

OCTOBER 2024

# Panhandle

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF OKLAHOMA PANHANDLE STATE UNIVERSITY

OPSU.edu

STRENGTHENING  
ENGAGEMENT  
AT OPSU THIS FALL

---





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  
Victor Esparza — Athletic Director  
Laura Hutchinson — Dean of Student Affairs

PANHANDLE MAGAZINE

Natasha Eidson — Director of Campus Communications  
Lauren McBee — Marketing Coordinator  
Tatum Hall — Sports Information Director

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Natasha Eidson — Lauren McBee — Maddie Flanagan  
Kendal Smart — Judith Harris — Allegiance Stone

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

05 AGGIES FALL SEMESTER  
ENCOURAGES STUDENT AND  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

---

06 HONORING NASA'S HIDDEN  
FIGURES AND ADVOCATING  
FOR OPSU IN D.C.

---

08 DR. RYAN BLANTON NAMED  
CHAIR OF OSRHE ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

---

11 TCEC WELCOMES NEW  
COLLEGIATE DELEGATES

---

15 BRANDON STEPHENS EARNS  
ATHLETIC CAREER ACHIEVEMENT  
FOR 5000 PASSING YARDS

---



# AGGIES FALL SEMESTER ENCOURAGES STUDENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Fall 2024 semester at Oklahoma Panhandle State University has been full of exciting events and community engagement. Highlighting the season was the highly anticipated Homecoming celebration with the theme “Aggies Around the World.” The event brought together students, alumni, and community members for a week of activities that celebrated OPSU’s diverse and vibrant campus life, culminating in a festive parade and football game.

In addition to Homecoming, OPSU’s Art on the Green event welcomed nearly 100 students from Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas. Local artists and high school students gathered for a day of creativity, hands-on activities, and presentations, showcasing the importance of the arts in education. The event was a great success, engaging young minds in meaningful artistic exploration.

Another notable event was the annual Counselors Retreat, which attracted high school counselors from Guymon, Hooker, Texhoma, Tyrone, and Balko. The retreat focused on how to better serve students in their college journeys and provided valuable insights on recruiting and admissions processes. Throughout the semester, the OPSU Student Life team has kept campus buzzing with activities, leading to exceptional student engagement across various events.





# HONORING NASA'S

## HIDDEN FIGURES AND ADVOCATING FOR OPSU IN D.C.

**University President Dr. Julie Dinger** represented Oklahoma Panhandle State University at the historic Congressional Gold Medal ceremony on September 18, 2024. Hosted at Emancipation Hall in Washington, D.C., the event celebrated the legacies of NASA's "Hidden Figures" Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, and Christine Darden. Invited by Representative Frank Lucas, Dr. Dinger was honored to witness this moment recognizing the pioneers who shaped the future of space exploration while breaking down racial and gender barriers.

Dr. Dinger expressed her sincere gratitude to Representative Lucas for this remarkable opportunity. "Attending this event was not only a privilege but a reminder of the power of perseverance and education in transforming our world. OPSU embodies the same spirit of progress that the Hidden Figures exemplified, and we are proud to draw inspiration from their stories," she remarked.

During her time in D.C., Dr. Dinger met with Senators James Lankford and Markwayne Mullin to discuss how OPSU serves as a cornerstone for workforce development and economic growth in Oklahoma. Both senators advocate for policies aligned with the university's mission. Senator Lankford's focus on supporting education, military service members, and rural development echoes OPSU's commitment to expanding opportunities in underrepresented regions. He has worked tirelessly on legislation to strengthen defense, support workforce initiatives, and promote educational access, which aligns with OPSU's

efforts to prepare students for success in rural communities and beyond.

Senator Mullin, known for his dedication to economic development, workforce readiness, and healthcare, shared time with Dr. Dinger discussing the vital role OPSU plays in educating the next generation of critical occupations in our region and our state.

The meetings highlighted OPSU's role not only as an educational institution but as a key driver of growth and innovation in Oklahoma. Dr. Dinger underscored the importance of strengthening partnerships across sectors to ensure that OPSU students can transition smoothly into meaningful careers. She also discussed the university's initiatives to address healthcare and critical workforce shortages—pressing issues shared by state leaders like Senators Lankford and Mullin.

Dr. Dinger's trip to Washington, D.C., reflected OPSU's growing influence on both state and national levels. Her engagement with lawmakers reinforced the university's commitment to fostering academic excellence, access, and sustainable economic growth for our state and region. **P**





# DR. REBEKAH WAGENBACH

## JOINS OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

**The Oklahoma Humanities Council** recently named Dr. Rebekah Wagenbach a member. Dr. Wagenbach is the Associate Dean for the College of Arts and Education and an Assistant Professor of History and Political Science at Oklahoma Panhandle State University.

“Dr. Wagenbach’s appointment to the Oklahoma Humanities Council is an important milestone for her and our university,” stated University President, Dr. Julie Dinger. “Her passion for the humanities and her dedication to enriching the lives of others through education make her an outstanding choice for the Council. I’m excited to see her bring her unique perspective and reflect the values of OPSU in her work with the Council.”

As a member of the Oklahoma Humanities Council, Dr. Wagenbach will contribute to fostering dialogue about the state’s cultural and historical narratives. With a focus on the Oklahoma and Texas Panhandles, she is eager to bring new programming to underserved areas. “My goal is to bring humanities-related programming here to the Panhandle to provide more cultural opportunities for our citizens,” she explained. “The arts and humanities are crucial to our communities’ intellectual and cultural growth.”

Dr. Wagenbach has contributed to initiatives that promote the arts and humanities. One of the most recent is launching “Our Nowhere: Panhandle Histories,” a project celebrating the research of the Oklahoma and Texas Panhandles alongside many faculty leaders. This initiative and several lecture series focused on research conducted within the College of Arts and Education reflect her dedication to preserving and promoting regional heritage.

“I am honored to serve on the Oklahoma Humanities Council and to have the opportunity to advocate for the role of the humanities in enriching our communities,” Dr. Wagenbach shared. “The arts and humanities are essential to understanding the world and cultivating empathy, creativity, and critical thinking. I look forward to serving my state and community.”

Dr. Wagenbach’s academic background in history and political science aligns seamlessly with her work on the Oklahoma Humanities Council. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communication and a Master of Art in American Studies from Northwestern Oklahoma State University and a Doctorate in Public Policy and Administration from Walden University. “History and political science are my areas of expertise,” she said. “But I’m equally passionate about community theater and musical performance, and I’ve led organizations that produce cultural events in these areas,” said Wagenbach.

Her work outside of OPSU highlights her commitment to the humanities. As the former President of the Mulvane WildActs, a community theater in Wichita, Kansas, and a collaborator with the No Man’s Land Historical Museum through podcast projects, Wagenbach has consistently sought ways to engage the public in meaningful cultural experiences. Her part in the Voice of the Santa Fe Trail lecture series is another example of her drive to make history accessible and engaging for all. As a historical interpreter for Old Cowtown Museum in Wichita, Kansas, she brought history to life by telling the story of the settlement of the Great Plains region.

Dr. Wagenbach joins a distinguished group of scholars, educators, and leaders dedicated to enhancing Oklahoma’s cultural landscape. The community is welcome to attend the Oklahoma Humanities Council’s literature talk at the Guymon Public Library on November 1st with Dr. Shawn Holliday which is part of their “Let’s Talk About it” book club program. **P**



# DR. RYAN BLANTON

## NAMED CHAIR OF OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

**Dr. Ryan Blanton**, Vice President of Advancement at Oklahoma Panhandle State University, has been named the Chair of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Economic Development Council. This role aligns seamlessly with Dr. Blanton's ongoing efforts to enhance OPSU's regional presence and impact.

Dr. Blanton's leadership extends beyond his recent appointment to the Council. As a current Leadership Oklahoma Class 37 member and the Guymon Chamber of Commerce President, Dr. Blanton has demonstrated a deep commitment to service, economic growth, and community development. His work with these organizations reflects his dedication to the Panhandle community.

The Economic Development Council, comprised of chief economic development professionals from each higher education institution, serves as an advisory body to the State Regents, Chancellor, Council of Presidents, and other state officials.

"The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education is pleased to confirm the appointment of Dr. Blanton as Chair," said Dr. Cass Minx, Associate Vice Chancellor for Workforce and Economic

Development at OSRHE. "His extensive experience will help direct and facilitate the Council's efforts, ensuring continued success."

"Being named Chair of the Economic Development Council is an honor, and I see it as an extension of my work at OPSU," said Dr. Blanton. "Every effort we make in economic development circles back to how we can better serve our students and business and industry partners. It's about creating opportunities for prosperity in Oklahoma, not just for today, but for the future."

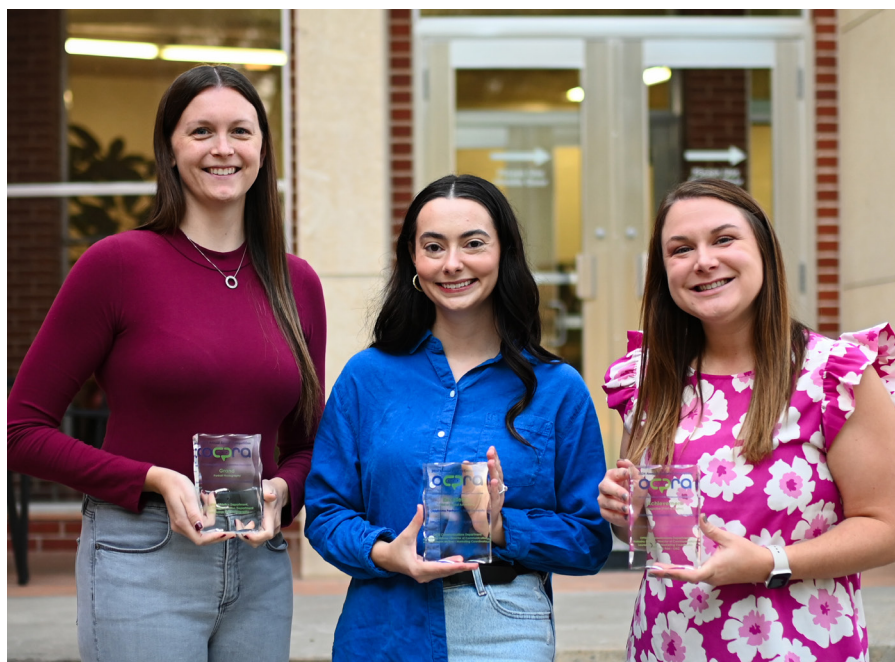
Dr. Blanton's involvement in these key leadership roles also brings valuable insights and connections to the OPSU Advancement team. His work with the Guymon Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Oklahoma, and the Guymon Industrial Foundation Board has positioned him to advocate for the university at both local and state levels, ensuring that OPSU remains a vital player in the region's growth.

As OPSU continues to advance its mission, Dr. Blanton's leadership in these roles will be crucial in driving the university forward, providing new avenues for student success, and enhancing the university's role in the broader community. **P**



**“The work of this team has elevated OPSU’s presence on a national scale.”**

**— Dr. Julie Dinger, University President**



# COMMUNICATIONS

## DEPARTMENT RECEIVES AWARDS AT 2024 OCPRA CONFERENCE

### Oklahoma Panhandle State University’s

Communications Department earned recognition at the 2024 Annual Oklahoma College Public Relations Association Conference, securing several awards in various categories. Competing against over 600 entries, the department’s work stood out and received accolades across print, digital, and photography.

Dr. Ryan Blanton, Vice President of Advancement and the Communications team held focus groups to develop the university’s campaign, “In No Man’s Land, Find Your Path to Anywhere.” Dr. Blanton oversees the communications department’s marketing initiatives and publications. The campaign captures the spirit of OPSU’s unique location and the limitless opportunities available to students.

The department was honored with the Achievement Award in Magazine for its work on the Panhandle Magazines and Quarterly Newsletter. In the category of Excellence in Print or Digital Advertising, celebrated for their innovative billboard designs and digital graphics. These awards recognized the collaborative efforts of Natasha Eidson, Director of Communications, and Lauren McBee, Marketing Coordinator, from the OPSU Communications Department, with print support from Quik Print—OKC.

Dr. Julie Dinger, University President, expressed, “The work of this team has elevated OPSU’s presence on a national scale. Their creativity and commitment to excellence continue to make our university stand out, and we’re incredibly fortunate to have such a talented group dedicated to representing the heart of Panhandle State.”



The university received the Grand Award in Portrait Photography for its work with the Athletics Department, Communications Department, and Aaron Witt Photography on Media Day. Victor Esparza, Athletic Director said, “Aaron Witt’s incredible photography truly captured the spirit of our athletes and the pride we have at OPSU. Maria Wiltzius did an excellent job organizing the Media Day, ensuring everything ran smoothly. Together, their efforts helped us create something exceptional that highlights the talent and energy of our teams.”

“I am proud of Natasha, Lauren, and Maria for their dedication and creativity,” stated Dr. Blanton. “Their work has showcased OPSU in the best light and increased the entire university’s communication efforts. This recognition is well deserved and speaks to their passion for telling the OPSU story.”

These awards reflect the dedication and skill of OPSU’s communications and athletics department, who continue to enhance the university’s visibility and engagement. **P**



# CHYANNA BLACK

RECOGNIZED AS  
NEXTGEN UNDER 30  
AWARD WINNER

**Chyanna Black**, Executive Director of the Panhandle State Foundation, has been named a 2024 recipient of the NextGen Under 30 award in the category of Adult and Higher Education. The NextGen Under 30 program honors young leaders who are pushing the limits in their fields through innovation, creativity, and inspiration. Winners are chosen for their active involvement and contributions to their communities, with a panel of respected business and civic leaders serving as judges.


Since joining OPSU in 2019, Chyanna has worked for the betterment of the University in both of her positions. First serving as the Director of Alumni Relations and then moving into her current role as Executive Director of the Panhandle State Foundation, Chyanna has found a passion for helping students and making an impact on alumni and community partnerships. "When my current position came open at the Foundation, I knew it was a chance to take my passion for alumni and current students and make a larger impact. This journey has shown me what I am capable of and taught me what it means to stay true to your heart."

University President, Dr. Julie Dinger stated, "On behalf of the university community, I extend our congratulations to Ms. Black for this prestigious and well-deserved recognition. Her commitment to excellence has not only impacted our university but our broader community. We're proud of her and look forward to her continued positive influence in the years to come."

The Panhandle State Foundation operates under the governance of a dedicated board of directors comprised of individuals committed to supporting the university's mission and ensuring the Foundation's financial stewardship and support of OPSU. She said, "I have earned the trust of my board by working hard, being able to provide resources and research for the changes we needed to make, and staying transparent and open with everyone. There must be a high level of trust and transparency between our office and the board, and I believe that has been the key to overcoming my challenges or any challenges."

"Without a doubt, Chy has exceeded all expectations since becoming Executive Director for the Panhandle State Foundation," stated Panhandle State Foundation Board President Travis Wolf. "She took over at a time of great change and has shown an amazing ability to adapt and deliver. Her commitment to improving the Foundation is obvious in everything she does. We are thrilled she has been recognized as a NextGen Under 30 award winner."

The Foundation office has seen record improvement in mainstreaming processes and increased student assistance regarding scholarships. Chyanna credited Stephanie LeGrange, Foundation Administrative Assistant, for working alongside her. "As we look forward, we are excited to start capital campaigns, give resources to our campus leaders to fundraise for their specific areas and dive into the grant's world. All these areas will continue to grow and set us up for long-term success."

Dr. Ryan Blanton, Vice President of Advancement at OPSU, expressed, "We are proud of Chyanna and all she has accomplished. Her leadership in the Panhandle State Foundation has contributed to our university's and students' success." 



# TCEC WELCOMES

## NEW COLLEGIATE DELEGATES: SALMA RAMIREZ, ADRIYNNNE SPARKMAN AND SAMUEL MADUKA

**TCEC is excited to announce** the newest members of its Collegiate Delegate Program: Salma Ramirez, Adriynne Sparkman, and Samuel Maduka. These exceptional students from Oklahoma Panhandle State University (OPSU) will learn about cooperatives, contribute fresh perspectives, and gain invaluable professional experience.

The Collegiate Delegate Program is designed to provide OPSU students with an opportunity to gain hands-on experience in cooperative business settings, enhance their leadership potential, and learn about the workings of TCEC. Ramirez, Sparkman, and Maduka were selected for their passion, values, and desire to grow professionally while contributing to their communities.

Adriynne Sparkman, an Animal Science major at OPSU, expressed her enthusiasm for the opportunity. "I thought the Collegiate Delegate program would be a great opportunity for me because it is a good way to meet new people and learn more about TCEC," she said. Sparkman is eager to learn about the partnership between TCEC and the communities they serve, saying, "I am looking forward to learning different ways TCEC can impact the area and how they have improved over the years."

While Sparkman is still undecided about her career path after graduation, she does have a unique interest. "I have considered becoming an equine chiropractor."

Salma Ramirez, also a student at OPSU, shares a deep commitment to serving her community and advancing her professional career. "I hoped to be a Collegiate Delegate because

TCEC's values align with the professional I hope to be and serve the community that best served me," Ramirez explained. "This program will help me gain valuable experience to turn around and contribute this knowledge to my career and community."

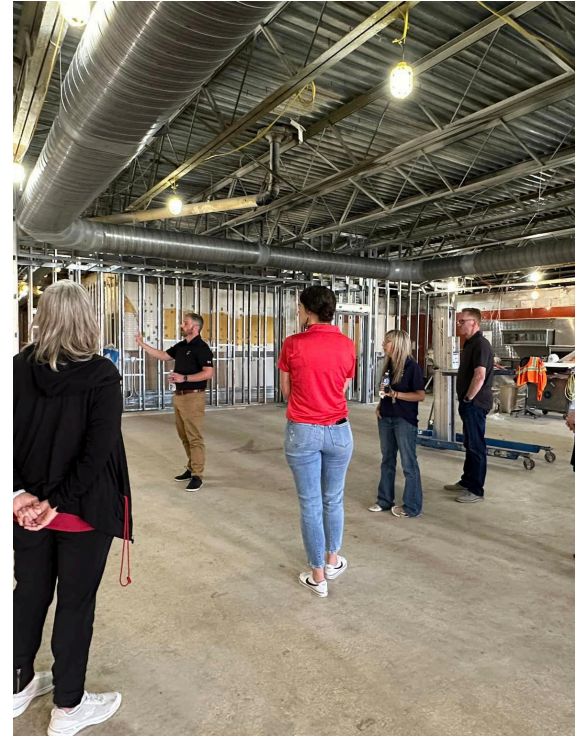
"After graduation, I plan to prepare and take the CPA exam," Ramirez stated. In her term as a Collegiate Delegate, she hopes to learn what it takes to be part of a successful company that prides itself on great service while maintaining strong ethics.

Samuel Maduka, a sophomore at OPSU pursuing a degree in Computer Information Science, has taken a significant step toward his professional ambitions by becoming a Collegiate Delegate. Seeking to gain firsthand experience and understand the requisites of working within a company, Samuel eagerly embraces this new role.

Samuel's primary motivation for becoming a Collegiate Delegate is to garner real-life experience that coincides with his career goals in networking and cybersecurity. By participating in this program, he aims to enhance his resume and better prepare for post-graduation opportunities in the technology sector. Samuel is particularly excited about the practical insights and exposure he will gain, which he believes will be invaluable for his future career.

TCEC is proud to have Ramirez, Sparkman, and Maduka on board and looks forward to their future achievements.

For more information on TCEC and the Collegiate Delegate Program, visit [www.tcec.coop/cdp](http://www.tcec.coop/cdp) or email us at [info@tcec.coop](mailto:info@tcec.coop). **P**



# OPSU CAMPUS

## INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATES FOR FALL SEMESTER

**Significant progress and ongoing developments** have been made across campus at OPSU this fall semester. With a focus on enhancing student experiences, OPSU has made substantial updates, including improvements to the Student Union and upgrades to the university's IT infrastructure. One of the most anticipated projects is the renovation of the Student Union, which is set to become the central hub for student life on campus. The updated space will offer more collaborative areas for students, enhanced dining options, and modernized facilities designed to grow community engagement.

"We're thrilled to see the transformation taking place in the Student Union," said Dr. Ryan Blanton, Vice President of Advancement. "These improvements will benefit our current students and attract prospective students by showcasing OPSU's commitment to providing a top-tier campus experience."

Remodeling activities in the Student Union have been moving forward on schedule, with major demolition work completed over the summer. Contractors are currently completing framing, electrical and utility rough-in, and installation of a new fire suppression system. Drywall, tile, paint, and finishes are scheduled for the next few months, as are new windows, patios, and lounge spaces for students and the community.

In addition to physical infrastructure, OPSU is making

advancements to its network infrastructure to create a more efficient and connected campus, upgrading classroom technology, and replacing laptops for faculty and staff as part of a hybrid workstation plan to improve the learning experience. The network infrastructure is being enhanced with fiber optic upgrades, new network devices, and improved wireless connectivity to ensure high-speed internet access across campus. Additionally, automating building management systems and administrative tasks through cloud-based platforms to streamline operations. The IT team is also exploring new technologies to enhance campus security and emergency response capabilities, prioritizing the safety of our community.

"Our IT upgrades this semester are vital to supporting the ever-growing demand for high-speed internet and digital tools in the classroom," said Liz McMurphy, Vice President of Fiscal Affairs. "We are committed to ensuring that every student and faculty member has access to the technology they need to succeed, both academically and professionally."

With these renovations and technological advancements, OPSU is ensuring that it remains a competitive and innovative institution, committed to serving the needs of its students and the community. **P**



# FIVE FUTURE TEACHERS

## AWARDED FULL-RIDE SCHOLARSHIP FOR 2024-2025

**Since 2018, the Panhandle Promise Scholarship** through the Panhandle State Foundation Office has been a vital resource for students in the Panhandle region. It reflects the university's commitment to supporting students financially and fostering educational opportunities. Five students were awarded the Panhandle Promise Scholarship for the 2024-2025 academic year.

This year's scholarship recipients are Laryn Dejarnett, a sophomore majoring in Agricultural Education, Madison McDowell, a sophomore majoring in Elementary Education, Peyton Mulbery, a senior majoring in Health and Physical Education, Ociece Pierce, a freshman majoring in Elementary Education, and Grace Saenz, a sophomore majoring in Elementary Education.

These five students are new to the Panhandle Promise Scholarship program, joining four returning students, bringing the total number of scholarship recipients for the 2024-2025 academic year to nine. They were selected through a competitive process, with their essays and academic achievements impressing a selection committee that included the OPSU Alumni President, Foundation President, two industry representatives, a public education representative, two OPSU Teacher Education Council members, and the Director of Teacher Education.

The Panhandle Promise Scholarship was created to enhance educational access for students in the Panhandle region and surrounding areas. Since its start, the scholarship has provided critical financial support to dozens of students, enabling them to pursue their educational goals without excessive financial stress.

Sophomore Laryn Dejarnett, an agriculture education major, said that this scholarship gives her the opportunity to not be financially burdened. "The Panhandle Promise Scholarship has given me the opportunity to pursue my dreams of becoming an agricultural educator by teaching the upcoming generations how important agriculture really is in today's society and how it will benefit the generations to come."

"The Panhandle Promise Scholarship is more than just financial aid; it's an investment in the future of our community," said Dr. Julie Dinger, University President. "By supporting these outstanding students, we are helping them achieve their academic dreams and ensuring that our region thrives with committed and exceptionally prepared teachers."

The scholarship plays a crucial role in promoting education within the Panhandle region, which faces unique challenges due to its rural nature. By reducing the financial barriers to higher education, the Panhandle Promise Scholarship helps to keep education graduates within the region, thereby strengthening the local economy and community. Recipients of this scholarship often become leaders and innovators in various fields, contributing to the ongoing development and prosperity of the area.

Senior, Peyton Mulbery, said that his goal is to stay around the Oklahoma Panhandle to teach physical education and become a football and basketball coach. "My inspiration behind my scholarship essay is my family tree of teachers. In my family, we have had principals, superintendents, P.E. teachers, English teachers, and coaches. My family inspires me every day because I want to continue my family tree of joining the education profession and be the best teacher I can be. My love for teaching is because of my family and I hope someday I'm just as good as them." **P**



# STEPHANIE AWADJE

## APPOINTED TO STATE LEADERSHIP ROLE IN OKLAHOMA STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

**The Oklahoma Student Government Association** recently selected Stephanie Awadje to serve on the President's Cabinet as the Coordinator of Recruitment and Retention for the 2024-2025 school year. Ufuoma Stephanie Awadje, a sophomore from OPSU and an international student from Nigeria, is committed to expanding her knowledge and leadership skills both on campus and at the state level.

Currently pursuing a major in Biology, Stephanie has a long-term goal of attending medical school to become a doctor. Her time at OPSU has been marked by a strong commitment to serving her fellow students and fostering positive change within the campus community. In this role, she will develop strategies to recruit and retain members for the OSGA Board of Directors, and reach out to non-member institutions across the state to encourage participation and support engagement with newly recruited institutions.

"Serving in student government is important to me because it allows me to represent my fellow students and contribute to the



campus meaningfully," Stephanie explains. "I'm passionate about creating positive change, and being involved in student government helps me grow as a leader."

At OPSU, Stephanie serves as Secretary of the Student Government Association, where she helps represent the student body and promote collaboration on campus. She credits her involvement in SGA with helping her develop communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills—qualities that are essential for her future career in medicine.

"Stephanie is a shining example of what students can accomplish when they get involved in campus leadership. To her credit, she boldly jumped into OPSU SGA as a freshman and, in her second year, is now leading at the state student government level," stated Dean of Student Affairs, Laura Hutchinson. "I have no doubt her intelligence, hard work, and commitment to developing her leadership and that in others will make a difference in the Oklahoma Student Government Association."

Stephanie chose OPSU because of its affordable tuition and the close-knit, supportive community that allows for strong student-to-teacher interactions. "In my high school, we didn't have anything like SGA," she said. "But at OPSU, the small community and personalized attention from faculty have been important parts of my education."

While focusing on her biology degree with a pre-med track, Stephanie plans to add a minor in marketing starting next semester, aiming to expand her skill set further. After graduation, she intends to take the MCAT and pursue her dream of becoming a doctor.

Stephanie is focused on her leadership roles at OPSU and with OSGA, where she continues to advocate for her peers and engage in student life. **P**

# BRANDON STEPHENS

## HITS CAREER MILESTONE OF 5000 PASSING YARDS



**Change is often met with uncertainty.** Still, for senior quarterback Brandon Stephens and the OPSU Aggies football team, it has been the catalyst for one of the best starts to a season in recent memory. Following a coaching transition that saw the departure of Coach Bob Majeski and the arrival of Coach Cory Miller and his new staff, the Aggies have started conference play with an impressive 3-1 record. With the leadership and poise of Stephens at the helm, the team's success is far from a surprise.

Brandon, a seasoned leader on and off the field, has seen it all during his four-year tenure at OPSU. Despite the uncertainties of a coaching change, Stephens has embraced the transition and attributes much of the team's success to the new culture that Coach Miller has instilled.

"People tend to dislike change because of their fear of the unknown. However, I see change as a gateway to new opportunities," Stephens shared when reflecting on the impact of the coaching change. "The new coaching staff has provided us with new opportunities to learn and receive coaching in ways we never had before. The coaching change has also led to the beginning of a new culture for the team—a winning culture."

Stephens' numbers on the field speak for themselves. With over 5,000 passing yards and over 1,000 yards rushing in his collegiate career, he's on the verge of breaking the school's all-time passing record. His dual-threat ability has made it difficult for opposing defenses to game-plan against the Aggies' balanced attack.

"As an offense, we all love to see other offense members shine.

We realize that we cannot be selfish and value personal stats over the team's well-being," Stephens explained. "There are times when I may have a huge game, and there may come times when I hardly do anything. We are satisfied as long as we finish the game with an Aggies win. Taking advantage of what the defense gives us is key."

The team's impressive 3-1 start to conference play is a testament to their resilience and hard work. But for Stephens and the Aggies, the job is far from finished. Stephens is laser-focused on the remaining schedule with the season at its midpoint.

"I feel like we can beat all remaining teams on our schedule. We have yet to put together a performance that showcases what we are truly capable of, yet we sit at a 3-1 record in conference," he said confidently. "We have the utmost confidence in ourselves because we know the effort we have put into becoming a better football team over the last few weeks. The team recognizes that we have a chance to be great, and we are not satisfied with falling short of our goal."

When Stephens was asked what his favorite memory from playing football at OPSU was, he said that it would have to be the Aggies' victory over LCU this season—a game where OPSU ended LCU's impressive 30+ home game win streak. "We were tasked with going on the road and beating a team on a 30+ home game win streak. After a long, back-and-forth game, we were able to squeak out a win. I enjoyed every minute of that game."

Off the field, Stephens has been equally impressive. A business administration major with a minor in health and physical education, he has a bright future ahead of him. After graduation, Brandon plans to move back to Texas with his girlfriend and son and begin a new chapter in his life. "My biggest and main goal is to be able to provide for my family. I aspire to become a professional football player," Stephens shared about his future ambitions.

As the OPSU Aggies charge through the remainder of the season, it is clear that Stephens will continue to play a pivotal role in the team's success. With a dedicated and motivated leader like him, the Aggies are poised to finish the season strong and set a new standard for OPSU football. **P**

# PROTECTING THE NET

## GROWING THE FUTURE: INSIDE STORY ON CAMI KENNY



### In the halls of Oklahoma Panhandle State University,

Cami Kenny stands out as a true embodiment of dedication and leadership. As a second-year student-athlete passionate about agriculture and volleyball, Cami's story is one of balancing dreams, responsibilities, and a deep commitment to her community.

Cami's decision to attend OPSU was strategic, rooted in her dual passions. "I chose OPSU because it was one of the few places where I could continue my volleyball career while pursuing a degree in agriculture," she says. This unique blend of opportunities was a key factor in her choice, aligning perfectly with her aspirations.

Currently, Cami is double majoring in Animal Science and Agricultural Education, which reflects her dedication to both practical and educational aspects of agriculture. Her commitment to these fields was evident last April when she earned a remarkable 4th place at the NACTA Ag Education contest in Idaho, a testament to her hard work and expertise.

Cami's dedication extends beyond the classroom and the volleyball court. She actively engages with the community as a referee for local Kids Inc. volleyball leagues. Her campus life is equally dynamic, as she is involved with the College of Agriculture, Science, and Nursing Leadership team, Women in Ag, Collegiate FFA, and the MSC. This year, she will also represent her team as a Student-Athlete Advisory Committee member.

In addition to these roles, Cami's summer was marked by a balance of work, family, and volleyball. She worked throughout the summer, spent quality time with loved ones, and stayed active in the sport she loves, helping her sister with the Guymon High School volleyball team. As the new semester unfolds, Cami is brimming with anticipation. She is set to play a vital role in helping OPSU host the Women in Ag conference this October and will assist with the local high school interscholastic competition in November. With a busy schedule ahead, Cami is enthusiastic about reconnecting with friends and diving into her various commitments.

Juggling academics, athletics, and leadership roles is no easy feat, but Cami has honed her ability to balance her responsibilities. "Sometimes it's tricky, but I've gotten better at handling it. I try not to take on too many things at once, and if I do, there is always someone willing to help me out," she shares. Her flexibility and encouragement from her various involvements support her ability to manage her busy schedule.

Tracy Kincannon, Cami's mentor, offers high praise for her. "Cami is one of our best and most respected student leaders. She is always there when a job needs to be done. She knows how to lead when needed and support other student leaders when they need it. We are very proud of her."

Cami Kenny's journey at OPSU is a shining example of how dedication, leadership, and passion can intersect to create a remarkable college experience. As she continues to excel in her studies, athletics, and community involvement, her impact will undoubtedly be felt for years to come. **P**



# EQUESTRIAN

## TEAM MEMBER SHINES AT HIGH ROLLER REINING CLASSIC, QUALIFIES FOR 2025 RUN FOR A MILLION



**Oklahoma Panhandle State University's** equestrian team member, Eva Johnson, is making a name for herself in the reining world with her exceptional talent and relentless drive. A Junior at OPSU from Albuquerque, New Mexico, Eva has built her equestrian career for over 15 years, mastering multiple disciplines ranging from western pleasure to ranch events. But it's in reining that she's making serious waves.

Recently, Eva traveled to Las Vegas to compete in one of the most prestigious events in the sport: the High Roller Reining Classic Show. This wasn't just any competition; these were the qualifying rounds for the coveted 2025 Run for a Million show, which boasts the largest purse in reining history.

Eva entered five highly competitive classes, showcasing her skills and proving why she's one to watch. In the Level 1 Rookie class, Eva won first place. She followed that up with a third-place finish in the Level 2 Rookie division. Not only did these results earn her accolades, but her overall performance secured her a spot as one of the top 5 rookie high-point finishers—a remarkable achievement given the intense level of competition.

Securing qualifications for the 2025 Run for a Million in both the Non-Pro and Rookie divisions is no small feat. "Getting the opportunity to be part of what they're calling reining history is mind-blowing," Eva says. "When I first started reining, I just wanted to learn. Now, I'm competing at some of the biggest and hardest shows in the industry, and I'm holding my own."

Eva's journey hasn't always been easy. She openly shared that before heading to Vegas, she struggled with self-doubt after a challenging show where things didn't go as planned. Through this challenge, she learned the importance of perseverance. "It's important not to let the past hold you back. I needed to go into this show with confidence in myself and my horse"

While Eva's success in the ring is a dream come true, she's far from done. When she's not competing, she's training hard, spending countless hours in the saddle and working with her trainers. "I like to rework any concerns and show my horse that I have confidence in him," she explains. It's this dedication and connection with her horse that sets Eva apart.

Eva is a true team player in and out of the arena and has immense sportsmanship. Coach Kacey Ward stated, "Eva is always willing to share her knowledge and help where needed. Whether helping fellow teammates get ready for shows or mentoring at practice, she is a true OPSU student leader."

After graduation, Eva has her sights set on studying veterinary medicine, specializing in performance equine medicine. With her impressive accomplishments in reining and a bright future ahead, Eva Johnson is not only making OPSU proud but also putting the Panhandle on the map in the equestrian world. Keep an eye out for Eva—she's only just getting started! **P**



OKLAHOMA  
PANHANDLE STATE  
UNIVERSITY

# 18th Annual



# CHILI COOK-OFF

NOVEMBER 16TH, 2024 | CHILI JUDGING @ 10AM  
OPSU TAILGATE

FOOTBALL GAME: OPSU VS OTTAWA UNIVERSITY (ARIZONA)

**CHECK OUT  
ALL THINGS  
HOMECOMING!**



     
**#wearepanhandle**