonnet, books musicians six days a week in its quintessential dive bar environment. Within a two-minute walk is Opolis, a micro venue that hosts a wide range of musicians and DJs in a modern industrial environment.

The Red Brick Bar and Bison Witches Bar & Deli both regularly host performers, and the Resonator venue frequently holds concerts, plays and galleries in its minimalistic, versatile space.

Converted into a performing arts studio from a historic train station, The Depot offers a concert series, galleries and workshops in downtown Norman. Just a 13-minute walk away, longtime neighborhood fixture Midway Deli holds concerts in the outdoor space behind the restaurant.

Scott Martin, president and CEO of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, believes a vibrant live music scene will be a central element to the city's success as OU enters the SEC.

"What we'd like to see more of is just constant, regular programming and concerts that are taking place in a myriad of different kinds and sizes of venues that can appeal to a lot of different people," Martin said.

In anticipation of the SEC move, Martin traveled to three established SEC cities, Fayetteville, Arkansas; Tuscaloosa, Alabama; and Lexington, Kentucky, to get an understanding of how Norman can amplify and boost its already dominant live music scene.

Martin said the live music scene in other SEC towns was at the forefront of the visitors' experience and many venues had open-air storefronts that allowed venues to pull people in from the street.

BOB NGUYEN/OU DAILY

The Aints perform at The Deli.

His goal is to expand and find ways to incentivize the incorporation of live musicians into more businesses on a regular basis.

"We need things for people to do. That's restaurants, that's bars, that's entertainment, both on Campus Corner (and) in downtown (Norman). We need that on a regular basis for our business districts to be thriving," Martin said. "They really need probably 250 days of the year programmed with different things that people can come see and do."

Norman can never match the live music scene and vivacity of Nashville, home of Vanderbilt University, or Austin, home of the University of Texas, which will join the SEC alongside OU in 2024. However, Martin and others believe Norman has a chance to develop an entertainment scene that centers live music of comparable vibrancy and quality.

In their current states, Campus Corner and downtown Norman act as the two hubs for the city's arts, entertainment and nightlife.

Campus Corner, walking distance from OU's campus and the Gaylord Family-Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, is home to boutiques, restaurants, bars and clubs. Many of the businesses on Campus Corner are relatively new to the area, including the nightclub Heist and restaurants like Raising Cane's and Yo! Pablo.

Game days fill the streets of Campus Corner with OU fans, where a large TV screen shows games from around the country and businesses are posted on the sidewalks inviting customers inside. On weekend nights, restaurants such as The Deli, Othello's and O'Connell's Irish Pub & Grille host live music from local artists with college kids and older Normanites alike enjoying the scene.

With a myriad of local businesses, restaurants and bars, downtown Norman is at the center of the city's arts scene. Main Street, home to The Sooner Theatre and The Studio, sees the 2nd Friday Norman Art Walk every month and the Norman Music Festival every April.

Scott said he believes just a couple of weekends, game days and festivals are not enough to keep people and visitors entertained and Norman needs to develop its local live music

opportunities in order to see a flourishing and booming arts scene.

Derek Paul is a singer, songwriter and guitarist with a decade of experience in the Norman music scene. He is a booking manager at The Deli on Campus Corner where his band, The Aints, has been playing Monday nights for eight years.

Paul said he first experienced the Norman music scene and The Deli in what he calls the "heyday" of red dirt music, a blend of country, folk and rock. When Paul began as a musician on Campus Corner, The Deli was one of just a handful of live venues.

"You had The Deli, always, but you had Brothers, you had Red Dirt Cafe," Paul told OU Daily. "You could come here and go to four or five different places on Campus Corner that had music, and over time, when EDM started becoming popular with the younger crowd, you saw less of an emphasis on this kind of thing and more of DJs."

On an average Friday or Saturday night, college students flock to Campus Corner. Long lines form outside spots like Heist, Nompton Social and Sideline Bar & Grill, where DJs mix popular beats for crowds to dance to.

Paul pointed to how the rise of social media, especially TikTok, has changed the way that music becomes popular. Instead of users seeing content from those they follow, TikTok's algorithm builds a feed curated to the user. If a track is marketed in a way that fits with popular trends, it can go viral before the entire song has even been released and reach a larger audience more quickly than it would on the radio.

"The old way was that you record an album. You're going to have three or so singles off that album, and you tour it for a year while you're writing and recording your new album," Paul said. "Now, no one really does an album. They might do an EP, but for the most part, you're doing a single, putting it out and then another single, so the attention span is different."

Even if the college crowd often veers toward the club DJ experience on a weekly basis, Norman Music Festival has seen its crowds grow year after year with audiences open to hearing music of all genres by artists large and small.

Norman Music Festival provides a place where Oklahoma artists connect with audiences and with each other. The festival's ability to gather a crowd is one element it has in common with popular weekend venues like Heist.

Shari Jackson, executive director of the Norman Music Festival and The Depot, said the base of Norman's music scene is very strong.

"We are seeing an embarrassment of riches in terms of quality of music, musicians, bands, in a variety of genres, and it's terribly exciting," Jackson said. "We're watching bands that are local (become a) hit nationally."

JAKE REEVES/OU DAILY

Alex Siegel performs at Opolis.

BOB NGUYEN/OU DAILY

Singer, songwriter, guitarist and booking manager Derek Paul during an interview at The Deli.

Norman's current venues provide a strong base for artists to develop. However, Jackson said Norman's current infrastructure struggles to keep its up-and-coming artists.

"We watch that happen time and again," Jackson said. "We can't sustain that here and then bands of all genres end up going elsewhere when we could have (had) them calling us home."

After studying at OU for three years, Bee & The Hive lead singer Bee Pichardo left the university and moved to Oklahoma City in 2022 to focus on her music career. Later that fall, the band was signed by an Oklahoma City-based label, Catapult Recordings. Bee & The Hive is one of several Norman-based musicians and bands to move out of the area to larger markets like Oklahoma City or Tulsa, with some even leaving the state.

Established platforms for local musicians like The Deli and Bluebonnet Bar only have a capacity of around 100, and Opolis can hold about 150 people. However, Norman needs venues for large crowds to come together to gain popularity across the board, according to Jackson.

"When you talk about audiences and the ability for the music scene to really gain some ground, Norman as a college town really should have one, probably two or three venues that have the capacity for a few hundred people," Jackson said. "Those mid-sized venues are very powerful in terms of helping set the tone for our music scene."

Larger venues would offer local artists the ability to play for bigger audiences but would also provide space for touring musicians. Many venues have proximity clauses that require a certain number of miles between each venue artists play at.

In September, a group of city, private sector and university leaders proposed a $1 billion entertainment district with an arena that OU athletics would be the primary tenant of. However, the leaders said they hope to host concerts in the venue and encourage performers who usually go to other mid-size venues in the state to instead come to Norman. The district has not been approved by council as of early November, leaving artists to routinely choose venues in Oklahoma City or Tulsa over Norman.

"There are some really good venues that opened up in (Oklahoma City) and you would see a lot of touring acts, either on purpose to go play the better venues or because of proximity clauses," Paul said. "Are you going to go to (Oklahoma City) or are you gonna go to a smaller venue in Norman?"

Resonant Head opened in Oklahoma City earlier this year and holds over 250 people. Beer City Music Hall opened in 2022 and has a capacity of 500. The Criterion opened in 2016 and has a capacity of 4,000. Tower Theatre, one of Oklahoma City's many older venues, can hold 1,000.

Tanner Miller co-owns the Bluebonnet Bar along with his wife, Michelle. With live music six nights a week, Bluebonnet is an active player in the Norman music scene.

As a business owner working in the center of Norman's arts scene, Miller said he's seen the impact of Oklahoma City's growing music infrastructure over the last 10 years.

"With a medium-sized venue, you can invest in a whole part of the community," Miller said. "That's a way you can invest in the entire arts."

With the hope that OU's SEC move will bring more attention to Norman's music scene, Miller wants the focus on uplifting the current artists of the city.

"The money is going to come no matter what with the SEC," Miller said. "I want to see an investment in growing and sharing our musical talents and gifts."

Norman has a wealth of talent and a strong community of dedicated individuals working to build a self-sustained music infrastructure within the city, Jackson said.

Along with venues, the second element Jackson believes is necessary to support music in Norman is the existence of record labels and booking agencies.

"We have the engineers. We have recording studios. We have producers. We have people that know how to help bands put music together," Jackson said. "But labels and booking agencies and agents, that's where we're short. That mid-level piece of music industry that really makes it hit."

As the SEC move approaches, Jackson said she hopes Norman's energy will focus inward and support the current network of local artists.

"I would love to see in this run up to the SEC, … that we lean into how to support all of the amazing, wonderful things that we have here and provide more opportunities," Jackson said. "Whether that's venues, space, festivals, concerts (or) events, to be able to show all of those folks exactly what Norman is: it's an extraordinary place, with amazing, interesting, incredibly talented people."

ZHENG QU/OU DAILY

OU graduates attend the 2019 spring graduation ceremony at Lloyd Noble Center.

STUDENTS APPRAISE HIGHER ED

OU contends with declining value of degree

BY KAROLINE LEONARD • KAROLINELEONARD@OU.EDU

Richard Key felt high school eating away at him mentally.

Key attended Norman High School and sitting still for eight hours a day was exhausting.

This, coupled with the rising costs of higher education, led Key to know early on that he didn't want to attend college.

"Some people don't have the ability to tell whether or not they'll do well in college," Key told OU Daily. "They just go anyways, and I already knew I wasn't gonna go. There was no way I would have been able to do college, personally."

Instead, Key attended Moore Norman Technology Center while in high school and for a couple of years after. Now a full-time electrician, Key is financially independent, lives alone and didn't take out loans to attend higher education.

"I found a career that I really enjoy, and it really doesn't stop there," Key said. "If more people tried going to a trade school or going into the workforce straight after high school, I think it's a really positive thing rather than going straight out of high school, right back to school and be in crippling debt."

OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. has started raising questions in interviews, galas and Board of Regents meetings about the decreasing confidence in higher education. With several national studies and articles calling into question the value of attending universities, OU's president has grown more concerned for the future of higher education and his university.

"I spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about this question. … How many students nationwide are not going to college out of high school right now? And the drop is really concerning," Harroz told OU Daily in September. "It's a real concern, and not just for the individuals whose life will not be changed by having a college degree, but for the country and its supply of a truly educated workforce."

Using a compilation of studies, The New York Times recently examined how Americans have started turning away from higher education. About a decade ago, 74% of young adults believed college education was "very important." That number had fallen to 41% by 2019. About 45% of Generation Z believe that a high school diploma is all that is needed to achieve financial security, and almost half of parents said they'd prefer their children to not enroll in a four-year college, the article read.

Americans ranked K-12's role in preparing a child for secondary education as the 47th priority out of 57, according to a study by Populace. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was ranked 10th. In the study, highly ranked priorities for K-12 schools included preparing a student for a career, developing skills competitive for the job market and doing meaningful and fulfilling work.

College Board's Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2023 report found total

undergraduate enrollment at public four-year institutions in the U.S. declined by 3% between fall 2019 and fall 2021. In the same time period, the report found that Oklahoma's total undergraduate enrollment declined by over 5%.

OU, however, welcomed its largest class in university history this year, seeing an increase of about 10% in new students compared to last year's freshman class. This was the third consecutive class to break class size records.

An annual study by New America, a group that researches education and other policy issues in the U.S., found that 59% of Americans thought universities had a positive impact on the country, which is 10% lower than before the pandemic. Only 41% of Republicans saw universities as having a positive impact compared to 78% of Democrats.

A 2016 survey from Pew Research Center found that only 16% of Americans think a four-year degree prepares students "very well" for a well-paying job in today's economy.

Even with these statistics and the decrease in university enrollment nationwide, the U.S. Department of Education said by 2027, 70% of jobs will require education or training beyond high school.

"Why aren't people racing to get a college degree?" Harroz said. "The demand is without a doubt going to be there."

Higher education is at a turning point and now universities like OU are grappling with how to keep the worth of their degrees viable.

Enriching the value of an OU degree is included throughout the university's "Lead On, University" strategic plan, from meeting the Association of American Universities benchmarks to boosting OU's reputation through faculty, branding and career development.

For Harroz, he said it boils down to the value proposition of higher education and how OU can market itself in a time where confidence is down and belief in a future after college is diminishing.

"People don't want the lowest cost education," Harroz said. "People talking about school choice in K-12, we're the ultimate school choice, right? Zero people could choose to come here next year if they wanted to. Nobody's compelled to come here. And so you got to look at the market and ask what the market really wants."

Greg Burge, chair of OU's Department of Economics, said he doesn't believe there's evidence that the value of higher education has gone down.

Despite growing questions about the value of a college degree, data shows the wage gap between bachelor's degree holders and high school graduates has only continued to grow in recent years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2021those age 25-34 working full-time with a bachelor's degree made a median salary of $61,600 and those with a high school diploma made a median salary of $39,700.

However, Burge said as labor markets shift, costs rise and debates around student loan forgiveness continue, he questions whether that value proposition exists across the board.

"With what you get out of college, it's good for students to be thinking critically about this experience," Burge said. "Is it worth it in their lives? Is it really the best way to use that many years?"

Rising cost of higher education

Across the country, the annual cost of being a full-time college student — which includes tuition and fees, books and supplies, transportation and other expenses — averaged at roughly $28,840 for public four-year, in-state students and $46,730 for public four-year, out-of-state students, according to the College Board's 2023 trends report.

Over the summer, the OU Board of Regents raised tuition and fees for the second time for resident students and for the third time for nonresident students in three consecutive years.

OU's undergraduate 2023-24 tuition for an in-state student is $5,070 and for out-of-state students, it is $22,140. Students also have to pay fees totaling $9,085 for this academic year, according to the Office of Admissions and Recruitment. Books and supplies are estimated to cost roughly $800 and for students who live on campus, housing and food equals $14,608. OU estimates that housing and food costs for a student living off campus equals roughly $12,500.

Norman apartment and rental rates have risen in recent years and are expected to continue climbing as OU enters the Southeastern Conference next summer.

Added expenses — transportation, loan fees and miscellaneous expenses — bring an undergraduate in-state student to spend roughly $34,342 to $36,412 per year attending the university and an out-of-state student to spend roughly $51,412 to $53,482 per year.

"We're (about) 20% cheaper than the average university. You don't want to be 50% cheaper because, all of a sudden, it decreases your ability to offer excellence," Harroz said. "So it's a strange give and take that exists, and that's what we're trying to thread, which is how do you walk this line?

"You don't look at tuition increases and say, 'Well, that's gonna hit everybody.' It's not because there's a lot of folks that don't have the ability to pay it."

Jeff Blahnik, vice president for the Division of Enrollment Management and executive director of the Office of Admissions and Recruitment, said that the university tries to address the cost of college by offering financial aid, the money coach program and classes to teach students how to budget.

According to the College Board's 2023 report, state and local funding for public higher education increased nationwide in 2021-22 and reached $10,240 per full-time equivalent student.

According to the College Board's 2022 report, Oklahoma had the least amount of state or local funding per student. The percent change between 2010 and 2020 for inflation-adjusted funding per full-time equivalent student was -29% for Oklahoma, according to the 2022 report. The only other states with negative percent changes included Louisiana at -28%, Arizona at -10%, Connecticut at -8% and Kentucky at -3%. The U.S. average was a 25% increase, with states often comparable to Oklahoma such as Texas, Kansas, Alabama, Nebraska and Missouri all increasing.

In the 2023 report, Oklahoma had the only negative 10-year percent change in the country with -2%. The U.S. average was 48%.

Oklahoma offers a little less than 95% of grants solely based on financial need. State grant aid in Oklahoma averaged a little over $500 per full-time equivalent student.

"Oklahoma universities have the eighth-lowest cost of attendance in the nation. Each Oklahoma public institution has a national or regional peer group and it's important to note that our public colleges and universities continue to keep tuition affordable," Angela Caddell, associate vice chancellor for communications for the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, wrote to OU Daily.

OU saw a negative percent change of almost 10% for in-state tuition and fees over the past five years, according to the College Board.

Blahnik said, however, the university tries not to compare itself to others when it comes to determining the value of a degree from OU versus from elsewhere in the country, even another in-state institution that has not raised costs recently.

Oklahoma State University's Board of Regents opted not to raise its 2023-24 tuition for a second year in a row. The last time OSU raised its tuition was 2021, it was raised by 2.5% and had not increased in the three years before that.

"One of the things that we tried to carefully not tread on is, when we're talking about the value of education, we don't want to compare ourselves to other universities," Blahnik said. "The prospective students will do that themselves."

Tyler Ransom, OU associate professor of economics, told OU Daily that with the cost of higher education being so high, a lot of people look at the product and compare it to the price of 10, 20 or more years ago. He said the products are not necessarily comparable.

"I don't think that (higher education is) less

valuable. I think part of the thing that bothers people in Generation (Z) and younger is that it's like, 'Well, I'm getting the same product, but I'm having to pay three times the price as someone from a generation or two ago,'" Ransom said. "Maybe it's not exactly the same product. There's other factors that are pushing the tuition upward."

Ransom explained that having proficient or highly sought after faculty, the additions of on-campus housing that did not exist in the same fashion over 50 years ago and the prospect of a semi-decent football team can all be reasons, or excuses, to drive up the cost of tuition. The product could have appeared to change and become more valuable or more of an experience compared to generations past.

"Having a good football team, the games and also joining the SEC, there's no question that President Harroz was really excited to make that move because it guarantees a certain amount of resources, (a) certain amount of cache that's going to keep people interested in OU," Ransom said.

Harroz previously told OU Daily that student tuition and fees do not go toward OU athletics, one of the few universities in the country to have a self-sustaining athletic department. Ransom said, even if tuition and fees do not go toward funding athletics, OU's football team contributes to a brand and an identity that people want to buy into, so OU can drive the price based on perceived demand. OU's strategic plan outlines a tactic to boost the university's marketing and brand by recognizing the value of the OU athletics brand and OU's ability to capitalize on it.

"There is almost a little bit of monopoly power that OU has, and they claim to have it because they said 'There's only one,'" Ransom said. "That's actually to OU's advantage because it means that there isn't a direct competitor."

If the product hasn't changed significantly, Ransom said, the university then has to answer to that and explain why OU's tuition has gone up.

Harroz said the value of an OU degree would diminish if the university lowered tuition significantly because it would no longer provide the excellence and life-changing education people seek in higher education.

Burge said there definitely are places to receive a degree for cheap, like degree mills, but students walk away unprepared for careers upon receiving their diploma. The value of that degree, to him, does not equal the value of a degree from a university like OU.

Burge, however, acknowledged that OU students may walk away questioning whether the past four years were worth the amount of debt some have to pay off, not to mention the added costs of graduate school or advanced degree programs for those who continue in higher education.

"There's as much, or even more, gains to come to a university as there has ever been," Burge said. "But at the same time, I do see that it can be challenging. If you're having a hard time paying your rent, is it a good idea to keep paying the tuition dollars, paying those fees versus just getting a job and getting started? That's always going to be a tough choice."

Ransom said not all universities are forthcoming with their financial strategy or reasoning behind raising tuition and fees.

With the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid that launched in fall 2023, students are required to fill out fewer questions and with less specificity with the intent of offering more federal financial aid to students through options like Pell Grants.

Ransom said if this new application and expanded Pell Grant eligibility really results in more financial aid, some universities might further raise the cost of tuition.

This, along with repeated controversy involving student loan forgiveness and universities' place in the nation's culture wars, might contribute to Americans' loss of faith in higher education institutions.

"People are a little bit dubious of how they think that higher ed institutions are not necessarily the best actors or don't have everyone's interests in mind," Ransom said.

Politics and student loan forgiveness

U.S. President Joe Biden promised to forgive student loans while on the campaign trail, but the Supreme Court shot down his debt forgiveness plan in June. Now, the Biden administration has shifted to seeking student loan relief through the Higher Education Act of 1965.

With the back and forth of student loan forgiveness and the need to address rising costs of higher education on the federal level, Ransom and Burge said it's a bad look for universities nationwide and causes Americans to lose confidence in institutions that have been among the most locally influential and respected.

"Your value proposition is a big thing for students these days, and they listen to folks talking about student loan forgiveness and they face this uncertain environment," Burge said. "They're kind of watching and wondering how this will all pan out."

Burge said the back-and-forth, will-they-won't-they situation of student loan forgiveness is causing high schoolers, college students and parents to question the value of a degree.

"There has been federal policy on trying to assist low income students or middle income students for generations," Burge said. "I got (a) Pell Grant back in the '90s, so it's not like the government hasn't had an awareness that the financial burden of college is an issue. … These last couple of years have just been shining a spotlight on it because it's been in the national news."

MEGAN ROSS/SOONER YEARBOOK

An OU graduate wears a custom graduation cap to the commencement ceremony in 2017.

Ransom said some of the discontent with higher education institutions stems from the history of universities staying monolithic in terms of political stances or viewpoints. Premiere or elite universities, such as Ivy League schools, are sometimes generalized to all institutions, he said, and those universities tend to have less ideological diversity than institutions like OU.

"People think that whatever's happening there is also happening at places like OU, even though it's not necessarily happening. There's some of the mistrust in universities that is more perception of reality," Ransom said. "But that doesn't make it any less of an issue."

Ransom said communication and transparency can only further trust in higher education and in universities.

According to Ransom, this extends from issuing statements on political stances, such as about abortion, Black Lives Matter protests or the Israel-Hamas war.

In addition, with larger class sizes and the post-pandemic wave of more flexible admission standards, from the elimination of standardized testing to offering more spots in order to boost enrollment across the country, there's the possibility of accepting students who are less equipped to succeed at OU.

"This is more true at this super high-end of the market, where there's sort of keeping information from prospective students as a way to capitalize on the students," Ransom said. "But then it ends up harming students in the end, so I'm thinking specifically about the universities admitting someone who is not on the same par

as the typical admit. … And the kid's looking around like, 'Hey, why am I not doing as well as everyone else when you let me in with them?'"

Burge said instilling confidence in the value of a college degree cannot be achieved with silence or uniformity.

"That's not really best accomplished when you fall into the traps of group think, or the 'We're really only going to take one approach politically,' or whatever that might look like," Burge said. "I do think, actually, that's one of the reasons why OU's pretty blessed to have a lot of diversity in the faculty. We have diversity of backgrounds, political thoughts (and) we come from different parts of the world. We would probably be doing different things if we weren't here. I think students can kind of benefit from that if they come with a certain mindset."

Value of an OU degree

As he plans how to promote and deepen the value of an OU degree, Harroz looked at the growing freshman class and the likelihood of an even larger applicant pool for the class of 2028.

Blahnik said while enrollment nationwide might be down, OU's momentum is rolling.

"It's a sign of health and growth for the university. Not all schools are experiencing that same momentum," Blahnik said. "We feel very fortunate to be positioned in the situation that we are in."

Blahnik said OU's move to the SEC can only grow the university's branding and recognition, which in turn fuels the worth of a degree from the university. According to Blahnik, his office is seeing an increase in applicants from the Southeast; students who would typically attend places like the University of Georgia or the University of Alabama are choosing OU instead.

Ransom and Burge said they know firsthand the benefits a college degree has created in their own lives, which means they also understand the experiences of college students in debt.

"I've seen the power of education to transform lives. … So, I think that the value proposition is certainly there," Burge said. "It can be challenging. If you're having a hard time affording college, you're seeing yourself taking out loans and going more and more in debt, that can be tough to grapple with."

Even with employment options in and around the university, as well as financial aid, students can remain impeded by debt and expenses, which keeps some people from wanting to attend college, Ransom said.

Harroz told OU Daily that the conversation isn't one dimensional, and there are outside circumstances, such as inflation and state funding, that play into offering aid and raising tuition.

CONNIE WIGGINS/OU DAILY

"How do you keep up excellence, affordability (and) value and make sure everyone that has the talent (and) the ability, at least from Oklahoma and hopefully beyond, has the ability to come?" Harroz said. "The answer is continue to work on cutting costs where you don't have to have them."

Caddell wrote that the state regents have discussed the growing need for an educated workforce in Oklahoma. The best way for that workforce to grow, specifically in high-demand fields like nursing and education, is for those students to attend college in state, she wrote.

"Higher education helps learners develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. College graduates are more likely to be engaged in their communities, lead healthier lives, and have higher levels of job satisfaction," Caddell wrote. "In terms of meeting workforce needs, we need more citizens with a college degree to help our current business community grow and attract new businesses to Oklahoma."

Over halfway through his third year as university president, Harroz has helped to usher OU into a new era with the move to the SEC, consistent class size growth and a publicly harmonious administration. This is in comparison to the tenure of former President James Gallogly, which coincided with revelations about former President David Boren's budget and accusations of personal malfeasance.

Harroz said to grow the value of an OU degree, tuition cannot be flat but other measures can be taken to aid students' ability to attend the university.

"Our students wouldn't come here if we were the cheapest because we couldn't afford to provide excellence," Harroz said. "It's that dynamic tension that exists. Our home base for all the analyses goes back to those two things, value excellence and affordability and make sure that the American dream is real, that those that cannot afford but have the ability and discipline and drive can afford to go."

For Key, the Norman High student who became an electrician, studying at OU or another university wasn't in the picture. He said friends who work in construction or in other technical careers who attended college or dropped out now must work to pay off student loans.

Key said there needs to be less stigma about attending trade school or working straight out of high school to possibly avoid student loan debt.

Harroz is now attempting to ensure those who come to OU find it valuable both now and later in life.

At a time when the state of higher education is constantly evolving and coming off a pandemic that altered the way classes are taught and degrees are earned, Harroz and Key are on two sides of a particularly pricey coin to debate whether higher education is still valuable.

The answer isn't clear and might never be.

"It's not a binary, all-or-nothing, black-or-white situation," Burge said.

COURTESY OF FRITZ KIERSCH

OU Professor Fritz Kiersch on the set of "The Children of the Corn." Kiersch directed the 1984 film adaptation of Stephen King's short horror story.

THOSE WHO CAN DO, TEACH

Follow famed director's journey from film to class oom

BY ANA BARBOZA • ABARBOZABALLESTEROS@OU.EDU

Fritz Kiersch's TV broke down when he was a kid.

His dad refused to repair it or buy a new one, so every week Kiersch walked to the movie theater down the street as a means for entertainment.

Kiersch was quickly mesmerized by the storylines, the acting and the mechanics of how the films were made. He wanted to know more.

"It piqued my curiosity about (movies), but there must be more involved in making these. So I started to ask questions and read books in my spare time to understand all these things," Kiersch said.

This fascination pushed Kiersch into pursuing a career in movie production.

Kiersch is best known for his work as the director of the 1984 film adaptation of Stephen King's "The Children of the Corn" and his two feature films made in Oklahoma, "The Hunt" and "Surveillance," both in 2006.

Now, as Kiersch searches for his next project, he has turned his attention toward teaching the next generation of filmmakers as a film professor at OU.

"One of a kind. (Kiersch) has a sense of humor that just gets him through anything. He's very funny but always light hearted," Clayton Tramel, Kiersch's former student, said. "It was so fun that you looked forward to going every day."

Art vs. science

Kiersch's father was a geology professor at Cornell University.

By 15, he knew almost all the faculty members, his way around the roughly 745-acre campus and where the best fraternity parties were.

After school, Kiersch said he and his sisters would go to his father's office and walk around or attend events happening around campus while waiting for him.

Kiersch said, as a kid, he was introduced to themes like politics and science. When he was a teenager, he became vocal about the politics of the 1960s and attended several protests at Cornell regarding the Vietnam War and other social issues.

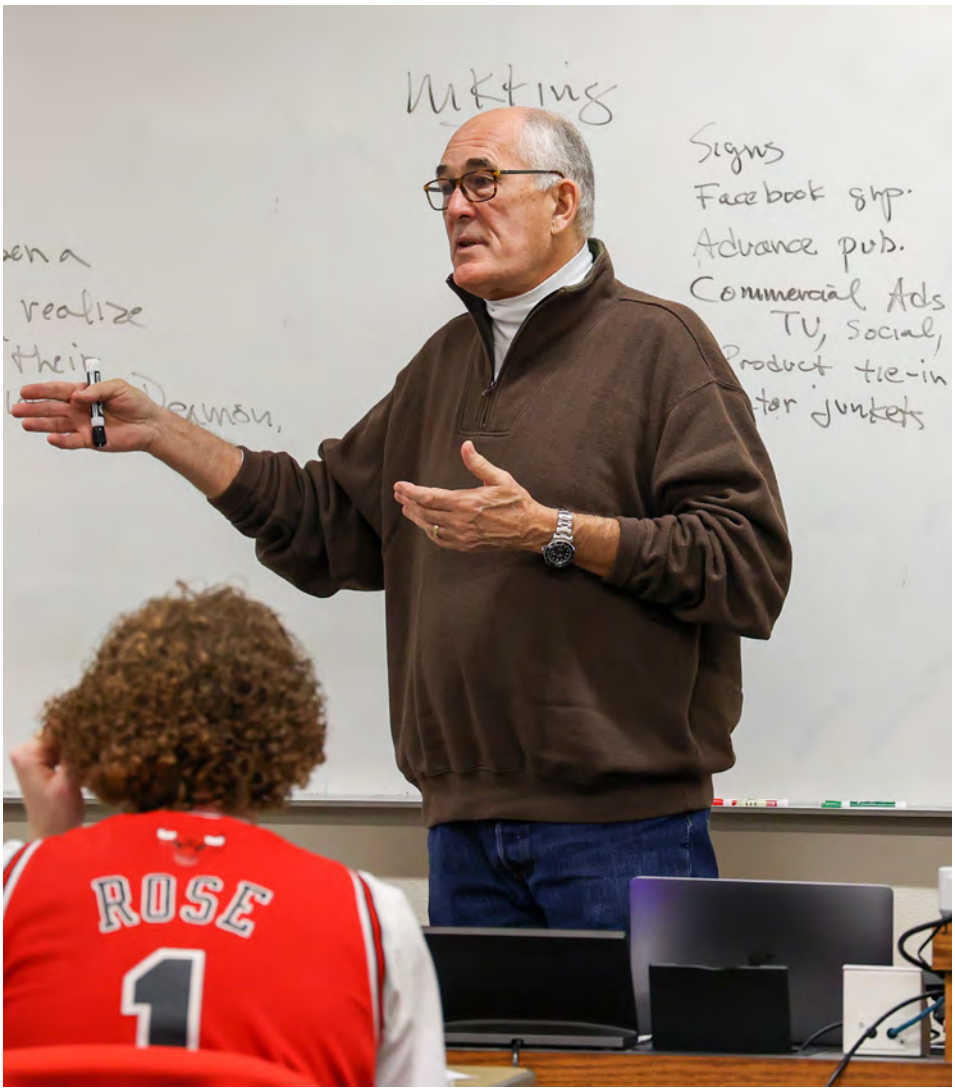
While his dad taught him and his sisters math and science, his mother, a cartoonist and artist who sold her work to The New Yorker and other magazines, always took him and his sisters to museums or symphonies.

"Our environment was kind of split. It was heavy science, or it was art culture," Kiersch said.

While his father wanted him to attend Cornell to study law, Kiersch went to Ohio Wesleyan University to earn a degree in economics.

During spring break of his senior year, wearing a blue suit he got as a graduation gift, Kiersch traveled to New York City and hunted for jobs at various international banks on Wall Street. While there, he slowly realized that he looked like everyone else applying for jobs.

"I noticed everybody had a blue suit,"



OLIVIA LAUTER/OU DAILY

OU Film and Media Studies professor Fritz Kiersch teaches his class about marking techniques in film production.

Kiersch said. "I looked and I thought, 'This is crazy. I look like everybody else here.'"

Kiersch left Wall Street, and instead of getting a job at a bank, he hopped on a subway and visited the film department at Columbia University.

He went into the office of a film professor and spoke with him for 40 minutes about the film industry, and when they were done, Kiersch planned his move to Los Angeles.

The man he talked to was Andrew Sarris, a legendary film critic for The Village Voice and later The New York Observer. Sarris went on to be known for introducing the auteur theory, a theory of filmmaking which centers the director as the major creative force behind a film. As a fan of Sarris, Kiersch followed his advice and moved to California after graduating from OWU in 1974.

TV commercials to feature films

While in LA, Kiersch pretended to be enrolled in graduate school. In reality, he was working at companies making TV commercials while living in his sister's garage.

Kiersch said he looked for any job opening, regardless of whether he had any experience in the field.

Kiersch started as a "freelance production assistant and utility person," and was in charge of picking up equipment or driving files to other TV commercial companies as well as other support tasks.

Paisley Productions, a TV commercial production company, eventually hired him to run errands for a day, Kiersch said, for which he received 35 cents for 12 hours of work. Due to his enthusiasm and eagerness to work for them, they kept hiring him. He eventually started making about $100 per week, or about $570 today.

When he had a chance while working on sets, Kiersch would watch other people work and learn more about the behind the scenes of filmmaking like lighting, props, cameras and directing.

After eight months of working for the company, he was offered a full-time job as a stage manager.

"I didn't know anything, but I raised my hand and said I know all that stuff," Kiersch said. "I went to the books and I read everything I could. ... I pretended like I knew all about the lights and all about the cameras."

Kiersch said he would travel to the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Southern California to watch film classes, go to libraries and learn everything he could about film equipment.

Kiersch worked in that position for four years and later became an assistant for Caleb Deschanel, who he described as the best American cinematographer.

Deschanel worked on movies like "The Patriot," "The Passion of the Christ," "National Treasure," "Fly Away Home," "Being There" and "Jack Reacher" among others.

He has been nominated for six Academy Awards, most recently in 2019 for "Never Look Away."

"He (had) just finished '(The) Black Stallion' and some other really cool films, so he brought me along and taught me how to light and how to direct," Kiersch said. "Then I became a cinematographer."

Kiersch started by filming commercials for free, shooting extra scenes that directors couldn't work on during the day.

Kiersch founded a company, Kirby/Kiersch Film Group, in 1981 with Terrence Kirby, business partner and friend, which focused on making commercials with Kiersch as a director and Kirby as a producer.

The company was very successful, Kiersch said, and did commercials with several companies including Target.

"The Children of the Corn" and "Tuff Turf"

One day, an old worker for Kirby/Kiersch Film Group who was working at New World Pictures, came to Kirby and Kiersch with an offer in return for the job they once gave to him.

He offered them the chance to direct and produce "The Children of the Corn," a horror film based on Steven King's short story of the same name.

Kiersch, who was only working with commercials at the time, wasn't open to the idea of working on a movie, but after some thought, he and Kirby decided to jump at the chance.

The slasher film depicts the story of a young couple trapped in a fictional town in Nebraska where a religious cult of children ritually kills adults.

Kiersch said he wasn't aware of the power King had in pop culture until the movie was

released. He said he wanted the film to be a "tribute to cheap movies" and didn't think it would do well in theaters.

The movie, starring Linda Hamilton and Peter Horton, was released in 1984 and became a cult classic. The movie later turned into a franchise with a total of nine films.

Kiersch said he was offered to work on the other films but wasn't interested.

Kiersch began working on films full time. He directed "Tuff Turf", a teen drama featuring James Spader and Robert Downey Jr. The movie, however, didn't conclude the way he intended due to costs, and it's a regret Kiersch still has to this day.

"We just made up this thing where we take them back and show a party, and everybody will exit the theater with a lot of loud music and fun. It's just a letdown," Kiersch said.

Though "Tuff Turf" didn't turn out the way he wanted, Kiersch continued to make more movies throughout his career, such as "Winners Take All" and "The Stranger."

"Making film products or moving image products takes you all over the world. It's allowed me to be a 'professional tourist', providing lifelong learning opportunities," Kiersch wrote in an email to OU Daily. "After exploring the places/locals/destinations the projects took me to, I created the events to record for the project. Events that are all artificial, constructed with artificial elements, relationships, behaviors, dialogue, actions, etc that, when organized and executed properly, created a reality.

"That was fun. That was effectively a magic trick which seemed new and fresh every time I did it."

Teaching and inspiring students in Oklahoma

Between 1997-98, Kiersch met and grew close with Gray Frederickson, a legendary film producer from Oklahoma City known for producing "Apocalypse Now," "The Godfather," "The Godfather Part II" and "The Outsiders."

Kiersch invited Frederickson to all his film screenings. Frederickson was always shocked by the size of Kiersch's small budgets.

"He would always say, 'How do you do this? You spent to make your film as much as I spend on toilet paper to make my films. I don't understand how you can make a film that looks like that for the budget that we use elsewhere,'" Kiersch said.

They both pitched and worked on films together until 1999 when Frederickson decided to move back to Oklahoma. Some time after he left LA, Frederickson approached Kiersch with a plan to grow the movie industry in Oklahoma.

Frederickson was approached by former Oklahoma Gov. and then-Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin, who was working on a program to improve and develop more businesses in the state. One area of consideration was the film industry.

OLIVIA LAUTER/OU DAILY

OU Film and Media Studies professor Fritz Kiersch teaches his class, "Producing for Film."

Because Oklahoma didn't have a film foundation at the time, Kiersch said they trained people on the mechanics of film and how to shoot, and, since he knew how to direct and produce, they wanted him to go to Oklahoma and help develop these programs.

Kiersch agreed to move to Oklahoma and began teaching at Oklahoma City Community College.

Jon Shryock, a former student of Kiersch, was one of his first students when he started teaching at OCCC.

Shryock told OU Daily that he already had a degree and had been working in the movie business for a while before taking Kiersch's class. He wanted to learn more from someone with the kind of experience Kiersch has.

"I found his phone number and I called him up and basically interviewed him as to whether I wanted to take his class or not. … I called him up just to find out who he was," Shryock said. "Then I get on IMDb and find out what he's done and get a bunch of his movies and watched them."

Shryock took all of Kiersch's classes. Listening to him talk about his experience was worth more than the books they were assigned, Shryock said.

After five years working at OCCC, Kiersch taught at Oklahoma City University and helped develop the film program for 10 years.

Around this time, Kiersch filmed and released "The Hunt" and "Surveillance," two feature films made in Oklahoma. Kiersch's former and current film students worked on the set alongside their professor.

Shryock helped with "The Hunt" and Tramel, another former student of Kiersch from OCCC, helped with the shooting of both productions.

"We loved his class. He's incredibly funny. He's incredibly experienced. But then to actually go from just talking about it in the classroom to actually being on set was a whole 'nother deal," Tramel said.

Last year, Tramel held a screening for a film he worked on. His friends and family attended, and so did Kiersch.

"When he's your coach, he's your coach for life," Tramel said.

Kiersch is now currently in the preproduction phase for his next film, which he said will be a true-crime story.

Kiersch said the plan is to film in New Mexico. He said if he's able to bring former and current students from OU to work on set with him, he will.

"Hanging around with students and getting them to realize that they have a point of view. … They have to say something and not just be existing, but to do something," Kiersch said. "Life has a purpose; it's what makes it fun. Talking to students and getting them excited about saying something, that's what it's all about."

The Holidays and Binge Drinking

Thanksgiving Vacation - November 22-26
Winter Break – December 15-January 16

With finals coming up for many of us, we have our hearts set to unwind and recharge during winter break. Ideally, the winter break is a much-needed rest from the hectic demands of school and work.

But for many of us OU students, the holidays can be a significant source of stress. This time can also be a risk factor for alcohol misuse and binge drinking.

64%

of people with mental health challenges report more stress during the holidays

This stress can stem from visiting a dysfunctional household, discussing politics, a change in routine and financial strain to buy gifts. From a new student who is visiting their family for the first time since starting college, to a graduate student still affected from the anxiety of finals week, everyone has stressors leading into winter break.

There may be some obvious days where us college students drink the most: New Year's Eve, Fourth of July, 21st birthdays etc. But some of the highest risk days for binge drinking is the period of Thanksgiving through New Year's. NYE is one of the highest risk days for college students to have a high blood alcohol content (BAC) level

Wellness Tips for the Holidays

Mentally Prepare to Visit Home

Reflect if you're drinking because you're having fun, or to cope with stress. Have a list of comforting things to do to stay grounded and trusting people to talk to.

Plan ahead for New Year's Eve

How is alcohol a part of your NYE party? Regardless, set a limit if you plan on drinking and plan how to get home safely

Prioritize Your Own Self-Care

As college students, we have a lot on our plates. Use this break to reflect on just how far you've come, and find ways to recharge for the spring. Rest is a right, not a reward.

University Outreach Southwest Prevention Center
The University of Oklahoma
The SPF-Partnerships For Success grant is funded by the Substance Use and Mental Health Services Adminstration

Have more questions about alcohol?
DM us a question!
@redcupqa

the RED CUP Q&A
separating alcohol fact from fiction

TONY RAGLE/OU DAILY

Students tape their mouths shut and link arms as they walk down the South Oval in January of 2015. OU is attempting to reconcile and grow from its past despite legislative attacks to shutter diversity, equity and inclusion programs at the university.

DEI FACES LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY

OU faculty, staff stress necessity of diversity programs

BY ISMAEL LELE • ISMAEL.M.LELE-1@OU.EDU

Students on campus placed tape over their mouths and started marching on campus in the spring of 2015.

A video featuring members of OU's Sigma Alpha Epsilon chapter singing a racist song, which included racial slurs and references to lynching, had gone viral earlier that week.

Marches on campus, calls for expulsions and conversations surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion marked the spring of 2015 at OU.

Actions taken by the administration, including the creation of a vice president role focused on diversity and inclusion, didn't stop all racism and bigotry at OU.

In 2019, OU President James Gallogly's tenure was marked by administrative turmoil and multiple instances of students wearing blackface on or near campus.

A year later, before the university shut down due to the worldwide pandemic, two OU professors used racial slurs in class, prompting a sit-in orchestrated by the Black Emergency Response Team in Evans Hall.

The need for diverse faculty and staff gained the university administration's attention in the aftermath of these acts of bigotry perpetrated by students and professors.

In 2014, before the Sigma Alpha Epsilon incident, minorities accounted for 28.7% of OU's enrollment. In 2015, the number saw a slight increase to 29.3%. Three years later in 2019, it was at 33.4% and during the sit-ins in 2020, it was at 33.5%.

OU has made attempts at absolving its past by increasing diversity through implementing interactive, scenario-based DEI courses to educate students, faculty and staff.

In 2023, there have been no sit-ins or outcries to the magnitude of prior events, despite another instance of a professor using a racial slur in the classroom.

As OU attempts to reconcile and grow from racist incidents that plague its past, the university is now at a crossroads as possible state legislation and inquiries surrounding funding threaten the shape and scope of DEI and some liberal arts programs.

Oklahoma's legislative attack on DEI

In recent years, Oklahoma's legislature has made several attempts at limiting liberal arts programs focused on diversity studies and studies on underrepresented groups, such

as African and African American studies or women's and gender studies. From book banning to funding restrictions, Oklahoma universities like OU could see the erasure of these programs.

Sen. Rob Standridge (R-Norman) authored a concurrent resolution in May to defund any state-funded higher education institutions that do not eliminate DEI programs. The resolution cannot be approved until the next legislative session, which begins Feb. 5, 2024.

Standridge's resolution mirrors a Florida bill which prohibits spending state or federal dollars on DEI programs or political or social activism. The bill was signed and has already taken effect.

Florida and Oklahoma's legislature is not the only government body attempting to eliminate DEI programs in public schools.

According to data compiled by The Chronicle of Higher Education, 40 bills in approximately 22 states have been introduced with the intention to place restrictions on DEI programs at public universities as of July. Of the bills, 29 have either been tabled, vetoed or failed to pass. Seven have final legislative approval and seven have become law.

These bills seek to eliminate the use of federal or state funding to support programs aiming to increase DEI staff, diversity training and to restrict identity-based preferences in admission recruitment and hiring.

According to an article by FOX25 News, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education reported that DEI funding accounts for just under 0.3% of all higher education spending in the state.

Attempts at limiting diversity in higher education have been implemented on the federal level after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down affirmative action in June.

In 2020, OU implemented its "Lead On, University" strategic plan, which includes a pillar specifically aimed to improve OU's approach to diversity.

The plan outlines ways to increase diversity such as promoting a culture of civil discourse. OU defines diversity as representing all individuals and viewpoints, through education and interactions, while bringing awareness and advocacy through civil conversations.

Along with restricting DEI program funding, several state lawmakers have voiced their frustrations in recent years by proposing and passing bills aiming to restrict the teaching of certain historical events focused on racial inequality.

Two bills received attention but didn't pass. Oklahoma House Bill 2988 intended to specifically bar critical race theory from public schools, meaning any instruction within classrooms that suggests the U.S. shoulders more blame than other nations for the institution of slavery. Standridge's Senate Bill 1141 would have effectively prohibited public universities from requiring students to enroll in courses addressing "any form of gender, sexual, or racial diversity, equality, or inclusion," unless required under their major.

Most notably, the state garnered national attention when it passed House Bill 1775, which restricts schools from teaching that a person is inherently racist, sexist or oppressive because of their race or sex, either knowingly or unknowingly. Known as a vague and widespread book banning law, the bill led one Norman teacher to leave her position and face backlash from Ryan Walters, Oklahoma's superintendent of public instruction. It also resulted in the downgrade in accreditation for two public school districts in the state.

Standridge's efforts to limit and restrict DEI haven't slowed. On Oct. 18, Standridge called for an interim study session in which Oklahoma senators discussed the influence of DEI programs in higher education in a forum that scrutinized the existence of the programs.

According to several OU professors, with the growing resentment of DEI programs and restrictions on liberal arts studies, the university may have to pivot its approach in promoting DEI studies and programs to maintain the progress made since 2015.

OU administration and DEI

As a professor in liberal arts at OU, Jermaine Thibodeaux believes the attack on academia stems from a fear of a younger generation who may be more radical.

Thibodeaux said the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 may have triggered both younger generations and politicians to delve deeper into their opposing beliefs. A tactic used by politicians, according to Thibodeaux, would be to attack the place where students spend the most time.

According to Thibodeaux, HB 1775 and SB 1141 have affected K-12 schooling more than OU. Despite this, he remains conscious of the language he uses when talking about sensitive history.

"I'm always mindful that those bills are a part of the education landscape in this state, but I wouldn't say, just yet, that I feel like they really have impacted what I teach for the most part. I think the presumption for most people who take (African and African American studies) classes should understand that we'll get into some of the unsavory stuff," Thibodeaux said.

When Nesha Williams, assistant to the chair and office manager of the African and African American Studies Department, first arrived at OU in 2013 as a staff assistant liaison between the military science department and the university, she was unaware of any courses relating to African American studies. It wasn't until 2020 that she became aware of AFAM studies, which eventually led her to apply for a position.

JENNA BURRESS/OU DAILY

Nesha Williams, assistant to the chair and office manager of the African and African American Studies Department, talks about the importance of diversity at OU.

"It wasn't a degree granting department, it was just a program. The work behind the scenes to elevate it from a program to a department would not have been possible without the level of support that we received from the (Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences)," Williams said.

The AFAM department offers courses like introduction to African American studies, Black literature and modern analysis of the prison industrial complex.

Despite the repeated political attacks, members of the AFAM department said they are unfazed as the department's future is crucial to the university.

"There is a need for what we do, and so I feel like the security comes in. And having that validation, from going to a program to a department, there is a need for the work that we do. And so that gives me at least a lot of security in knowing that my job is secure because there is still work that is still needed. For as long as there is work to be done, we have a reason to be here." Williams said.

When it comes to the presence of AFAM studies, Thibodeaux said the department will always have a place in higher education due to race being a salient lens of analysis in U.S. history.

His fears stem more from what students entering college will believe after coming through a K-12 system with harsh restrictions on race and diversity.

"The sort of broad attempts to whitewash,

erase (and) sanitize history for the sake of someone's feelings, maybe in some people's minds is a noble idea, but I think the consequences far outweigh any immediate gain or sort of benefit that these kinds of policies might produce," Thibodeaux said.

Williams said though what is happening may be an attack on history, the subject matter itself is unchangeable and undeniable.

"Politicians can't alter the events that have unfolded and power lies in moving forward and striving to bring about change," Williams said.

For Williams, it's not about attacking any specific group or party. Rather, it's about casting a spotlight on history to foster understanding and drive progress.

"There are African and African American students on college campuses around the world. They need a place that they can feel they can call home, a place that looks and feels familiar, especially for those students that are so far away from those things. It's very important for us to continue to have that same presence," Williams said.

Recruitment and DEI

Dorion Billups, director of Diversity Enrichment Programs at OU, recruits students with the intention of helping them complete college at their own pace by providing resources to fully acclimate them onto campus. Billups said his focus is more so on recruitment than retention.

According to the annual press release, OU's freshman classes have broken diversity records for the past three consecutive years, each surpassing the last in largest class size. According to OU admissions, 39.3% of students in the class of 2027 identified with an underrepresented group, 26% are first-generation students and 88 are international students.

Billups said in his time helping recruit and assist historically marginalized or underrepresented students as they attend and transition to OU, he has noticed that most students of color will experience some form of imposter syndrome while attending a predominantly white institution.

"If students don't see themselves whenever they're coming to visit campus, how are they going to feel like this is a place that they can be successful in?" Billups said.

According to Billups, OU has made honest attempts in trying to help his office grow, but it's still difficult negotiating with the university to provide his office with more scholarship opportunities for students who may struggle to finance their education.

Choosing to attend a predominantly white institution like OU is a conscious decision for most students, Billups said, but he believes if more legislation targeting liberal arts and DEI passes, it may affect recruitment for out-of-state students who aren't as familiar with Oklahoma politics.

"I think, with the political landscape in Oklahoma, it's not unreasonable to think that there could be a chilling effect for nonresident students thinking about the University of Oklahoma, if everything comes to pass."

Helena Okpara is used to being the only Black student in the classroom.

As a pre-medical student, she said she's had one Black professor and has known few other Black students who took pre-medical courses alongside her during her time at OU.

Despite the lack of diversity, Okpara, who is public relations chair of the African Student Association, has made it a personal goal to help students of all backgrounds strengthen their relationships with each other, a large task at an institution fraught with a history of racism and sparse administrative action.

When considering what it's like to be a minority at a predominantly white institution, Okpara said her time at OU has been difficult.

Okpara said she's met students from other states who, upon arriving at the university, had to grapple with the fact they, like herself, may often find themselves to be the only person of color in their classroom.

Okpara said diversity between all groups needs better promotion from the university for there to be a significant change. She invites students of all backgrounds to events hosted by AFSA to promote further inclusion.

While she agrees that the university should promote DEI, Okpara said mandating the DEI programs will not inspire massive change and shouldn't be a requirement for students.

"They're adults. They're human. They have their own free will to do whatever they want to do. We can't just force that; you have to be open minded," Okpara said.

Rethinking DEI programs

George Henderson, director of the advanced studies program in the Department of Human Relations and former dean of the College of Liberal Studies, joined OU's faculty in 1967. He and his wife were the first Black homeowners in Norman.

Henderson said he believes the legislation surrounding DEI initiatives may be inevitable as the structure of the programs are often hypocritical of their goals.

"Our program should promote self-growth and self-development, but it should also promote civility. It should promote ways that we can interact. We do this wrong at the University of Oklahoma," Henderson said.

Henderson's main issue with the structure of DEI programs at OU is how the division governs all aspects of diversity for the university. Instead, he thinks each dean should be responsible for the diversity programs and efforts in their own college, Henderson said.

Henderson said OU's DEI programs have largely been advertised not as a way to promote all people, but to specifically highlight Black people. In his view, this could alienate students who may need assistance from DEI programs but do not fall under the implied definition of "diverse."

Henderson said advertising around the programs has fueled a divide among the white and non-white populations in universities.

"DEI programs should be talking about all students. Of course, there's an emphasis on bringing in minority minorities, but how do you do that in a way that's helpful?" Henderson said.

Because OU's DEI programs are framed as "non-white," whether intentional or unintentional, Hendersdon said that encourages conservative white politicians to present and implement laws hindering diversity courses, even if such courses are vital for personal growth.

"We must live what we teach. If we say we're going to teach diversity, let's live it. Now, that means I'll have to have a program that will allow us to teach living together, interacting together, and I should not spend more words on denigrating one group and praising another group," Henderson said.

Henderson questioned what DEI is doing to improve the social environment since he has noticed little improvement in maintaining retention with minority students and faculty during his time at OU.

Though Henderson takes issue with the structure of DEI programs, he does think the overall ideas and programs are a necessity to reduce hatred and ignorance.

Henderson said the only way to create an environment where diversity is championed and not challenged is to work around what lawmakers are doing by playing within their system to avoid further division.

"My conundrum is simply this: No matter what we say about where legislators are going, they're going there, and no article or no film and nothing that you do will change that. Now the question becomes, 'If this is the game that we're gonna play, how do we play it well?'" Henderson said.

The existence of DEI programs is part of the attempts made by universities like OU to reconcile with past events that have made their minority population feel unwanted.

With the new legislation from Oklahoma lawmakers directly attacking these attempts for change, OU professors and faculty see it as another way to return to the past and ignore the reason these programs and disciplines were made in the first place.

"DEI is for everybody, you know what I mean? We're just out here trying to get students to at least feel where they can belong," Billups said.

ADEN CHOATE/OU DAILY

Oklahoma's primary mental health hospital, Griffin Memorial Hospital, built in 1915 in northeast Norman.

LEGACY OF GRIFFIN MEMORIAL

Hospital's relocation opens land sale prospects

BY PEGGY DODD • PDODD@OU.EDU

Standing on the northwest corner of Main Street and 12th Avenue Northeast, Griffin Memorial Hospital's brick buildings hold the history of Norman's early beginnings. Most prominently, the hospital's Hope Hall, built in the late 1920s, features tall white columns that once stood watch over one of the largest medical facilities in the state.

Neighborhoods to the west, coffee shops and fast food restaurants to the east and soccer fields to the north, most of the buildings on the extensive acreage are now closed or serve new purposes.

Standing on the property today, the sounds of cars speeding down 12th Avenue, families at Frances Cate Park and little league soccer games can be heard. But in the 1950s, the hospital heard patients working on dairy farms and Girl Scouts or one of OU's sororities volunteering at the facility. The property was primarily surrounded by Oklahoma's natural landscape at that time.

Not far from Norman's original townsite, the development around Griffin Memorial Hospital grew alongside the city.

In a city just a year old at the time, High Gate College's campus occupied the facility's current land. Founded in 1890, the girls' school educated the women of the area but soon found competition with nearby OU, which was founded the same year. High Gate College closed its doors after five years, making way for the Oklahoma Sanitarium Company.

1915 saw the establishment of Central State Hospital after the Oklahoma Sanitarium Company was sold to the state. In 1953, the complex was renamed Griffin Memorial Hospital.

The hospital currently has 120 beds and over 350 employees.

However, the future and legacy of the hospital's campus have yet to be determined after the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse announced a brand new facility in Oklahoma City would replace Griffin Memorial Hospital.

In January, Oklahoma County Commissioners approved $1 million to support the hospital's move, should the department decide to relocate to the state's capital. In September, the move was officially confirmed and renderings of the Donahue Behavioral Health hospital were released. The new facility would hold 330 beds, serving 275 adults and 55

adolescents daily.

Its estimated economic impact is over $447 million within five years.

In the original press release, Carrie Slatton-Hodges, Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services commissioner, wrote Griffin Memorial Hospital had outlived its functionality.

Moving from the state's third largest city to its first, the new behavioral health campus will take Griffin Memorial Hospital's title as the state's primary mental health hospital. With it, leaves the question of what the over 220-acre property will house next amid Norman's impending economic boom.

Donahue, a psychiatric legacy

As the state of mental health will be left uncertain in Norman with the hospital moving about 24 miles north, the new facility's name honors one of Griffin Memorial's most influential doctors: Hayden Donahue.

Originally from El Reno, Donahue became the superintendent of Norman's Central State Hospital in 1961 and served in that role until 1979. Before that, Donahue was the first director of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in 1953 until departing in 1959. He later returned to the position from 1970-78.

Donahue began the psychiatric residency program and structured the children's ward at Central State Hospital, according to his obituary in The Oklahoman following his death in 2002. The first federally funded comprehensive mental health center opened in Norman under Donahue's watch in 1969.

Renee Mixon worked at Griffin Memorial Hospital for over 30 years and now serves as the co-executive director of the Oklahoma Psychiatric Physicians Association. Mixon said that while she was at the hospital, the treatment was well orchestrated thanks to the work of Donahue.

"He put together a treatment program that was cutting edge at the time," Mixon told OU Daily.

According to Mixon, Donahue's treatment plan that was developed at Griffin Memorial Hospital involved putting together teams of professionals like psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists and therapists to develop personalized treatment plans. The end goal of Donahue's treatment was for the individual to improve and return home and did not focus on institutionalizing patients.

When Mixon joined the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in the 1970s, she said Donahue's treatment was the norm. Paired with Donahue's plan were advancements in psychiatric medications, which Mixon said allowed the length of patient stays to decrease from eight years to 21 days.

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Griffin Memorial will relocate to the Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City campus, renamed Donahue Behavioral Health hospital.

"They made a huge impact on treatment because instead of just a maintenance type of medication, it became a treatment modality, which made the person … wake up and be able to then take an active part in their treatment process," Mixon said.

Before Donahue's treatment program, Mixon said treatment mainly focused on "warehousing" patients, the practice of confining patients with mental disorders to large institutions for long-term care. Mixon emphasized that patients were treated kindly, but there just wasn't enough knowledge at the time to properly serve mental health needs.

Bonnie Campo, director of public relations at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, wrote in an email to OU Daily that department leadership made the decision to name the new hospital after Donahue. Campo wrote that a building on the current Griffin campus is already named after Donahue.

"The new Donahue facility will honor our history and the service of (the) current campus while carrying that service into the future," Campo wrote.

Donahue would follow the footsteps of Dr. David Wilson Griffin, the hospital's current namesake who had begun revising mental health care while running Central State Hospital.

Mixon said Griffin did not believe in classifying patients as "violently insane," making one of his first moves to remove the sign in front of Central State Hospital that read, "Norman Institute for Violently Mentally Insane."

Under Griffin, the hospital's campus expanded to over 30 buildings and three farms, according to the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services website.

"He believed in humanity and compassion, and his staff also believed in humanity and compassion, to the extent of the knowledge of medicine that they had during the 1920s and the 1930s," Mixon said.

At the time, Griffin and his staff would conduct treatments like insulin shock therapy, where patients were given increasingly large doses of insulin to induce low blood glucose and coma, according to Mixon.

The idea was to shock patients out of their conditions and was largely discredited in the 1960s.

He also practiced wet sheet pack therapy, where patients were wrapped in a wet sheet, followed by several dry blankets, to encourage hyperthermia and sweating. According to reporting from The Washington Post in 1989, most hospitals stopped using the therapy in the 1950s.

"They did the best they could, but as medicine progressed, the treatment at the hospital progressed," Mixon said.

Mixon said the psychiatric progress and work of staff and patients at Griffin Memorial Hospital should be remembered as pioneering mental health treatment and the acceptance of

psychiatric disorders.

"It's not a closing, but it's a new beginning for the facility. It will continue to change as the treatment of mental illness continues to evolve," Mixon said. "It was the gold standard, and I hope it continues to be the gold standard."

Future of Griffin

Officials from the city, Cleveland County and the Norman Economic Development Coalition started meeting with hospital leadership in April 2022 regarding the move, according to Lawrence McKinney, NEDC President and CEO.

McKinney wrote in an email to OU Daily, that initial conversations centered around keeping Griffin Memorial Hospital in Norman, but Oklahoma County and Oklahoma State University started incentivizing the state to relocate it to Oklahoma City.

"Norman, other than (tax increment finance districts), does not offer any other kind of incentive to be competitive with other communities," McKinney wrote. "It's a glaring disadvantage that this particular project illuminates."

In September, the Norman Transcript confirmed in an interview with Mayor Larry Heikkila that the city did not submit a bid to keep Griffin Memorial in Norman.

Rep. Jared Deck (D-Norman) is the legislative representative for Griffin Memorial Hospital. Deck told OU Daily that the hospital should be remembered as a foundational part of Norman, given its history of employment and its health care developments.

Deck said one of the most important things to remember for the Griffin Memorial Hospital move is to avoid gaps in services for patients. According to Deck, when the hospital leaves Norman, there will be gaps in in-patient treatment locally, though such services will be available in Oklahoma City.

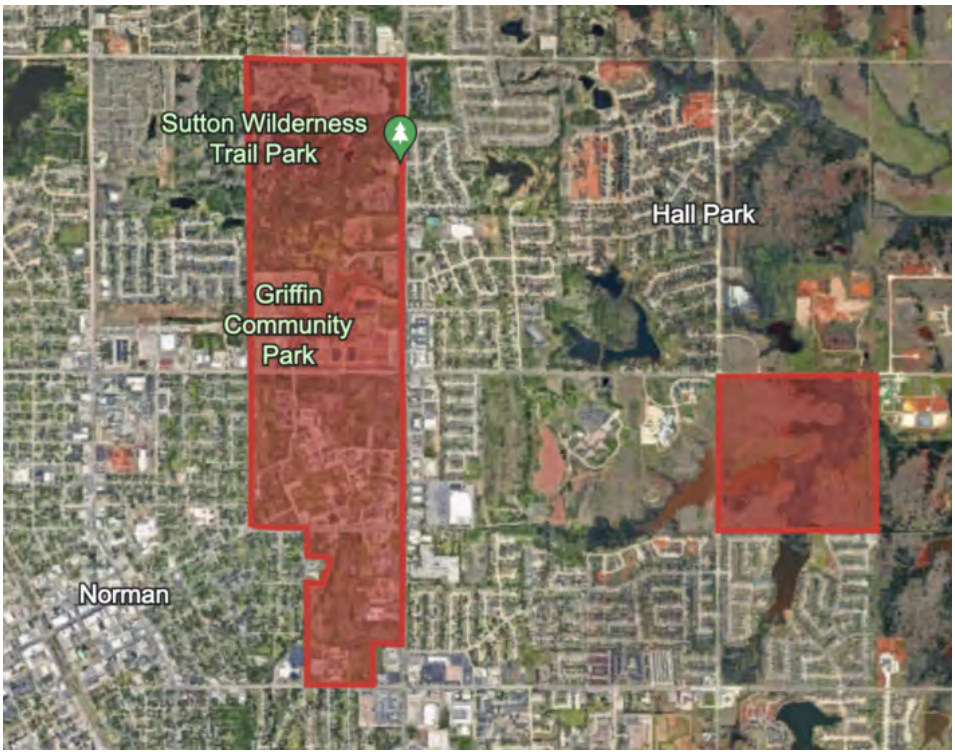
Deck said that, for himself and other members of the Norman delegation, access to mental health services is a priority.

"Our patients come first; our employees come next because our community depends on it," Deck said.

Griffin Memorial Hospital sits on 224 acres of land, though the state will sell over 700 acres located in East Norman, according to Campo.

For comparison, Central Park in New York is just under 140 acres larger than the property for sale. The entire campus of the University of Central Oklahoma is 210 acres, while the University of Texas at Austin takes up 431 acres.

The expansive property encapsulating Griffin Memorial Hospital includes the location of Red Rock Behavioral Health Services, which has an adult crisis unit on Griffin's campus. The Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center on Alameda Street is housed on the property, though Campo wrote it will be excluded from the sale.



COURTESY OF LAWRENCE MCKINNEY

A map outlining the state's property that will be for sale. The Norman Veterans Center and the J.D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities are not included in the sale.

The property for sale also includes the Cleveland County Health Department, Le Monde International School and Sutton Wilderness Trail Park. The property does not include the nearby Food and Shelter. The Norman Veterans Center and the J.D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities are also not included in the sale, though that property is also owned by the state.

It is not known as of early November if these services and businesses will be relocated elsewhere in Norman or keep their property.

As for employees, Campo wrote that everyone currently employed at Griffin Memorial Hospital has been assured their employment will continue at the new Oklahoma City facility. Campo wrote that the department will need more employees to run the larger hospital.

McKinney wrote that as Griffin Memorial Hospital employees move their work to Oklahoma City, new jobs could be coming to Norman. According to McKinney, a new outpatient health facility could potentially be built.

McKinney wrote that, should private sector enterprises purchase parts of the land, the area would become taxable property. The land must be sold in order to pay for the Donahue facility, McKinney wrote.

"Once it is sold, as the state is requiring, I believe we will see hundreds, if not thousands, of higher-paying private-sector jobs over the next decade," McKinney wrote.

McKinney wrote the most glaring loss of the land sale could be the newly built soccer fields across from the hospital, funded by Norman Forward dollars. Because those fields are currently under leases, should the land be sold to a single buyer as expected, all leases would be void and would have to be renegotiated, according to McKinney.

Kathryn Walker, city attorney, wrote in an email to OU Daily that the city wants to protect its existing interests — like Griffin Park and the Sutton Wilderness Trail Park — but the relocation of the hospital presents a unique redevelopment opportunity in East Norman.

Historically, there has been an assumption in Norman that the west side of town sees more development and business opportunities while the east remains mainly rural.

Norman City Council must approve any zoning and platting requests of the property by any future private developers.

As conversations with the state are ongoing, Walker wrote she couldn't provide any specific updates regarding the land but is hopeful the interests of the city can be protected.

NEDC believes the city or county should own the land and present a master plan for the area before selling plots to private entities, McKinney wrote.

"A master plan that solicits input from east side residents will be critical to the long-term success of whatever development is proposed," McKinney wrote.

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