

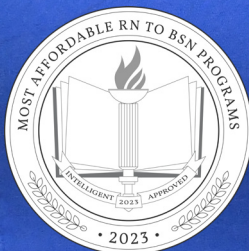
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Panhandle

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF OKLAHOMA PANHANDLE STATE UNIVERSITY

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REACHING NEW
HEIGHTS IN 2023





“As an alumnus, County Commissioner, and friend, Mr. Strain has been a tireless supporter and an incredible partner with the university.”

— Dr. Julie Dinger,
University President

/ ALUMNI /


LOCAL UNIVERSITY ALUMNUS HONORED AT RETIREMENT CELEBRATION

A celebration was held on December 10th to honor the retirement of a local university alumnus and County Commissioner, Jack Strain. The event was attended by a large crowd of friends, family, and community members and was a fitting tribute to Strain's many years of dedication and service to Texas County as Commissioner of District 3.

Strain graduated from Panhandle State in 1977 and has remained a loyal and active member of the alumni throughout his career. He has served in a number of leadership roles within the university, including as a member of the Alumni Association board of directors and as a volunteer mentor to many current and former students. The Strain family was recognized in 2001 as the Alumni Honored Family. In recognition of his many contributions, the university inducted Strain into its prestigious Alumni Ambassador Hall of Fame in 2014.

Strain started his career at Texas County District 3 in Texhoma, Oklahoma, in 2005, where he drove a truck and operated a motor-grader. A special election was held after Commissioner Hale passed away unexpectedly, where Jack and his wife, Gwen, decided it would be in their best interest for Jack to run for the office of County Commissioner. Strain won that election in December of 2005 and has held the office of County Commissioner for District 3 of Texas County since then.

During his remarks, Jack thanked the community for their support. Many spoke of his wisdom and advice at the event, his legacy will be one of service to others over self. President Dinger shared her thoughts that evening saying, “As an alumnus, County Commissioner, and friend, Mr. Strain has been a tireless supporter and an incredible partner with the university. I hope his retirement means we will enjoy seeing him on campus even more often.”

The retirement celebration was a heartwarming event that brought together a community of people from all walks of life to celebrate the legacy and achievements of a dedicated and influential member of the university community. 

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OKLAHOMA
PANHANDLE STATE
UNIVERSITY

P.O. Box 430 Goodwell, OK 73939

Tel: 580-349-2611 / Toll Free: 1-800-664-OPSU

Fax: 580-349-2302



@wearepanhandle

ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Julie Dinger — President
Dr. Ryan Blanton — Vice President of Advancement
Dr. Theresa Billiot — Vice President of Academic & Student Affairs
Liz McMurphy — Vice President of Fiscal Affairs

PANHANDLE MAGAZINE

Natasha Eidson — Director of Campus Communications

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Natasha Eidson — Abigail Rogers — Veronica Ray — Kyrstan Cook



/ UNIVERSITY /

PANHANDLE STATE RN TO BSN PROGRAM EARNS TOP RANKINGS

Oklahoma Panhandle State University has been recognized as one of the Best Colleges for Nursing in Oklahoma by a number of data-based outlets. The rankings are based on information compiled from the National Center for Education Statistics and other sources. Things like tuition costs, accreditation, and the program's reputation are all considered.

Niche put OPSU on the map at #9 as the 2023 Best College for Nursing in Oklahoma. RN to MSN online rankings show OPSU as #2 Most affordable RN to BSN Program online in Oklahoma. Intelligent and University HQ ranked Panhandle State for being in the Top 50 Most Affordable RN to BSN nursing programs in the country.

"We are thrilled to be recognized as one of the top RN to BSN programs in the country," said Oklahoma Panhandle State University President Dr. Julie Dinger. "Our faculty and staff work hard to provide a high-quality education that is accessible and affordable for our students."

The RN to BSN program at Panhandle State is designed for registered nurses who want to advance their education and career. The program combines online coursework with hands-on clinical experience, preparing students for leadership roles in the healthcare industry.

Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Dr. Theresa Billiot stated, "OPSU is committed to providing a high quality and affordable education to move our students' nursing careers forward. This milestone reinforces the stellar reputation that our BSN program has developed and maintained."

The program has a long history of success. Graduates of the program have gone on to work in a variety of healthcare settings, including hospitals, clinics, and universities, in teaching capacities. Many have also pursued advanced degrees in nursing or related fields.

"It's a testament to the amazing foresight, work ethic, and leadership of the entire nursing staff," said College of Agriculture, Science, and Nursing, Dean Tracy Kincannon. "Providing a world-class education in a critical need area insuring we have some of the very best medical professionals anywhere in the country being produced right here at OPSU."

Director of Nursing, Dr. Kristy Calloway, commented, "Our desire as nurse educators at OPSU is to develop safe, competent bachelor prepared nurses to care for the people in our communities. The fact that we are among the most affordable options in the country is the icing on the cake for us!" **P**



“Laura has a stellar track record of serving 20 years in student affairs at both small and large public and private institutions. Laura’s previous work establishing strategic retention plans will significantly benefit our efforts to reach our university’s retention goals.”

— Dr. Theresa Billiot,
Vice President of Academic &
Student Affairs

/ UNIVERSITY /

HUTCHINSON NAMED PANHANDLE STATE DEAN OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Oklahoma Panhandle State University is pleased to announce the appointment of Laura Hutchinson as the Dean of Student Affairs. Hutchinson is excited to be moving to Goodwell from Central Illinois.

She holds a Bachelor’s in Sociology from California Baptist University and a Master’s in Theological Studies from Texas Christian University. In addition, Hutchinson is currently working on a Doctorate of Education in Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership from the College of William and Mary.

Hutchinson has served as the Dean of Students for the last seven years at two liberal arts colleges in the Midwest. Over the past two years, she has put her full-time energy into pursuing her doctorate in education at the College of William and Mary. At William and Mary, she served as the Chair of the School of Education Honor Council and the School of Education representative on the Provost Student Advisory Group.

“Ms. Hutchinson’s student-ready leadership will continue to make the entire student experience at Panhandle State excellent. I look forward to working with her and advocating for student needs,” stated University President, Dr. Julie Dinger.

Hutchinson is looking forward to bringing her experience and expertise to Panhandle State and is eager to support the students and faculty at the institution.

“It was important to me to find an institution that was serious about equity and student success, and that is Panhandle State,” Hutchinson said. “I was also drawn to the challenge of reinventing the dean of student’s position to focus on advocacy and education. I’ve come from two small colleges and wanted to stay in an environment where collaboration and responsibility are valued.”

Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs Dr. Theresa Billiot stated, “Laura has a stellar track record of serving 20 years in student affairs at both small and large public and private institutions. Laura’s previous work establishing strategic retention plans will significantly benefit our efforts to reach our university’s retention goals. She also has exceptional planning skills in creating housing renovation projects and housing improvement plans, focusing on improving the residential experience for students.”

Hutchinson identified areas she is ready to jump right into. “I want to spend my early weeks and months getting to know faculty and staff and their perspectives on the student experience and assessing what students need from the dean position. I’m looking forward to building strong partnerships with anyone who has shared goals of retention and a robust student experience. It’s important to see students succeed and reduce barriers to success.”

Traveling and college athletics are two of Hutchinson’s past times. She met her husband, Robert Crawley, while they were both attending graduate school.

The university community looks forward to welcoming Hutchinson and working with her in her new role. **P**



“The feeling when they call your name over the speakers as the next Miss Rodeo Illinois is one I will never forget.”

— Kayla Walker,
Miss Rodeo Illinois 2023

/ ALUMNI /

RECENT PANHANDLE STATE GRADUATE, KAYLA WALKER, WAS NAMED MISS RODEO ILLINOIS

After graduating from Panhandle State in 2022 with a Bachelor of Agribusiness and a minor in Animal Science, Kayla Walker returned to Illinois. She decided to pursue the title of Miss Rodeo Illinois.

“I moved back to Illinois to start building a career, and I knew I had to make my younger self proud and achieve this goal of being Miss Rodeo Illinois,” said Walker.

The competition is a multi-day process involving various activities, including orientation, a written test, personal interviews, community events, and a horsemanship competition. The pageant is held annually over Labor Day weekend at the Pioneer City Rodeo in Palestine, Illinois.

On the last day of interviews, Walker had the highest overall score and earned the title of her dreams. “The feeling when they call your name over the speakers as the next Miss Rodeo Illinois is one I will never forget,” she said.

Walker has a strong background in the rodeo and equestrian worlds. While at Panhandle State, Walker was the captain of the Equestrian team, the Panhandle State Spirit Rider, and was crowned Miss Panhandle State in 2021.

University President, Dr. Julie Dinger, stated, “The Aggie Nation is so proud of Ms. Walker and this tremendous accomplishment. I look forward to following her journey this next year; there are big things to come.”

Walker credits several people at Panhandle State, including Kacey and Denton Ward, Hannah Hammack, and Dr. Aboohamidi, for positively impacting her life and helping her achieve her goals. “Attending Panhandle State was one of the best decisions I ever made. My professors were understanding and encouraging. My coaches cared about me as a person and pushed me to do my best in and out of the show ring. I made my closest friends there.”

Head Equestrian Coach Kacey Ward said, “Kayla’s work ethic is like none other. If she sets her mind to something, she will accomplish it. I look forward to supporting Kayla on this new adventure and hauling her favorite horse “Joker” to the close rodeos for her to ride.”

Now that she has been named Miss Rodeo Illinois, Walker has a busy year ahead of her. “I have so many plans for this year,” she said. “I will attend anything from the Cheyenne Frontier Days to elementary school visits. I have the opportunity to ride many different horses, travel across the country, and make many new friends at each stop.”

Walker has big goals for this coming year, and one of them is competing for Miss Rodeo America at the National Finals Rodeo in December 2023. **P**



/ ALUMNI /

AUDREY BROOKS ANNOUNCED 2022 ALUMNI ON THE MOVE

Audrey Brooks is a native of Guymon, Oklahoma. After high school, Brooks pursued a professional dancer and performer career, where she later went on tour. Although she did not attend college immediately after high school, she studied at Denver Center for Performing Arts. Brooks then transferred to Panhandle State to finish her degree.

Brooks graduated in 2017 with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts. She came to OPSU to focus on classes with the information she needed, like management, marketing, computers, and the arts. Brooks's plan was not necessarily to get a degree but to focus on learning many necessary skills for the real world.

Her favorite thing about OPSU is the people. All the employees make up a large family. Brooks's best memory at Panhandle State is working with instructors on projects or shows. She said, "Panhandle State has amazing instructors that have become lifelong friends. Half the classes I took were because I liked the instructor or the topic. I have a lot of extra classes on top of my degree. I still take classes occasionally."

Even after college, she is still in the entertainment industry, where she dances, sings, and acts. She also produces commercials, films, plays, and choreography and teaches acting. Her husband, Stacy Nordquist, is head of the Health and Physical Education department at OPSU and an announcer for athletics. They are both very active on campus as alumni, especially in athletics. They currently live on campus and love living in the end zone, watching practices and games, and being in the middle of all of the events at OPSU. **P**

/ ADVANCEMENT /

GUYMON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE NAMES DR. RYAN BLANTON BOARD PRESIDENT



Dr. Ryan Blanton, Vice President of Advancement at Oklahoma Panhandle State University, has been named the new President of the Guymon Chamber of Commerce Board.

As a member of the executive team at Panhandle State, Blanton has a strong connection to the Guymon community. He deeply understands the needs and concerns of local businesses and the resources and opportunities available through the University. In his new role as President of the Guymon Chamber, Blanton will be able to utilize these connections to foster collaboration and support between the city of Guymon and the local business community.

Blanton has a long history of involvement in the Guymon community through his work at the University and his service on the Chamber of Commerce Board, the Panhandle Region Economic Development Industrial Board, and the Guymon Industrial Foundation Board.

“I am excited to lead the Chamber over the next year. We are already working on adapting the Guymon Chamber to enhance our current business and community climate and pursuing new opportunities to bring more value to our community and regional business and industry partners,” stated Blanton. **P**



/ STUDENT /

OPSU STUDENT EXPLORES PORK INDUSTRY THROUGH SEABOARD FOODS' WINTERNSHIP

Panhandle State student, Carlos Flores, participated in Seaboard Foods' annual Winternship program. The week-long Winternship provides an opportunity for students to explore the operations of a connected pork production company, network with company experts, better define career paths and gain knowledge about how pork is produced.

Seaboard Foods' Winternship started in 2010. Since then 258 students have completed this unique educational opportunity. Students augment their formal education with a real-world view of the industry through tours and presentations, connection with professionals, and better defining their career goals through a look at career paths.

The interns learn about Seaboard Foods' unique integrated business and about the many different business sectors the company touches. Students gain knowledge about the company's departments, from operations of farms, feed mills, and a pork processing plant to transportation, environmental resource management, food safety, supply chain, finance, human resources, marketing, sales, and more.

Flores stated, “My week at Seaboard Foods not only provided me with knowledge about the pork industry, but also gave me a firsthand experience with the locally involved, people-focused, reliable employer that Seaboard is for our community.”

“Our Winternship experience is a great way to show students how pork is produced from beginning to end. The information they take away is key to building future industry leaders and advocates,” says Rick Sappington, Plant Vice President and General Manager for Seaboard Foods. **P**



/ UNIVERSITY /

OKLAHOMA SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, BLAYNE ARTHUR, VISITS PANHANDLE STATE

Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture, Blayne Arthur, visited Oklahoma Panhandle State University on December 13th to discuss water shortage, weather impacts, and other local agricultural concerns with local agriculture producers and organizations. The visit was led by the faculty of the College of Agriculture, Science, and Nursing for their first Agriculture Issues and Solutions Forum.

The event brought together a wide range of stakeholders from the local agriculture industry, including farmers, ranchers, and representatives from agricultural organizations and government agencies.

"We welcomed area producers and representatives from the State Department of Agriculture and our state elected officials to discuss issues in Agriculture in the Panhandle with our students and community," University President Dr. Dinger said. "Thank you, Secretary Arthur, Senator Murdock, and Representative Patzkowsky for your insight and support for our community!"

Secretary Arthur began the event by highlighting the importance of water conservation and management in the face of ongoing drought conditions in the Oklahoma Panhandle. She discussed the state's efforts to address water shortages, including the development of new irrigation techniques and the use of conservation practices on farms and ranches.

Arthur also discussed the impact of extreme weather events

on Oklahoma's agriculture industry, including the recent storms and flooding that have caused widespread damage across the state. She acknowledged the challenges that farmers and ranchers have faced in the wake of these events and emphasized the importance of providing them with the resources and support they need to recover.

The event also featured a panel discussion on local agricultural concerns, where producers and representatives from organizations shared their perspectives on the industry's current state. Topics of discussion included crop yields, prices, and the future of agriculture in the Panhandle.

Overall, the event provided a valuable opportunity for local agriculture producers and organizations to engage with the Secretary of Agriculture and discuss the critical issues facing their industry. Arthur highlighted the state's commitment to addressing the challenges facing Oklahoma's agriculture industry and supporting the farmers and ranchers who are the backbone of the state's economy. **P**





/ ATHLETICS /

2023 OPSU RODEO TOP HAND AUCTION SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 4

The 2023 Top Hand Auction for Oklahoma Panhandle State University's Rodeo team is set for February 4. Get ready for a night of excitement and western tradition. This annual event will be held at Pickle Creek in Guymon, OK, with doors opening at 5:30 PM. The event is free with dinner provided by Hunny's and a dance following with Ken Stonecipher and the Wooden Nickel Band.

University President Dr. Julie Dinger stated, "Year after year this event has seen record-breaking fundraising from the community. I am ready and excited to see the Aggie nation come together yet again to support our student-athletes on the rodeo team."

The Top Hand Rodeo Auction highlights the university's rodeo program and is an exciting community event. It features live and silent auctions of donated items, such as artwork, jewelry, and rodeo equipment. All proceeds from the auction go towards supporting the university's rodeo team and maintaining the program's facilities.

Don't miss out on this exciting event! In addition to the auctions, the evening will include a catered dinner and live music. This is an excellent opportunity to show your support for the team and the sport of rodeo while enjoying a fun night out with friends and family.

Women's Rodeo Coach Shelbie Rose commented, "This year's Top Hand Auction is shaping to be another great one. We look forward to this event every year and are always grateful for all of the support that we receive. We hope everyone will come out and enjoy a night with us!" **P**

/ ATHLETICS /

MEN'S BASKETBALL KICK OFF 2023 SEASON WITH A WIN



The Aggie Men's Basketball Team tipped off their 2023 season with an astounding win on their home court versus Oklahoma City University. This game is the tenth matchup between the Aggies and the Stars.

Both teams traded shots in the first half of the game. The Aggies saw themselves down by six points eight times during the game. The Stars would go on a 13-0 run at the 3:45 mark going into halftime; the Aggies would trail 48-62.

After halftime, the Aggies saw their lead grow to sixteen points before things changed. The Aggies would go on a 12-2 run, cutting into the Stars' lead. At the 10:40 mark, the stars went up by ten. Senior Rayquan Elliott hit a jump shot at the 7:15 mark to get the Aggies within four. Both teams played down to the wire. With 52 seconds left, the Stars hit a three-point shot to go up by two, and on the next Aggie possession, Junior Justin Pile would hit it home with a dunk, tying the game at 97-97. Freshman Fedja Cukle stole the ball and fouled to go to the free-throw line to shoot two. Cukle missed his first attempt but would seal the game on his second attempt, scoring 98-97.

After the game, coach Laird shared, "We had a terrible night of defensive during the first half. We gave up 62 points. I challenged my guys to do what I knew they had always been capable of, and we won the 2nd half 50-35. It felt good to win our first Sooner Athletic Conference game and add a few guys to help us turn things around." **P**



/ ATHLETICS /

PANHANDLE STATE BASEBALL & SOFTBALL PREVIEW

The Panhandle State Baseball and Softball teams are preparing for an exciting season ahead. Both teams have a strong mix of new and returning players, and the coaching staff is optimistic about their chances this year.

The Baseball team, led by Head Coach Shawn Joy, is particularly excited about the new faces on the roster. According to Joy, "We've got a lot of new faces to our team this year that have mixed well with our returners." This fellowship has created a cohesive and talented team. Despite the challenging schedule, the team looks forward to representing OPSU on the field.

The Aggie Baseball team will open their season in Phoenix, Arizona, January 26-28.

The Aggie Softball team is also preparing for a competitive season. The team had a productive fall conditioning season and is eager to take the field and put their skills to the test.

Head Softball Coach, Marc Benjamin is coming off of a season where he landed the seat as the Sooner Athletic Conference Head Coach of the Year in 2022. "This year's team will have lots of new faces and personalities in the lineup. Our batting order only returns two major contributors from last year's school record season. I'm excited to see what this year's team will blossom into," said Coach Benjamin.

The Aggie Softball team will start their season February 3-4 in Hobbs, New Mexico.

Overall, the Oklahoma Panhandle State University Baseball and Softball teams are ready to take on the challenges of the upcoming season. The teams are poised for success with a strong mix of new and returning players and a dedicated coaching staff. The players and coaches are excited to represent OPSU and give it their all on the field. **P**

TOP HAND AUCTION



**SILENT AND LIVE AUCTION,
DINNER, AND DANCE.**

**PROCEEDS GO TO SUPPORT
OPSU'S RODEO TEAM**



**SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 4TH
PICKLE CREEK
DOORS OPEN AT: 5:30PM
FREE ADMISSION**

MEAL PROVIDED BY
HUNNY'S
DANCE AND MUSIC
**KEN STONECIPHER & THE
WOODEN NICKEL BAND**