

OU DAILY



BACK TO SCHOOL



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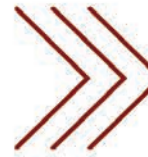
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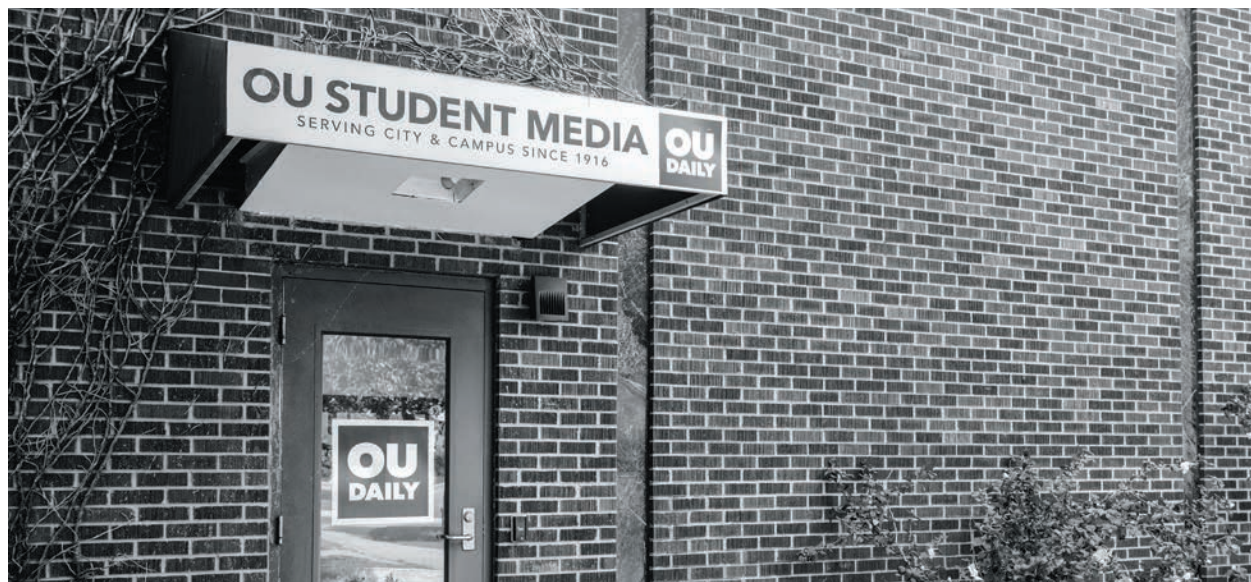
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FROM THE EDITOR



SHAYFER CANNON/OU DAILY

The east entrance of OU Daily's newsroom located on the South Oval.

Aiming to build, strengthen community reporting

Welcome to Norman!

Whether you're stepping on the South Oval for the first time or returning for your final fall, there's a particular kind of electricity that comes with a new school year. It's the buzz of possibility — of clean slates, fresh notebooks, new classes and unexpected conversations. It's a reminder that college isn't just about lectures and deadlines, it's also about discovering who you are and who you're becoming.

As a young freshman buzzing with excitement and nerves, I remember stepping onto OU's campus so eager to find my purpose, and I found that purpose, right through the doors of Copeland Hall to the OU Daily newsroom. Three years later, I'm so incredibly honored, humbled and still just a little awestruck that I get to lead this newsroom.

Here at OU Daily, we're ready to tell the stories of the Norman and OU community: the big ones, the quiet ones and the ones that capture what it means to be part of this campus. As the university's independent student voice, our mission is to inform and engage the OU community with journalism that matters. That includes in-depth daily digital coverage, special print editions like this one and an expanding presence in social video; where we're aiming to meet our audience in the fast-moving, visual spaces where stories increasingly unfold. We believe good journalism is for everyone, and we're always working to meet you where you are.

This Back to School issue of the OU Daily is built with that spirit in mind. Inside, you'll find a guide to help you navigate the first few weeks with information about what organizations to explore, who to know, the emergence of

new dorms and more.

If you're new here, we've got insights to help you feel less lost. If you're returning, we've got stories to help you reconnect.

College is rarely a straight line. At its best, it's a place that pushes you to think harder, care deeper and grow in ways you never expected. At the Daily, we're here to be part of that process to inform, question and celebrate the stories that shape OU.

Thank you for picking up our Back to School Guide and following up online at oudaily.com. Sign up for our newsletters and follow us on social media to stay up to date with our work. You can find us on Facebook, X, Instagram, Bluesky, Threads, YouTube and TikTok.

As you find your footing this semester — whether that's in a lecture hall, on the practice field or during a late-night coffee run — know that you're part of something bigger. You're part of a community that's always evolving, always learning.

We're glad you're here,
Anusha Fathepure



Anusha Fathepure

Editor-in-chief

anusha.fathepure@ou.edu

SUMMER IN REVIEW

13 Norman, OU stories to start your semester

BY JOSH FRANKLIN •
JOSHUA.T.FRANKLIN@OU.EDU

May 14: OU names new vice president for research and partnerships

OU announced Matthew Hulver as vice president for research and partnerships. The position is a new role created to lead research endeavors and unite OU's campuses in shared goals. Before coming to OU, Hulver was a professor and vice president of knowledge enterprise initiatives at Arizona State University.

May 20: Norman City Council approves Rock Creek Entertainment District phasing plan

Norman City Council approved the Rock Creek Entertainment District phasing plan in a 8-1 vote. Ward 5 Councilmember Michael Nash was the only council member to vote against the plan. The plan is expected to cost \$622 million but could possibly cost up to 15% more as it develops.

May 24: OU athletic department to lay off 5% of staff due to looming revenue-sharing with athletes

OU announced the athletics department would cut 15 of its 302 full-time staff to support revenue-sharing with student athletes. The layoffs come in response to the House v. NCAA settlement that allowed schools to share up to \$20.5 million in media revenue. Following the layoffs, OU plans to allocate the full \$20.5 million toward initiatives such as revenue sharing, evaluating ticket pricing, and enhancing premium offerings across all sports.

June 2: WCWS streak ends: Texas Tech 3, OU 2; quest for 5-peat falls short

OU softball fell short of a possible five-peat after losing to Texas Tech in the Women's College World Series semifinal. The Sooners trailed until the final inning when they tied the game with a two-run homer, but eventually lost the game in the bottom of the seventh to a walk-off run batted in.

June 12: OU Board of Regents approves tuition increase

The OU Board of Regents unanimously approved a 3% increase in tuition and mandatory fees for undergraduate and graduate students at OU's Norman campus. OU College of Law will also have a 5% tuition and fees increase.

June 14: Man held in Norman shooting is also suspect in OKC sword attack

A man was taken into custody after being charged with first-degree murder and two counts of assault. Police identified Mark Shepherd, 25, as the suspect of a shooting at his family home in Norman. He was also the suspect of a sword attack



ESTHER HODSON/OU DAILY

Senior pitcher Sam Landry and sophomore outfielder Kasidi Pickering during the game against Texas Tech on June 2.

at a Buddhist Monastery in Oklahoma City earlier that day. One person was confirmed dead and two others were hospitalized after the shooting.

June 15: Former dean of OU College of Law, interim president dies at 93

David Swank, former OU College of Law dean and interim president, died at 93. Swank graduated from OU College of Law in 1959, later serving as dean of the college from 1986-93 and as interim president of OU from 1988-89. Swank retired after the 2017-18 academic year, but continued to serve on various law and higher education committees.

June 22: Oklahoma City Thunder wins first NBA championship

Oklahoma City Thunder won its first NBA championship, defeating the Indiana Pacers 103-91. The Thunder won the series at home in the seventh game, with Shai Gilgeous-Alexander being named Finals MVP.

June 23: Norman Public School Board of Education approves bell-to-bell phone ban

Norman Public School Board of Education approved a bell-to-bell policy banning personal electronic devices for students from the first bell at the beginning of the school day through the final bell at the end of the day. The policy comes after the Oklahoma legislature passed Senate Bill 139 in May, requiring school districts to pass their own bell-to-bell cell-phone ban policies.

June 25: Norman City Council approves seven AIM Norman plans

Norman City Council adopted seven AIM Norman comprehensive plans: a land use plan, housing strategy plan,

comprehensive transportation plan update, stormwater master plan update, water hydraulic modeling update, wastewater master plan and sanitation master plan. AIM Norman is a 25-year area and infrastructure plan composed of projects designed to enhance Norman's quality of life.

July 1: Norman City Council swears in new mayor, council members

Mayor Stephen Tyler Holman, along with newly elected Ward 1 Councilmember David Gandesbery and Ward 7 Councilmember Kimberly Blodgett, were sworn in alongside returning members Ward 3 Councilmember Bree Montoya and Ward 5 Councilmember Michael Nash. Council also approved a resolution thanking and honoring former Mayor Larry Heikkila and former Ward 1 Councilmember Austin Ball.

July 7: OU athletic director Joe Castiglione to retire in coming year

OU athletic director Joe Castiglione will retire during the upcoming 2025-26 school year. Castiglione is currently the longest tenured athletic director in the country and has been with OU since 1998. During Castiglione's tenure, the Sooners have amassed 26 national titles across all sports and made a significant conference change from the Big 12 to the SEC. President Harroz announced that Castiglione will remain athletic director until a replacement is found.

July 25: Trump signs \$9 billion funding cut for NPR, PBS, foreign aid accounts into law

President Donald Trump signed into law a bill to revoke \$9 billion in previously approved funding for public broadcasting and various foreign aid accounts, which would take funding away from NPR affiliated stations across the country including KGOU and KOSU.

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McCasland Hall exterior in June.

PHOTOS PROVIDED



Interior McCasland Hall construction in June.



Interior McCasland Hall construction in June.

NEXT GENERATION OF RESIDENCE HALLS

McCasland Hall opens for inaugural year as part of housing master plan

BY ANA BARBOZA • ABARBOZA@OU.EDU

McCasland Hall, the first of two new freshman residence halls, will open its doors at the beginning of the fall semester for incoming freshmen as the university initiates Phase 1 of its First-Year Housing Master Plan.

In May 2023, the OU community bid farewell to Adams Center, a residential hall that housed first-year students for nearly 60 years, and started construction on the new residence hall.

The new hall is named after the McCasland family, long-time donors to OU. During an event in December celebrating the naming of the building, OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. said the McCasland Foundation has donated over \$22 million to the university since 1970.

"They've given over \$22 million to athletics, business, fine arts, library, urban energy, medicine, arts and sciences and so many more," Harroz said. "A significant gift in 2001, OU's field house was named in memory of Howard (McCasland)."

The McCasland Foundation donated \$10 million toward the construction of the residence hall, the largest donation in the foundation's history. OU estimated \$460 million for the total Freshman Housing Master Plan.

During the celebration, Harroz honored the impact of Howard, his wife Vivian and the McCasland Foundation, and said he hopes the residence hall can mark the family's legacy and represent the OU community.

"If we do our job the right way with the benefit of this facility, we can repeat that (McCasland family) story with different family names helping more and more people, ..." Harroz said. "I love to see this physical manifestation of what our unbelievable life changing future looks like."

Features, accommodations

McCasland Hall will hold 560 beds for incoming first-year

students. According to the OU Housing and Food Services website it will feature single rooms, one-bedroom suites for two people and two-bedroom suites for four people.

The projected cost for a four-person suite will be \$4,400 per semester, the two-person suite will be \$6,200 per semester and the single bedroom will cost \$8,000 per semester.

For Walker and Couch centers, a four-person, two-bedroom suite will cost \$3,850 per semester, as approved in March by the OU Board of Regents.

McCasland Hall will also feature a convenience store, coffee shop, lounges and storm shelter. According to McCasland Hall frequently asked questions, each room is furnished with extra-long twin beds, desks and chairs, drawers, individual closet spaces, a shared vanity and storage cabinets with space for a microwave and mini fridge.

Bergen Smith, incoming aviation freshman who will live in McCasland Hall, said that while she also applied to live at Cross Village, she was drawn to the new residence hall because of its modern look.

"OU Housing is committed to meeting the evolving needs of our growing student population."

LEAH MCKEE,
OU MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATIONS
COORDINATOR FOR CAMPUS
OPERATIONS

Smith said she was able to see McCasland during her campus tour and New Sooner Orientation, and is excited to move into the new building as the fall semester approaches.

"It kind of reflects that OU is constantly evolving, constantly changing and getting better," Smith said. "That just kind of spoke to me and I was just really

excited about the new opportunity."

In August 2024, OU welcomed its largest freshman class for the fourth-consecutive year with 5,615 students. Leah McKee, OU Marketing and Communications coordinator for Campus Operations, told OU Daily in March that McCasland Hall was built to help accommodate increased enrollment.

"OU Housing is committed to meeting the evolving needs of our growing student population," McKee wrote in an email. "We have strategically implemented the First-Year Housing Master Plan to seamlessly accommodate the growth of incoming classes and are well-prepared to address any challenges associated with increased enrollment."

Future of Couch and Walker centers

During a March 2021 OU Board of Regents meeting, the university announced its plan to replace Adams, Couch and Walker centers with new residential halls, which stemmed from concerns regarding the building's age and conditions.

"The towers were built in the '60s, the mid-'60s, ... so what we are endeavoring to do is go on a multi-year plan to replace those," Harroz said during the meeting.

In a September 2024 interview with OU Daily editors, Harroz said Walker Center will likely be demolished early 2027, and the question of whether to refurbish or demolish Couch Center is still being decided.

"We're still talking about Couch. There's a way to rehab Couch, and there's a way to take Couch down," Harroz said.

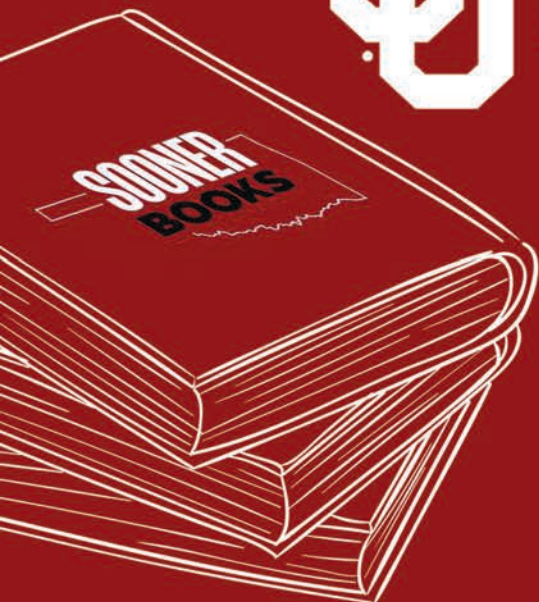
Harroz said the fate of Couch Center depends on what option works best for students.

"Does that work for the students? Does it work overall?" Harroz said. "That's exactly one of the questions we're looking at."



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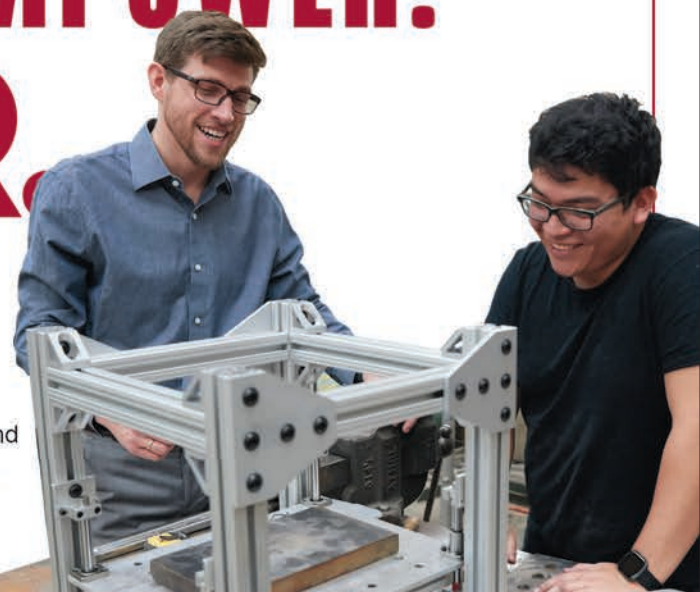
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THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Get to know 8 key campus leaders who work to help Sooners succeed

BY JOSH FRANKLIN • JOSHUA.T.FRANKLIN-1@OU.EDU



JOSEPH HARROZ JR.
OU president

Harroz is OU's 15th president and has actively served the university for 28 years in various leadership positions. He was appointed in 2020 and has worked to improve the university through the "Lead On University" strategic plan, which has worked to position OU as one of the nation's top public research universities. Under Harroz, OU has experienced growth in class size with an increase in the number of first-generation college students and a record number of Oklahoma residents. Harroz was also at the forefront of OU's historic move to the Southeastern Conference in 2024.



JOE CASTIGLIONE
Director of Athletics

Castiglione has served as the athletic director since 1998. He has guided the Sooners through significant changes, including the transition to the SEC in 2024 after 28 years in the Big 12. During his tenure, OU has won more than half of its all-time national championships in several sports including football, softball and gymnastics. Castiglione aims to build a strong culture for student-athletes, emphasizing academics, leadership and personal growth. He recently announced his plan to retire June 2028, stepping down from his role after the 2025-26 academic year.



ANDRÉ-DENIS WRIGHT
Senior vice president and provost

Wright is the senior vice president and provost of the University of Oklahoma since 2021. He is responsible for all academic initiatives on the Norman campus, including overseeing curricular standards and academic policies, faculty recruitment and development, institutional planning and budgeting, and resource and enrollment management. Wright aims to keep education affordable and provide students with the tools needed post-graduation.



BELINDA HIGGS HYPPOLITE
Vice president for Access and Opportunity

In 2024, Hyppolite became the vice president for Access and Opportunity, the office that replaced the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. She has worked in higher education for 28 years focusing her career on increasing access to higher education and reducing barriers to success for faculty, staff, students and local communities. She's passionate about supporting students from a multitude of diverse populations: including first-generation students, those from low-income backgrounds, students in foster care, veterans, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Temporary Protected Status students.



DAVID SURRATT
Vice president of Student Affairs
and dean of students

Surratt became the vice president of Student Affairs and dean of students in 2019 and is an OU alum. His responsibilities include overseeing programs that focus on educational access, leadership and engagement, advocacy, personal development and wellbeing for students across all campuses. In addition, Surratt is a public speaker passionate about civic engagement, multiculturalism and leadership development. He also helped draft OU's strategic plan, aiming to create a sense of belonging at OU by listening to student concerns.



ERIN SIMPSON
Assistant vice president of Student Affairs
and assistant dean of students

After six years directing the Gender & Equality Center, Simpson transitioned to her current role as assistant vice president for Student Affairs in April 2024. She oversees the Office of Advocacy and Education, Assessment, New Student Programs and Office of Student Life. Simpson previously served as coordinator for OU Advocates, a free and confidential support service for individuals who have experienced sexual violence or harassment, providing essential support and guidance to campus community members.



QUY NGUYEN
Director of Student Life and assistant
dean of students

Nguyen serves as the director of Student Life and assistant dean of students. As a graduate and longtime member of the OU community, Nguyen joined the Office of Student Life in 2008 and has since made significant strides to ensure that OU remains a place where students can form strong bonds within the OU community. Under Nguyen, the office of Student Life advises over 70 student organizations and oversees campus programs, fraternity and sorority programs and services, as well as community engagement.



ANN SCHAFER
Director of the Office of Advocacy
and Education

Schafer is the director of the Office of Advocacy and Education at OU. She previously held the position of associate director for the Gender and Equality center, until its closure in May 2024. Schafer served as a resident director where she co-supervised resident advisers and assisted with programs focused on self-identity, diversity and community service. She also served as Cate Center coordinator, assistant director of housing and associate director of the Office of Outreach and Education.

JOIN THE CLUB

Learn about student organizations that build community on campus

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

With over 500 registered student organizations in 15 different categories, RSOs cover a variety of interests and activities that provide opportunities to connect with other students on campus.

Academic

American Mock World Health Organization: Promotes and empowers future leaders in global health policy through meetings, community service and conferences.

Baccano Italian Club: From conversation to Italian film screenings, this club hosts events to teach and immerse students in Italian culture.

Sooner Air Traffic Control Association: Promotes the importance of air traffic control while helping students further their careers.

Women's Health Advocacy: Promotes women's health through education and advocacy while providing free menstrual products to students around campus.

Cultural

American Indian Student Association: Promotes the welfare of Native American students through educational, social and cultural activities.

Asian American Student Organization: Celebrates cultural heritage and advocates for the preservation of languages, traditions and history of Asian Americans.

Black Student Association: Promotes interaction and communication among Black students and communities through educational, personal and professional development programs.

Hispanic American Student Association: Promotes the culture, heritage and traditions of Hispanic and Latin American communities.

Media

Animation @ OU: Focuses on sharing and creating animated media.

Classic Film Club: Provides movie lovers with opportunities to watch and discuss classic films.

Greenlight Creative Productions: A student-led production company that provides resources to aspiring filmmakers. Students write, pitch, film, edit and premiere short films and other projects.

World Literature Today Student Advisory Board: Promotes World Literature Today and publishes The Aster Review, a student literary publication.



MATTHEW MOORE/OU DAILY

Tri Delta and Beta Theta Pi during the Homecoming Glow Parade in 2024.

Environmental Sustainability

Beekeepers' Association: Maintains beehives and provides training, education and opportunities to plant pollinator gardens and support native bee research.

Environmental Science Student Association: Provides field and volunteer experiences for students interested in environmental science.

Green Week: Holds events promoting environmental education and sustainability, culminating in a large week-long event in partnership with the Department of Geography and Environmental Sustainability every spring.

Performing

Crimson Chords: An audition-based, student-led a cappella choir that hosts two concerts a semester.

Elite Dance Team: An audition-based organization that focuses on perfecting and performing the art of dance.

Obviously Unrehearsed Improv: A student-run comedy group that performs monthly.

Soniyes: A competitive Bollywood-fusion dance team that performs locally and competes nationally.

Recreational

Afrobeat Dance Club: Promotes African culture through dance while hosting community classes and attending competitions.

Boomer Rocket Team: An interdisciplinary academic team where students design, build and launch high-powered rockets.

Kesem at OU: A student-led nonprofit that supports kids with parents or guardians battling cancer by providing a free, week-long summer camp and year-round programming.

Sports

Club Golf Team: A student-led golf team focused on increasing the accessibility of competitive golf while competing in regional and national tournaments.

OU Gaming Club: Seeks to entertain the community and advocate for esports and gaming cultures.

OU Men's and Women's Hockey Clubs: Competitive club



SUTTON SPINNER/OU DAILY

OU American Indian Student Association members during the Tribal Celebration Walk in 2024.

ice hockey teams for men and women.

OU Swim and Dive Club: An organization for students to train and compete in swimming and diving.

Campus Activities Council

The programming branch of the Student Government Association, Campus Activities Council plans campuswide, student-led events including:

College Bowl: A pop culture trivia competition held as a one-day event each fall and a week-long event each spring.

Concert Series: Hosts musicians and bands throughout the school year, organizing shows and hosting musical guests such as Friday Pilots Club and Yoke Lore.

Film Series: Hosts events ranging from free movie screenings on campus to the annual Spring Student Film Festival, featuring student-made films.

High School Leadership Conference: Organizes and hosts an annual three-day leadership conference for high school juniors.

Homecoming: Collaborates with university faculty, staff and local businesses to organize events welcoming alumni back to campus with a parade, annual rally and other events related to the homecoming football game.

OU Dance Marathon: CAC's official philanthropy event, students host a 12-hour dance marathon each March to raise money for Oklahoma Children's Health Foundation and Children's Miracle Network Hospitals.

Scandals: A musical revue composed of seven Broadway-style acts directed and performed by students.

Speaker's Bureau: Hosts free events featuring national speakers, such as reality star Tan France and actor Rainn Wilson.

Other Involvement

Class Council: Connects students to their peers and the university through social and educational events.

The Big Event: Organizes one-day service projects each spring where students, faculty and staff work on various projects across Norman and the Oklahoma City metro.



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SHAYFER CANNON/OU DAILY

OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. and Regent Anita Holloway during the OU Board of Regents meeting on June 12.

COST OF OU RISES AGAIN

The ‘why?’ behind OU’s 5th consecutive tuition increase

BY MACEY THAXTON • MACEY.G.THAXTON-1@OU.EDU

In June, the OU Board of Regents approved a 3% increase in tuition and mandatory fees for undergraduate and graduate students at its Norman campus, the fifth-consecutive year OU has raised tuition.

The cost for a full-time undergraduate resident student will now be \$5,093.25 per semester. The cost for a full-time undergraduate nonresident student will be \$14,150.25 per semester.

A graduate resident student will see a \$11.50 increase, totaling \$393.75 per credit hour. A graduate nonresident will see a \$32.50 increase, totaling \$1,112.75 per credit hour.

OU College of Law will also see a 5% increase in tuition and

mandatory fees. A resident student will see a \$29.15 increase, totaling \$612.65 per credit hour. A nonresident student will see a \$52.90 increase, totaling \$1,111.90 per credit hour.

Since 2021, the board has approved a tuition and mandatory fee increase annually, amounting to a 9.33% increase for undergraduate resident students and a 12.68% increase for undergraduate nonresident students over the past five years.

Although the price of tuition and mandatory fees has risen, OU says the net cost to attend for a first-year resident has decreased by 27%, or \$1,460 annually, and increased 5%, or \$835 annually, for a first-year nonresident since 2019 due to an increase in financial aid and scholarship opportunities.

Stewart Berkinshaw, OU vice president and chief financial officer, told OU Daily that focusing on the “sticker price,” or the flat-rate tuition that a student will pay to attend, is “outdated thinking.” He said OU wants students to focus on the “coupons” that OU offers, such as tuition waivers, financial aid and scholarships.

“If you look at the sticker price, you’re not really paying attention to what the actual pricing is at the university,” Berkinshaw said. “It’s a red herring to focus just on that sticker price.”

OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. announced in a mass email in March that OU has increased need-based aid by 38% and

enhanced scholarships awarded by over 20%.

“We have continuously prioritized ensuring an OU education remains affordable and accessible, especially for those with the greatest need,” Harroz wrote. “While college tuition skyrocketed nationwide, today an OU degree is more affordable than it was five years ago.”

Where does the money go?

Berkinshaw said the revenue from tuition increases will help fund a merit-based salary increase for eligible faculty, staff and qualifying graduate assistants.

“If we’re going to be competitive to recruit great faculty, good staff and retain those great faculty and staff, we need to be able to compensate them decently,” Berkinshaw said. “It’s all going right back into the pockets of the faculty and staff to keep them here to be able to support the students.”

Berkinshaw said that at the this summer, OU implemented an average 3% raise for faculty and staff, with a majority receiving less than a 3% raise. Berkinshaw said it costs the university \$15 million per year to implement a salary raise program. The tuition increase revenue amounts to about \$8 million.

“Unless we have a large amount of funding coming in from the state, it’s difficult for us to figure out how to be able to afford that raise program,” Berkinshaw said.

OU Student Government Association President Avery Dunlap said that although students will be paying more for a degree, they will also get more out of their degree.

“The professors make or break the quality of your degree,” Dunlap said. “I was happy to hear that is what it’s going toward.”

Dunlap said it is important for students who are concerned about the tuition increase to meet with an OU MoneyCoach to understand the reason for the increase.

“As the student government president, my reaction was ‘how do we support students who are going to have questions about their financial aid?’ or ‘how can they make the couple hundred dollar increase work for them?’” Dunlap said.

Comparing to other universities

According to the OU fiscal year 2026 budget, OU will receive about \$148 million in state appropriations for the Norman campus. Berkinshaw said it is not sustainable for higher education institutions in Oklahoma to not have annual tuition increases with the amount of state funding currently allocated.

“Not doing a tuition increase is not a sustainable strategy to be able to maintain that kind of excellence that we want to have at OU,” Berkinshaw said. “If the state was to increase funding to the university, that’s another option for us.”

A week before the June OU Board of Regents meeting, Gov. Kevin Stitt said Oklahoma universities did not need a tuition increase at a press briefing.

“I don’t think we’ve gotten all the efficiency out of our universities,” Stitt said. “I would encourage the boards to look for efficiencies, look for the tenured professors that maybe aren’t teaching as many classes as they should. Those are the things that I would continue to push before they do a tuition increase.”

In June, the Oklahoma State University Board of Regents voted to freeze tuition and mandatory fees for the fourth consecutive year. According to the OSU fiscal year 2026 budget, the university will receive about \$224,581,306 in state appropriations.



SHAYFER CANNON/OU DAILY

Regents Rick Braught, Kenneth S. Waits and Rainey Williams during the OU Board of Regents meeting on June 12.

Berkinshaw said that although OSU tuition and fees have remained flat, the university has not had a salary raise program since 2022.

“They’ve gone without a raise program for that time, and I can promise you it’s difficult to retain faculty and staff when they’re not doing something like that,” Berkinshaw said.

Other schools similar in student population and size to OU are following a similar trajectory by raising tuition and fees.

The University of Arkansas will also raise its tuition and fees by 3.9% for resident students and 5.3% for non-resident students beginning in the fall. This is Arkansas’ fifth-consecutive year raising tuition and mandatory fees.

According to the Arkansas fiscal year 2025 budget, Arkansas received about \$150,208,070 in state appropriations.

Auburn University will also raise its tuition and fees by 3% beginning in the fall. According to its website, Auburn has had an annual tuition and fees increase since 1990. The university received \$389,241,177 in state appropriations, according to its fiscal year 2025 budget.

The University of Kentucky will also raise its tuition and fees by 3% beginning in the fall. According to its fiscal year 2025 budget, the University of Kentucky received about \$358,565,600 in state appropriations.

Affordability at OU

In 2020, OU launched its “Lead On, University” strategic plan, composed of five pillars that represent goals set by the university. The third pillar was to make OU “attainable and affordable.”

During the strategic plan refresh in March, the third pillar was changed to “ascend as ONE OU”

“We have continuously prioritized ensuring an OU education remains affordable and accessible, especially

for those with the greatest need,” Harroz wrote in a mass email announcing the strategic plan refresh. “While college tuition skyrocketed nationwide, today an OU degree is more affordable than it was five years ago.”

In March, the OU Board of Regents approved a \$90 meal plan increase, bringing the meal plan cost from \$3,075 to \$3,165.

Berkinshaw said part of the revenue generated by the meal plan increase will go to a salary raise program for eligible food service workers. The other part of the revenue is intended to keep up with operational food costs.

Berkinshaw said OU food services has also increased its available hours for student employees.

“That doesn’t necessarily make us money just because we’re open more, but it does provide more services to students,” Berkinshaw said.

The board also approved various increases to housing rates ranging from 3-6%.

According to Berkinshaw, the increase in housing revenue will contribute funds to replace Couch and Walker towers as soon as 2027 and pay for the construction of McCasland Hall, which will open this fall. Berkinshaw attributed housing rate increases to the high demand for dorms with more amenities like Cross Village, Headington College and, most recently, McCasland Hall.

Berkinshaw said the price increase is not affecting the demand to attend OU, as the incoming class of 2029 will be the fifth-consecutive record-breaking class.

“We still deliver a very affordable product to students to be able to come here and succeed here at the price point that we have,” Berkinshaw said. “We’re still seeing record demand for this fall, so we’re not seeing the pricing piece affect the demand.”



ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

Michael Markham, speaking last spring, is the new dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

‘A NEW ERA OF EXCELLENCE’

OU College of Arts and Sciences dean shares goals, initiatives

BY NATALIE ARMOUR • NATALIEDARMOUR@OU.EDU

After nearly 14 years working at OU, Michael Markham stepped into his new role as dean of Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences, the university’s largest college.

Markham began his tenure at OU in 2011 as an assistant professor in biology before becoming associate dean of the college in 2020.

Markham succeeds former Dean David Wrobel, who left OU in July 2024 after spending six years in the position, and replaces interim dean Randall Hewes. Markham previously served as the interim dean of OU Honors College for one year before its current dean, Paul Gilmore, was appointed in April.

As a long-tenured OU faculty member, Markham said there are higher expectations for him given his extensive knowledge and involvement at OU and the College of Arts and Sciences. “People have expectations of me that they wouldn’t have

(for) a new dean coming in from the outside,” Markham said. “You’re starting with a clean slate, whereas I’ve got a 14 year history at the university that’s going to follow me into the position.”

Who is Michael Markham?

Markham earned his bachelors, graduate and doctoral degrees from the University of New Mexico. He earned his doctoral degree in psychology in 1994 before returning to school in 2001 to study biology.

Markham moved to Austin, Texas in 2006, where he continued his research at the University of Texas at Austin. He also taught laboratory courses on Neurobiology until 2011 when he began his faculty position at OU.

At OU, Markham’s research surrounds the neurobiology of communication between animals, specifically

weakly electric fish and small freshwater fish that live throughout South America and Africa. Markham said he keeps some of these fish in a lab on campus to conduct his research.

“Just like as we’re sitting here talking to each other, I’m projecting waves through the air (and) they’re being detected by your ears,” Markham said. “These fish are projecting electricity through the water and modulating the characteristics of those electric signals, and that’s the language that they speak.”

First 100 days

Markham said his main priority is to communicate his goals to students, faculty, staff and alumni, outlining where he wants to take the college during his tenure.

“The first 100 days (are) really going to be about bringing a message to all the constituencies in the college about what my

vision and what my strategic direction for the college is going to be,” Markham said. “In order to move my agenda forward, I’ve got to make sure that the messaging is clear, so that all of these groups understand the value of what we’re going to be doing.”

Markham said his main goals surround areas such as research outputs that lead to higher federal grant funding, increasing the number of doctoral graduates, increasing publication of books by faculty and supporting faculty in endeavors to win prestigious awards.

Markham said he is passionate about retention and graduation rates for undergraduate students. He said he wants to maintain a student retention rate at 90% or higher with all students graduating in four years, which he believes is key to ensuring the college is providing students with what they need while keeping university affordable.

“Every semester is very costly. You’ve got tuition, you’ve got room and board, and on top of that, there’s the opportunity cost. You’re not out there in the workforce with a full time job,” Markham said. “Every additional semester beyond four years is incredibly costly for the students that are here and we want to make this education affordable, and one of the most important things we can do in that regard is make sure students can graduate in a timely fashion.”

Markham said if the college can maintain a high retention rate and four-year graduation rate, it proves it’s prioritizing student support.

“If we achieve our goals in those two areas, it means we’re doing so many other things right,” Markham said. “It means we’re taking care of students’ academic progress. It means we’re caring about mental health. It means we’re ensuring that they have the financial support that they need to be able to continue in progress through their degree, so that when we focus just on those two simple goals, it means that we’re doing hundreds of other things right to get there.”

Language requirement

OU Provost’s Office requested an evaluation of the College of Arts and Sciences foreign language requirements in November, raising concerns from the OU community that the undergraduate language requirement would be removed.

Markham said the review is not calling for the removal of the language requirement, but it was requested to determine whether the extent of the requirement is delaying graduation for students. According to Markham, the College of Arts and Sciences requires three semesters of a language course at OU, while other colleges only require two language credits that can be accepted from high school.

“The reason for the request of the initial review was to assess, is this delaying graduation?” Markham said. “Delaying graduation is something we really want to avoid at all costs, because it really has a major impact on our students.”

While Markham supports the review, he said he is passionate about maintaining those requirements so students can learn about other cultures and immerse themselves in different viewpoints across the world.

“My own belief is that a language requirement is absolutely essential. That’s really (the) core of what we do as a college of arts and sciences, but we’ve got to find a way to deliver it in ways that don’t delay graduation, ...” Markham said. “We’ve got to find a way to strike that balance, to be able to resolve that tension between a requirement that goes beyond other colleges at OU, (and) at the same time, prompt graduation and

timely graduation”

Association of American Universities

The Association of American Universities is an invitation-only organization of the nation’s leading research universities accredited for life changing education, research and innovation. Member universities earn the majority of federal funding for research that improves public health, addresses national challenges and contributes to the education and training of younger generations.

In 2024, OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. announced in an address to faculty and staff that the university was making changes in hopes of joining AAU. Harroz said in April that the university must make 300 additional faculty hires, raise \$500 million for student support and receive additional funding to meet the AAU criteria, which Harroz said is a possibility for OU.

“Four years ago, I couldn’t tell you that AAU membership was anything more than a dream,” Harroz said. “Now, we are in the conversation.”

Markham said he tailors his goals as dean to align with OU’s strategic plan and the necessary qualifications for the university to join AAU, including major goals he plans to communicate with stakeholders during his first 100 days.

“Research, research books, awards, PhD graduates and then first-year retention and four-year graduation ... Those are the measures that the AAU uses to evaluate potential members,” Markham said. “The plan that I’m laying out here is directly connected to those AAU aspirations.”

Markham said less than 40 public universities in the U.S. are members of the AAU, a very small number that receives benefits most public institutions don’t have access to, which he believes would benefit the university and the way it presents itself to prospective students.

OU is considered a R1 institution as classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, meaning the university is classified as having “very high research activity” with a high output contributing to projects and programs around the world. Markham said an AAU membership would mean higher funding, more resources and elevated value of a degree from OU.

“You’re talking about a very elite tier of universities. A lot of value comes with that,” Markham said. “There’s a pure prestige factor. The value of the degree is also going up. It makes you more graduates, more competitive in the workplace, makes (undergraduates) more competitive for graduate programs, for medical school and so forth.”

College Improvements

OU initiated many major projects to improve the university, including construction of new laboratories for the college to replace Sutton Hall, which was demolished this winter.

Markham said he recognized a need for new labs and more space for OU’s significant growth three years ago and brought the issue to OU administration about a year and a half later.

The university secured \$80 million from the state legislature and a \$20 million private gift to fully fund the building. Of the 100,000 square feet allotted for the building, 80% will be for laboratory classrooms and 20% for biomedical sciences research labs.

“This is one of the things that I’m most proud of accomplishing while I was in the associate dean position,” Markham said. “I had recognized about three years ago, with this explosive growth in the size of our incoming freshman classes, we would literally physically run out of space in introductory

biology and chemistry classes to be able to teach the numbers of students that we needed to teach.”

Markham said it was time for improvements and the new building will allow for students to engage in high-quality research and learning practices.

“Anybody that’s taken a class in the chemistry annex knows, you know that when the crumbles of rust are falling off the ceiling, ...” Markham said. “The building is past its prime.”

Since the beginning of his tenure as associate dean, Markham said he noticed how many adjunct professors had been loyal to the university for years, but were not on full-time contracts to receive job security and benefits. Over the past three years, Markham said almost 40 faculty have been offered full-time contracts.

“Let’s start putting (adjunct professors) on three-year and five-year contracts so that they have that job security, so that they have the benefits (and) the institution returns some of the loyalty to them that they had been showing to us without a lot of rewards for year upon year,” Markham said.

Markham said by rewarding instructors who have been loyal to the university, often without benefits, the university shows its appreciation for all they’ve contributed to students, other faculty and the university overall.

“When the institution proves that kind of support and loyalty to the people that have been serving us well, they continue to do well. They serve our students better. We see better learning outcomes, we see better student satisfaction. That, for me, was just a win-win,” Markham said. “You’re helping out people that have been doing a great job for us for a long time, and in turn, we get better outcomes for our students.”

Markham said concurrent enrollment at OU has grown by over 600% in credit hour production over the past three years, stating OU has trailed behind other institutions in the state in previous years. He said the college is set to double that.

“We’re on pace to double that, to double that concurrent enrollment participation again, and it is just incredibly, incredibly valuable for students in Oklahoma, because there’s no tuition,” Markham said. “Concurrent enrollment is just absolutely an essential function of our college.”

Long-term initiatives

One of Markham’s major goals is to increase federal research funding by 20%, a goal he said he has set to achieve in the next five years. Markham said part of reaching that goal is by hiring and developing new faculty that produce more research to increase the overall research productivity in the college, which he said takes about three years.

“That’s going to be a multi-year program to support our existing faculty and a multi-year program to bring in new faculty to achieve those kinds of outcomes that we’re looking for,” Markham said.

Markham said increasing retention and graduation rates, and enforcing major changes to degree programs can take up to a year or two to implement, with the more ambitious goals taking about five years to achieve.

“While it’s really easy for me to sit here and say, in these seven areas, we are going to improve by whatever metric we measure it, any of these areas is a multi-year process,” Markham said. “I’m looking at a five-year horizon on achieving the really ambitious goals that I’m setting out for the college, because none of these things happen overnight.

“We’re really looking at moving the college into a new era of excellence, and that takes time.”

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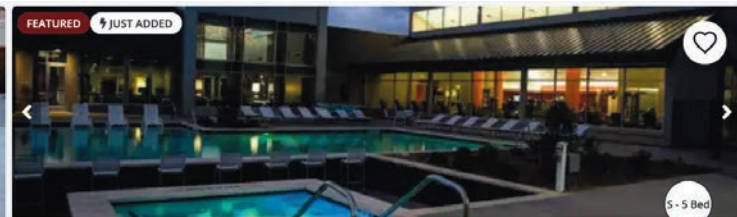
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LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

SGA president welcomes students as campus growth continues



Avery Dunlap
SGA president
avery.k.dunlap-1@ou.edu

Sooners,
Welcome to the University of Oklahoma! Our campus has undergone tremendous change and growth over the last few years and we are so excited for you to join us. Joining the Southeastern Conference, growing class sizes, launching strategic plans and the emergence of new dorms are exciting examples of our recent growth. However, the most exciting thing happening this year is you, the Class

of 2029, joining campus!

Similar to our campus, you're all experiencing a lot of change in your life right now. It should be encouraging to know that change isn't new to campus! You may be anxious, excited or unsure of how to feel as you prepare to join us this fall. I can assure you, I had all of those emotions too. Moving

into my dorm in August 2022, I had no idea what to expect of my four years here or where I would find my feet landing on campus. However, as I enter my senior year, I can assure you that not only choosing to attend OU, but to grow as I went, was the most impactful decision I have ever made.

I want to expand on this idea of "Grow as You Go." College will hold invaluable opportunities, teachable challenges and many new faces. My advice is to grow in each of those spaces. Get out of your comfort zone by joining organizations and attending events. Take each challenge head on and lean on your support system during them. Meet people from all over the world and form deep relationships with them. Each student is going through that same kind of growth and exploration, - so find people to grow alongside and take the highs and lows with, whatever that looks like for you. Growth is different for each of us, and if that is making a new friend or becoming the leader of a campus organization, do it as you go.

OU is a special place for so many because of the growth associated with this place. Four years may seem like a long time,

but they will fly by. There are definitely long days, but it feels like just yesterday I was eating in the Couch Restaurants with my floormates, attending Camp Crimson or getting lost in the Physical Science Center on my way to class. I advise you to take a second to look around. Not to quote Ferris Bueller, but it's true that life moves fast and you will miss it if you don't slow down and look around. College is such a uniquely fun and developmental time in life, but it moves fast. Find a way to take it all in!

With that said, welcome to OU! You chose OU for a reason that will become apparent over the next few years. Please know that the Student Government Association is here to support you with resources, opportunities and advocacy. Please reach out to us during each step of your academic journey, we are located in the Conoco Student Leadership Center in the Union. Have a great first year at OU ... and go to class!

Live On, University!

Avery Dunlap, SGA president

STUDENT GOVERNMENT 101

The Student Government Association serves and advocates for the student body. It distributes over \$600,000 of the student activity fee each year to registered student organizations.

Executive Branch

SGA's version of the White House.

- President - Avery Dunlap
- Vice president - Joseph Harroz III
- Chief of staff - Ellie Wolthuis
- Other various cabinet officials

Meetings: 2 p.m. Mondays, Oklahoma Memorial Union, Room 181.

Website: ou.edu/sga/branches/executive-branch

Undergraduate Student Congress

SGA's version of the House of Representatives. There are 48 representatives from 14 districts.

Committees:

- Congressional Administration
- External Affairs
- Human Diversity
- Campus Outreach, Safety and Concerns
- Sustainability
- University Policy
- Ways and Means

Meetings: 7 p.m. Tuesdays, Dale Hall, Room 103.

Website: ou.edu/sga/branches/undergraduate-student-congress

Graduate Student Senate

SGA's version of the Senate. There are 112 senators from 56 departments.

Committees:

- Academic Affairs
- Development and Philanthropy
- External Affairs
- Internal Affairs
- International Student Affairs
- Public Relations
- Sustainability
- Ways and Means

Meetings: Biweekly meetings at 7 p.m. Thursdays via Zoom

Website: ou.edu/sga/branches/graduate-student-senate

General Counsel

This office serves students charged with academic misconduct or student code violations and those who want to appeal a grade. It also reviews registered student organizations policy agreements and ensures that the SGA constitution and enactments of the legislative branch are followed.

Website: ou.edu/sga/branches/general-counsel

Superior Court

SGA's version of the Supreme Court. This office handles cases involving the SGA constitution and legislative acts, including validating election results.

Website: ou.edu/sga/branches/superior-court

Campus Activities Council

SGA's programming branch, responsible for programming campus-wide events that serve all students.

CAC events:

- Welcome Week
- Homecoming
- University Sing
- OU Dance Marathon

- College Bowl
- High School Leadership Conference
- Scandals
- Concert Series
- Film Series
- Speakers Bureau
- Union Programming Board

Website: ou.edu/sga/cac

Offices: Located in the first floor of Student Leadership Center in the Conoco Wing of Oklahoma Memorial Union

SGA Elections

Fall elections:

- SGA president and vice president, elected by all students on the Norman campus.
- Undergraduate Student Congress representatives, elected by students within specific academic districts.

Spring elections:

- Campus Activities Council chair, elected by all students on the Norman campus.
- Undergraduate Student Congress representatives, elected by students within specific academic districts.
- Student Bar Association president, elected by law students.

Campus concerns

To submit campus concerns, click the "Campus Concerns" box on the SGA website.

Website: ou.edu/sga

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November 7–9



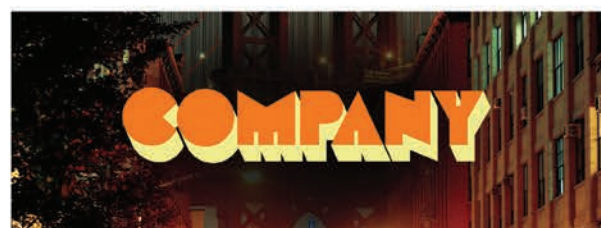
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