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OPSU.edu



OPSU RN-BSN PROGRAM
SHAPING OKLAHOMA'S
HEALTHCARE LANDSCAPE



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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 — University President
Dr. Ryan Blanton — Vice President of Advancement
Liz McMurphy — Vice President of Fiscal Affairs

PANHANDLE MAGAZINE

Natasha Eidson — Director of Campus Communications
Lauren McBee — Marketing Coordinator

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Natasha Eidson — Lauren McBee — Kyrstan Cook — Claire Scheopner
Kendal Smartt — Judith Harris — Kadence Kunselman



OPSU

RN-BSN

NURSING PROGRAM SHAPING OKLAHOMA'S HEALTHCARE LANDSCAPE ONE SCHOLARSHIP AT A TIME

Oklahoma Panhandle State University is shaping the next generation of BSNs in Oklahoma and the surrounding region. What sets OPSU's RN to BSN program apart is its tailored approach to addressing the unique challenges in any healthcare setting. In response to the growing demand for skilled nursing professionals in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas, OPSU is proud to introduce two new scholarships to empower aspiring nurses in the region in addition to the Oklahoma RN-BSN Scholarship. The first scholarship, the Saints to Aggies RN-BSN Scholarship extends to students who have graduated from Seward County Community College with their RN. Lastly, the Badgers to Aggies RN-BSN Scholarship aims to attract RN students graduating from Amarillo College. Both of the Kansas and Texas Scholarships are a \$1,000 Tuition-based scholarship. The scholarship that has led the way financially for so many nursing students at OPSU is the Oklahoma RN-BSN Scholarship, a 100% tuition match scholarship, providing financial support to pursue their nursing degrees at OPSU. Through these scholarships, OPSU recognizes the importance of meeting the healthcare workforce needs of the region but also reaffirms its dedication to nurturing the next generation of healthcare leaders.

Among the successful graduates of OPSU's RN to BSN program is Alumna Brooke Smith. Her recent appointment as Director of Nursing for Memorial Hospital of Texas County is a clear testament to the transformative impact of OPSU's program. Smith's story is a testament to individual growth and the power of scholarships in reshaping nursing and healthcare delivery in the region. As Director of Nursing, Smith is responsible for overseeing nursing staff, managing patient care processes and standards, developing policies, procedures, protocols, and standing orders, regulatory compliance, quality improvement initiatives, life safety oversight, and hiring, training, and evaluating nursing staff. Smith had a wealth of knowledge coming into the BSN program after graduating from SCCC with her RN. She stated, "My education at OPSU helped me become more well-rounded. The RN-BSN program provided a strong foundation for me in nursing theory, research, evidence-based practice, leadership, and critical thinking. There was also a focus on nursing in rural communities, which applies to Texas County."

"There is a critical shortage of nurses in Oklahoma and our

region," says Dr. Dinger, University President. "I'm proud of our faculty for helping educate the next generation of nursing leaders. Our RN-BSN Program is a success because of our strong partnerships with Oklahoma and area community colleges."

In the healthcare industry, many fields of study demand professional growth and continued education. Smith spoke about how OPSU prepared her for advancement in the nursing field. "My time at OPSU prepared me for the challenges of the nursing profession and further instilled a commitment to excellence and a passion for making a positive impact on patient care and outcomes. The supportive environment encouraged me to continue to seek opportunities for professional development and advancement."

Smith is eager to see how she can help with the nursing shortage locally and educate the community on rural healthcare. "I plan to collaborate with area nursing programs and educational institutions to increase the number of nursing graduates by offering mentorship programs, clinical placements, and support. I also plan to focus on offering competitive compensation packages to attract and retain nursing talent," she stated. "Community awareness about the importance of nursing is vital. I plan to participate in outreach events, career fairs, and other community events to connect with prospective nurses and encourage them to pursue a career in healthcare. I would also like to pursue opportunities with community organizations and businesses to offer scholarships or other incentives for nurses to work in our rural community."

Smith's journey from Emergency Department Manager to Director of Nursing exemplifies the program's commitment to nurturing talent and fostering leadership in healthcare. OPSU's RN to BSN program is instrumental in empowering individuals like Brooke Smith to make a meaningful impact in their communities by providing students with the tools and knowledge needed to excel. "Furthering your education at OPSU prepares you to excel in various healthcare settings and adapt to the changing demands of nursing, as well as laying a solid foundation for leadership roles," Smith stated.

Central to OPSU's mission is its dedication to accessibility through scholarships. The new RN-BSN scholarships play a crucial role in alleviating financial barriers and ensuring nursing students can pursue higher education. By investing in the next generation of healthcare professionals, OPSU is transforming individual lives and uplifting entire communities. **P**



OPSU'S

ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER

EMPOWERING STUDENT SUCCESS



At OPSU, students are not just numbers; they are individuals with unique goals and aspirations. Central to OPSU's mission of "Progress Through Knowledge" is the Academic Resource Center (ARC), a vital university resource dedicated to supporting students on their academic and personal journeys within a nurturing community environment.

The ARC's mission is to support faculty in empowering students to achieve their academic and personal goals. "We make it a priority to meet students where they are and teach them lifelong skills," says ARC Coordinator, MaKenze Anderson. "We want to serve as a friendly face to all students in the midst of both their struggles and their success." This mission is realized through a range of services aimed at enhancing student success, including peer mentoring, mental health counseling, accommodating disabilities, online tutoring, navigational support, the testing center, and career services.

Peer mentoring is a cornerstone of the ARC's support services. Freshmen receive weekly support and guidance from peer mentors who understand the challenges of transitioning to university life. This personalized approach fosters a sense of community and provides valuable mentorship to new students.

In today's digital age, access to resources is essential for academic success. Through Tutor.com, students have access to 24/7 online tutoring, ensuring assistance is available whenever they need it.

Additionally, the ARC offers navigational support to students, helping them navigate textbooks, Canvas, and other academic resources.

Inclusivity and support extend to every student, including those with disabilities. Laci Unruh and Robert Crawley, the dedicated professionals behind disability services, embody the ARC's commitment to ensuring access and support for all students.

Robert Crawley, the Disability Coordinator, works tirelessly to facilitate access both inside and outside the classroom. He meets with students individually to review documentation and approve reasonable accommodations, ensuring that every student can thrive academically. Moreover, as one of the central advisors for students from the College of Arts and Education, he provides invaluable guidance and support throughout their academic journey.

In addition to Mr. Crawley's pivotal role, Laci Unruh, the Counseling

Coordinator, offers a compassionate and welcome space for students to address their mental health needs. With an open-door policy and a genuine desire to support students, Laci provides support for those feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious. Her revolving door is a sign of the ARC's commitment to holistic student well-being, ensuring no student's needs go unnoticed or unaddressed. Together, Laci and Robert exemplify the ARC's mission to empower every student to succeed, regardless of their challenges or circumstances.

The ARC also houses a testing center where students can take proctored exams. This includes accommodation testing for students with unique needs, ensuring all students have equal opportunities to succeed. Additionally, the ARC serves as a Pearson VUE Testing Center for various certifications, including CEOE, EMT, GED, Real Estate, and more, catering not only to students but also to community members.

Beyond academic and disability services, the ARC collaborates with employers to build career paths for students. Events like Aggie Career Connections facilitate networking and job opportunities, helping students prepare for life beyond graduation.

Collaboration is key to the ARC's approach in supporting student learning and achievement. Tools like Dropout Detective allow the ARC to identify struggling students early on and provide timely support, ensuring no student falls through the cracks. The ARC also assists faculty in administering make-up exams in the testing center, ensuring students have opportunities to excel academically.

Looking ahead, the ARC is committed to expanding and enhancing its support for OPSU students. With a student-centered approach, the ARC aims to meet students where they are and equip them with lifelong skills. By serving as a friendly and reliable resource throughout their academic journey, the ARC embodies OPSU's dedication to empowering individuals to thrive in their pursuits of knowledge and beyond. **P**




STUDENT UNION

RENOVATION UNDERWAY

The Student Union at Oklahoma Panhandle State University will undergo major renovations, the first since being built in 1964. OPSU has partnered with Studio Architecture and the Ross Group to design and provide construction management for the project. Studio Architecture began the project's design phase in April 2023 with on-campus forums to get community input into the project. After design and preconstruction work, bids for the project were opened on April 22nd, 2024, and construction is set to begin following commencement on May 10th, 2024.

"Our community is excited to begin construction on this project. These renovations will bring new and functional spaces to our students and campus community," said Dr. Julie Dinger, OPSU President. "The renovation will bring much-needed improvements and modernization to the facility and truly transform it into a student-focused Union."

As part of the \$5 million renovation, the Student Union will receive major infrastructure upgrades, new campus dining spaces, renovated offices, and student lounge spaces. "Our remodeled Student Union will be the centerpiece of campus life and a hub for our community," said Vice President of Advancement, Dr. Ryan Blanton. "We are very thankful to Studio Architecture and the Ross Group for their hard work in bringing the project to this point."

OPSU received significant contributions for the project from the Nash Foundation, as well as the Panhandle State Association of Alumni and Friends Century Club 2024 campaign. Information on how to contribute can be found at opsu.edu/alumni-friends/century-club. 





GOLDEN MESA

CASINO RECEIVES REGENTS BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Oklahoma Panhandle State University celebrated its partnership with the Golden Mesa Casino at the 2024 Oklahoma State Regents Business Partnership event on March 8. OPSU and the Golden Mesa Casino have developed an exceptional partnership since its opening in 2019. Golden Mesa Casino has supported OPSU in many facets, including OPSU Athletics, the Business Department, and the College of Business and Technology. Golden Mesa Casino is a leading partner in regional workforce development.

The Regents Business Partnership Excellence Award is designed to highlight successful partnerships between business and community partners. Reflecting on the significance of this partnership, Dr. Julie Dinger, President of OPSU, stated, "Golden Mesa Casino has been a tremendous asset to our region, not only through its economic contributions but also its commitment to investing in education and workforce development. Their partnership with OPSU serves as a model for impacting communities."

Golden Mesa Casino has shown its dedication to higher education by providing scholarships for its employees to pursue additional business courses at OPSU. In 2023, Golden Mesa Casino assisted OPSU in funding scholarships for a new micro-credential program for its employees. This initiative benefits its employees and enriches the region by equipping individuals with specialized skills and knowledge essential for success in today's competitive job market.

Dr. Ryan Blanton, Vice President of Advancement at OPSU, commented, "The collaboration between Golden Mesa Casino and Panhandle State exemplifies the power of strategic partnerships in advancing educational and economic objectives. We are grateful for this shared partnership with them and look forward to the great work we will continue to do for our region."

Golden Mesa Casino has actively engaged with OPSU students by offering them priority in the employment interview process. With flexible scheduling options accommodating students' class commitments, the casino has created valuable opportunities for students to gain practical experience while pursuing their academic goals. Additionally, the casino provides internships in various operational areas, offering students valuable hands-on experience and insights into the gaming and hospitality industry.

Learn more about Golden Mesa Casino and its career opportunities! [P](#)



EIGHT STUDENTS

INDUCTED INTO OPSU'S OKLAHOMA ZETA OF ALPHA CHI NATIONAL COLLEGE HONOR SOCIETY

Eight exceptional Oklahoma Panhandle State University students have been honored with membership into the Oklahoma Zeta chapter of Alpha Chi National College Honor Society. Kayleigh Clepper, Avery Evans, Hunter Harris, Austin Jacobs, Juan Javier, Julie Johnson, Donna Rupe, and Bailey White have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement, leadership, and character, earning them a well-deserved place among the ranks of Alpha Chi.

Alpha Chi National Honor Society is an American collegiate honor society that recognizes academic excellence and promotes academic integrity and leadership among students. It was founded in 1922 and is open to students from all academic disciplines. Alpha Chi's mission is to promote educational excellence and character among college and university students and to honor those who achieve such distinction. Membership in Alpha Chi is selective and is based on academic achievement, character, and leadership potential—only the top 10% of juniors and seniors are invited to join. Alpha Chi chapters are present in colleges and universities across the United States.

Reflecting on the significance of this achievement, faculty advisor Tito Aznar remarked, "Membership in Alpha Chi is not just about academic excellence; it's about embodying the values of scholarship, leadership, and service. These students have not only excelled in their studies but have also demonstrated exemplary character and leadership potential. I am incredibly proud of each of them for their accomplishments."

OPSU highlights the importance of organizations like Alpha Chi in fostering academic excellence and leadership among students. Dr. Julie Dinger, University President, stated, "Alpha Chi provides a platform for students to showcase their talents and achievements while promoting a culture of academic integrity and service. I am immensely proud of our students for their dedication and hard work."

"Our faculty members play a crucial role in nurturing the talents and aspirations of our students. I commend Tito Aznar and Dr. Marjory Hall for their dedication to excellence and for volunteering their time for this opportunity for our students to be recognized," continued Dinger.

The induction of Kayleigh Clepper, Avery Evans, Hunter Harris, Austin Jacobs, Juan Javier, Julie Johnson, Donna Rupe, and Bailey White into Alpha Chi National College Honor Society not only celebrates their individual achievements but also highlights the academic excellence and student success at OPSU. Their accomplishments are a source of pride for the university community and inspire students to strive for excellence in everything they do. [P](#)



PANHANDLE STATE


ALUMNI ASSOCIATION HONORS 2024 ALUMNI HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

The Panhandle State Alumni Association proudly presents this year's distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame recipients: Marie Pool and Carl Huddleston. The induction ceremony was held on April 20th at 5 p.m. in the OPSU Student Union Ballroom, and many were in attendance commemorating their outstanding achievements.

Marie Pool has enjoyed a notable career spanning over 25 years as a highly respected educator across various Oklahoma public schools. Marie's academic journey began at Oklahoma Panhandle State University, where she pursued studies in biology and chemistry. Her numerous accolades, including multiple Teacher of the Year awards and recognition from the President for excellence in math and science teaching, underscore her dedication to education. Additionally, she serves as an Adjunct Instructor at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, Oklahoma and has made significant contributions to STEM education through her involvement in robotics and NASA workshops. Her commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and excellence makes her a great new addition to the OPSU Hall of Fame.

Carl Huddleston's distinguished tenure of 25 years with NASA's Space Program is nothing short of remarkable. He is the Manager of the Ground Flight Application Software Team for Aerodyne Industries on the Test and Operations Support Contract at the Kennedy Space Center. A native of Texhoma, Carl's continuous support for OPSU has impacted countless students. His contributions to the aerospace industry, recognized with prestigious awards, reflect his expertise and leadership as the manager of a prominent aerospace organization. Specifically, Carl was a recipient of the Space Flight Awareness Award in 2022. This award is one of the highest presented to NASA and industry partners and is for first-level management. Carl attributes much of his success to his formative years at OPSU, which laid the groundwork for his successful career.

University President, Dr. Julie Dinger, remarked, "Ms. Pool and Mr. Huddleston exemplify the extraordinary achievements of our alumni. Their unwavering dedication to their respective fields and support for OPSU make us at the university and the Aggie alums proud."

Shawn Joy, the Director of the Alumni Association, added, "We are excited to pay tribute to Marie and Carl this year. Their achievements serve as a source of inspiration for us all of us here at OPSU." 



MARIA WILTZIUS

NAMED HEAD WOMEN'S BASKETBALL COACH


Oklahoma Panhandle State University is thrilled to announce the appointment of Maria Wiltzius as the new Head Women's Basketball Coach. Maria, who initially joined OPSU in May as the Assistant Sports Information Director, seamlessly transitioned into the role of Interim Head Women's Basketball Coach during the current season.

With prior coaching experience at the collegiate level, Maria served as the top assistant for the women's basketball program at NAIA's William Woods University for two years, while earning her M.Ed. Additionally, she held the position of top assistant at NJCAA Bay College in Michigan for a year, showcasing her commitment to the development and success of women's basketball programs.

Athletic Director Victor Esparza expressed his enthusiasm for Maria Wiltzius taking the helm of the women's basketball program, stating, "We are excited to officially welcome Maria Wiltzius as our Head Women's Basketball Coach. Her dedication and contributions as the Interim Head Coach have been invaluable, and we look forward to seeing her continue to elevate our program."

President Dr. Julie Dinger echoed these sentiments, saying, "We are confident that Maria's coaching experience, passion for the game, and commitment to the holistic development of student-athletes align perfectly with the values of OPSU. We are thrilled to have her lead our women's basketball program."

Expressing her excitement and gratitude, Maria Wiltzius stated, "Everything happens for a reason. I am very excited to be officially named the next Head Women's Basketball Coach at Oklahoma Panhandle State University. I love this place and the people, which I now call home in my short time here. I cannot say thank you enough to Athletic Director Victor Esparza for being the one to give me my first head coaching job. Thank you to President Dr. Julie Dinger for putting your trust in me to lead young women on and off the court. We have made strides already in this short window, but now I want to take this program leaps and bounds forward."

A press conference will be held at a later date, following the completion of the current basketball season, where Maria Wiltzius will be officially introduced as the Head Women's Basketball Coach for Oklahoma Panhandle State University. 



SHOOTING SPORTS

TAKES ON NATIONAL COMPETITION WITH OVER 1,500 COMPETITORS

As the 2023-2024 Shooting Sports season ends, the OPSU Shooting Sports Team looks back on a season of hard work, improvements, and many personal records. From the first competition in Hays, Kansas, in September to the Nationals in San Antonio over spring break, the team has been on a journey of skill and determination. The season's peak unfolded at Nationals in San Antonio, Texas, where the team competed against over 1,500 competitors. After months of training, the Shooting team delivered great performances across various disciplines, leaving with many personal records from the competition.

Reflecting on Nationals, Trent Downey, a junior on the team, shared, "Nationals was a good time with fellow shooters and friends; we did really good as a team and shot some of our highest scores we have been working towards all year."

Senior Austin Jacobs shared, "This season had its ups and downs, but in the end, even though we didn't win a national championship, I felt we had a team capable of winning anytime we went to compete. We have a great group of people that I know will go on to do great things."

Coach Tell Dixon states, "This team has come so far since our very first practice. Each OPSU shooting sports team member brings their unique strengths and experiences to the line, contributing to the overall success that is brought back to the Panhandle. Now that this season is over, we move on to compete in Shilder and look forward to the next season."

Next on the calendar is the Salt Creek Shootout in Shidler, Oklahoma. Last year, the OPSU Shooting team competed and won the overall competition. This year, the team plans to go back and start a streak of winning this shoot. **P**



TWENTY

AGGIE ATHLETES INDUCTED INTO CHI ALPHA SIGMA ATHLETICS HONOR SOCIETY

The Oklahoma Panhandle State Beta Chapter of Chi Alpha Sigma hosted its annual National College Athletes Honors Banquet on Wednesday, April 17th, in the Student Union ballroom. This annual event celebrates excellence, recognizing student-athletes who have excelled in academics and athletics.

Chi Alpha Sigma, the only national honor society exclusively for collegiate student-athletes, sets the bar high for achievement. It focuses on the 'Four A's': Academics, Attitude, and Achievement, all encapsulated within the motto 'Excellence in Athletics and Academics.' Eligibility for membership in this honorable organization entails maintaining a minimum 3.4 GPA, Junior standing (60 credit hours/two full semesters at OPSU), while demonstrating exceptional performance in their respective sports by earning a letter.

The banquet magnified with Panhandle State President Dr. Julie Dinger as the keynote speaker, was a testament to the commitment and perseverance of these outstanding individuals.

Chi Alpha Sigma Chapter Advisor Stacy Nordquist commended the remarkable achievements of this year's honorees. Stacy Nordquist, in particular, played a pivotal role in the evening's proceedings, personally presenting each inductee with a certificate acknowledging their induction into Chi Alpha Sigma.

Twenty deserving student-athletes were presented with this prestigious honor, symbolizing their unwavering commitment to excellence both on the field and in the classroom. These individuals, who have left an indelible mark on our organization, were presented with cords to proudly display their affiliation during their respected graduation ceremonies.

The twenty athletes are Juan Javier Paredes, Ryota Kusumoto, Kenzie Monroe, Kieley Stegman, Paige Pearson, Caitlyn Ambrose, Kyle Cavender, Marissa Oestmann, Evan Meashaw, Thomas Garcia-Mejia, Ntandoyenkosi Tshuma, Aaron Smith, Mallory Maltese, Rylin Baker, Chloe Browning, Meagan Bellar, Toni Shawnee, Kaycee Torres, Taylor Blanton, and Koral Sylestine.

Their dedication, leadership, and academic talent inspire the entire Panhandle State community. We extend our sincere congratulations and best wishes for their future endeavors as they continue to pursue excellence. **P**



OKLAHOMA
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**2024 COMMENCEMENT
MAY 10TH @ 9AM**

**READY TO BE
AN AGGIE?**



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