

Campus Update

ECU awarded \$13M TSET Grant for Dan Hays STEM Center

ADA, Okla. – The Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) has approved a \$13M grant to East Central University (ECU) for the purpose of completing The Dan Hays STEM Center and School of Nursing in Ada, Okla., a major capital project that will expand healthcare workforce education across Oklahoma, particularly rural Oklahoma.

The Dan Hays STEM Center, currently under construction and projected for completion in July 2026, supports

TSET's mission by increasing healthcare capacity, advancing chronic disease prevention and improving health outcomes statewide. About 80% of ECU nursing graduates remain in Oklahoma after graduation.

SEE TSET, PAGE 2



Prominent figures featured at NASNTI REACHE Tribal Summit

Several guests from across the state attended and spoke at the NASNTI REACHE Program's annual Tribal Summit.

Featured speakers included Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby, Lewis Johnson (Seminole Nation), Dr. Brandon Postoak (Chickasaw Nation), Dr. Amanda Tachine (Navajo Nation) and Jerod Tate (Chickasaw Nation), along with several other presenters and vendors.

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Chickasaw Nation Lt. Governor to speak at ECU graduation

Chickasaw Nation Lt. Governor, Chris Anoatubby, is set to present the commencement address for the Fall 2025 graduation ceremony on Dec. 13 at 10 a.m. inside the Kerr Activities Center.



TSET

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The 64,000 square foot facility will feature a simulation center, more than 25 hands-on labs and advanced STEM classrooms for Nursing, Math and Computer Science students. The expansion is expected to generate a major increase in nursing graduates and will allow ECU to grow to 600 nursing majors over the next four years while adding additional faculty and staff.

ECU's School of Nursing continues to demonstrate strong outcomes through

NCLEX-RN pass rates, holds continuing accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) and is approved by the Oklahoma Board of Nursing. This program is the only accredited Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program in the South Central and Southeastern part of Oklahoma. The latest American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) survey revealed that 28% of new nursing positions required a BSN, while 72% stated they strongly prefer a BSN prepared nurse. A step



above the LPN and RN certifications. TSET is a state grantmaking trust dedicated to improving the health of Oklahomans. It funds programs that reduce tobacco use and

obesity, the state's leading causes of preventable death, and supports initiatives that create healthier communities.

Annual Marvin Stokes Lecture delivered



The 2025 Oklahoma teacher of the year and 27 year teaching veteran, Melissa Evon, delivered this year's Marvin Stokes Lecture to students, staff/faculty, and community members in November.

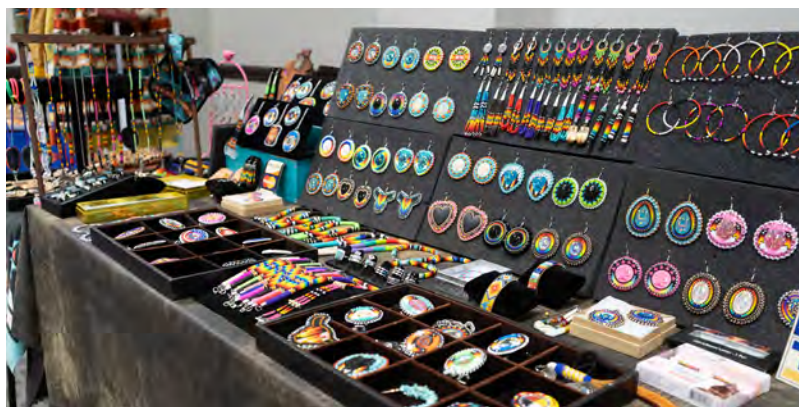
The annual lecture, named for the ECU alumnus and Byng superintendent, also serves as a platform to recognize scholarship recipients in ECU's Education department as well as an opportunity to celebrate district teachers of the year who are ECU Alumni.



Panter honored before annual Limes Lecture

David Panter was named the 2025 Smith Center for Entrepreneurship Entrepreneur of the Year at ECU and delivered the annual Limes Lecture.

Panter is a 1989 graduate of ECU and currently serves as Chief Executive Office for MedReps, a medical distribution company he founded in 2014.



SUMMIT

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Over the course of two days, a number of professionals came together from across several tribal nations to attend the 2025 Tribal Summit, themed “Rooted and Rising.”

Several keynote speakers and break-out session presenters addressed topics of concern, including student retention and graduation, culturally responsive teaching and advising, tribal and institutional partnerships, physical and mental health and indigenous research and storytelling.

Along with the lectures and keynote addresses were roundtable discussions, vendor booths and musical presentations.

ECU Tiger Football chosen for First Americans Bowl

The ECU Tiger Football team is set to compete against Northeastern State University in 7-Clans Talent Agency’s inaugural First Americans Bowl, a new postseason college football event established to elevate and empower Indigenous and minority athletes across the United States. Proceeds from the game will directly support scholarships, youth sports programs and community initiatives that benefit Indigenous and minority athletes.

The inaugural First Americans Bowl will take place Dec. 6, 2025, at 1 p.m. at Doc Wadley Stadium on the Northeastern State University campus in Tahlequah, Okla.



Dr. Shirley Mixon presented with Lifetime Achievement Award from Oklahoma Women in Higher Education.



ECU TRIO Programs shine at national conference

ECU's Federal TRIO Programs staff recently attended the 54th annual Southwest Association of Student Assistance Programs (SWASAP) Regional Conference in Houston, Texas.

This year's "Together We Rise" event provided critical professional development for the ECU delegation, which included directors, project coordinators, and academic advisors from Upward Bound, Upward Bound Strive, Upward Bound Math and Science and the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC).

Mason Martinez of the Oka' Institute and Diego Cifuentes of the EOC served as mentors at the first-ever Oklahoma Latino Youth Leadership Summit at the State Capitol. They were among 40 mentors who guided 110 high school and college students from across the state through workshops on leadership, professional development, community advocacy and public service.

Employee Spotlight



Jessica Sanchez

Jessica is a longtime member of the ECU Tiger community, having received her B.A. in 2015 from ECU and her M.S. in 2023.

Following graduation, she began working with the ECU McNair Scholars Program. After a brief time away from ECU, she returned to the McNair office in 2019 before transitioning to her most recent role as Creative Coordinator/Executive Assistant for the ECU Foundation in 2022.

She remained in that position until she was named ECU's Director of Alumni Relations at the end of 2024.

"Jessica exceeded every expectation in planning and executing her first Homecoming," said Buffy Lovelis, Chief Operating Officer of the ECU Foundation. "The attention to detail, calm leadership, and commitment to creating a meaningful experience for our alumni and Ada community were evident. She approached every challenge with dedication, creativity, and a genuine passion for East Central University. I couldn't be prouder of the work she accomplished and look forward to Homecoming 2026 under her leadership."

ECU recognizes three employees for Lifetime Service



Dr. Gerald Williamson



Dr. Shirley Mixon



Becky Isaacs

President Wendell Godwin has announced Dr. Gerald Williamson, Dr. Shirley Mixon and Becky Isaacs as the first-ever recipients of ECU's Lifetime Service Awards. Each individual has served the ECU community for more than four decades.

Isaacs served as Director of Financial Aid at ECU at the time of her retirement earlier this summer. Williamson, who has filled a number of roles during his time at ECU, continues to serve the university as Chief Development Officer for the ECU Foundation. Mixon serves as Professor and Director of ECU's Interdisciplinary Studies Program, while continuing to serve on numerous university, community and state committees and organizations.

Lifetime Service Award Banquet for Saturday, March 28 at 6 p.m. in the ECU Foundation Hall. More information for the event and each honoree will be announced later.

Peter Biles Book Talk



Fiction writer and ECU instructor, Peter Biles, delivered a Book Talk at ECU's Linscheid Library, discussing his newest collection of stories, "Last November."

Biles, who spoke to more than two dozen attendees at the event, is a native of Ada, Okla. He received his Bachelor of Arts in English from Wheaton College in Ill.

"Last November" is his fourth publication.

Author Alan Gratz presented Community reading on ECU campus

The City of Ada and the Ada Public Library hosted award-winning author Alan Gratz inside ECU's Ataloo Theatre.

Gratz is a New York Times bestselling author who has written more than 20 books for young readers.

Eleven local schools attended the event where Gratz discussed his book Prisoner B-3087, which tells the story of a youth's experience in concentration camps during the Holocaust.



The ECU Tiger Esports varsity League of Legends team wins Great American Conference championship



The ECU Tiger football team volunteered to help out the City of Ada with this year's Santa Stroll festivities at Wintersmith Park

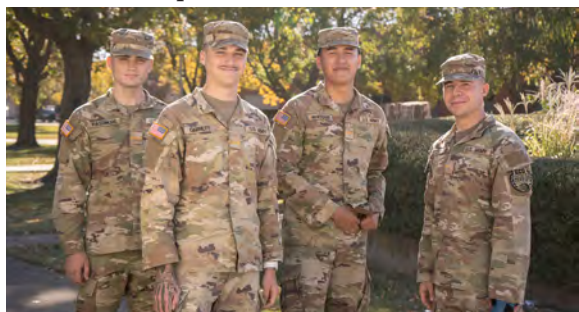
ECU Athletics held campus Q&A

The ECU Athletic Committee hosted the first-ever ECU Athletic Department Information Session on campus.

The Q&A gave faculty and the university community the opportunity to ask questions and learn information about a wide range of athletics related topics.

Veterans Day ceremony organized by ECU GOLD

The GOLD (Guard Officer Leadership Development) Program at ECU commemorated Veterans Day with a ceremony at the Frank R. Crabtree Sr. Honor Plaza on campus.



Upcoming Events

- Dec. 1
 - Linscheid Library, 5 p.m.
- Dec. 2
 - Holiday Ornaments & Polar Express Experience, 5 p.m.
- Dec. 3
 - Paws and Relax, 5:10 p.m.
 - ECU Band Concert, 7:30 p.m.
- Dec. 4,
 - Mental Health First Aid Training, 8 a.m.
 - Smash the Stress Away, 10 a.m.
 - American's and the Holocaust 1 p.m.
 - Honors Showcase, 3:30 p.m.
 - ECU Honors Program Laude Banquet, 6 p.m.
 - Super Smash Bros. Tournament, 6 p.m.
 - Chamber Ensemble Concert, 7:30 p.m.
- Dec. 6
 - Environmental Science 50th Accreditation Anniversary, 5:30 p.m.
- Dec. 8
 - ECU Staff & Faculty Holiday Party, 3:30 p.m.
- Dec. 10
 - Paws and Relax, 11 a.m.
- Dec. 11
 - Super Smash Bros. Tournament, 6 p.m.
 - Basketball vs. SNU, 7:30 p.m.
- Dec. 12
 - FA25 Term B Ends
- Dec. 13
 - Honors Graduation Ceremony, 8 a.m.
 - Fall Commencement, 10 a.m.
- Dec. 15
 - Winter Intersession Begins

Students headline historic Hot Springs poetry night



Seven students recently presented their original poetry at Wednesday Night Poetry in Hot Springs, Ark., with six students serving as the week's featured headliners.

Beginning Feb. 1, 1989, Wednesday Night Poetry has continued for more than 36 years and reached its 1,920 consecutive Wednesday night when ECU's students were asked to participate.

Featured students included Mass Communications major Bethany Baggerly; English majors Maia Clark, Addison Guinn, Zachariah Hobbs, Jayde Landreth and Kris Marc;

and Physics major Colton Collins, participating in his first-ever poetry event. The trip was led by ECU professor and Oklahoma poet Dr. Ken Hada.

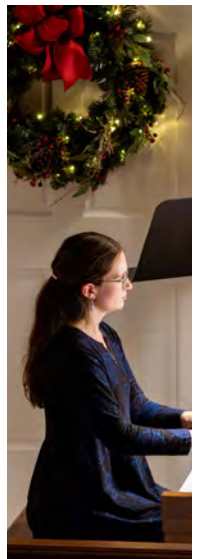


The ECU School of Nursing Pinning Ceremony took place inside Atalio Theatre



ECU's Gamma Delta Pi assisted the Regina Bounds Foundation in hosting an inauguration banquet for Seminole Chief Sena Yesslith and Assistant Chief Sheila Harjo.

Band events took place throughout November





Students turned out for the annual Turkey Trot at Wintersmith Park



Chi Omega hosted a bake sale to raise money for the Make A Wish Foundation.



The Asian Student Association hosted their annual Diwali Night festivities

The Annual Tiger Tank, Tiger Promote and Tiger Trak contests took place



Tiger Tank Advanced Collegiate Champion – Apexion (Andon Russell)



Tiger Tank Collegiate Champion – Savalon (Savannah Averitt & Ava Freeze)



Tiger Trak Collegiate Champion – Kara Doan

Tiger Tank Award Winners

ADVANCED COLLEGIATE

Champion – Apexion (ECU - Andon Russell, Business Administration-Entrepreneurship)

Runner Up – CVS Garage Doors (ECU – James Cole Campbell, Business Administration with Certificate in Entrepreneurship)

Second Runner Up – JK (ECU – Milana Khaikhan, Business Administration-Entrepreneurship & Aubrey Junk, Accounting)

COLLEGIATE

Champion – Savalon (SSC – Savannah Averitt & Ava Freeze)

Runner Up – Next Level Athletics (SSC – Kaitlyn Simpson)

Second Runner Up – Workstay (ECU - Ashton Bierce)

HIGH SCHOOL

Champion – Smart Studying (Ada – Kaylee Johnson, Rashmika Hyder)

Runner Up – Rooted & Risen (Vanoss – Khloee Dewitt, Harper Miller)

Second Runner Up – Hunters Connect (Byng – Maddie Hogue)

Tiger Promote Award Winners:

Champion – Friends 'n' Fellowship (Latta – Faith Abdegule, Memphis Batterton)

Runner Up – Run for Relief (Vanoss – Kira Miler, Bryson Braudway)

Second Runner Up – Fit Prep (Latta – Briley Brundidge)

Tiger Trak Award Winners:

COLLEGIATE

Champion – Kara Doan, SSC

Runner Up – Milana Khaikhan, ECU

Second Runner Up – Jentrie Gibson, SSC

HIGHSCHOOL

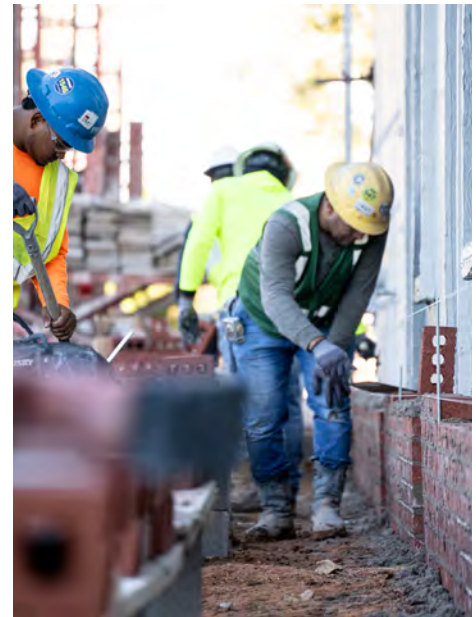
Champion – Jeff Yang, Ada

Runner Up – Briley Brundidge, Latta

Second Runner Up – Abigail Canada, Byng

Champion School – Ada High School

Construction continues on the Dan Hays STEM Center/ School of Nursing



ECU students and faculty visit Missouri Botanical Gardens

By Jose Montalva, ECU Instructor of Geography

In early Oct., East Central University's Plant Ecophysiology class, alongside Dr. Leah Dudley and myself, embarked on an unforgettable journey to one of the world's most renowned herbaria, the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis.

We departed early Wednesday morning, at 6 a.m., embracing the crisp fall air for an 8-hour drive from southeastern Oklahoma to St. Louis, Missouri, once known as the "Gateway to the West," arriving around 2:30 p.m.

The Missouri Botanical Garden (MoBot) hosts two charming old brick buildings that serve as accommodations for visiting researchers from around the world. The apartments were spacious and comfortable, each fully equipped with a working kitchen, perfect for longer stays. Conveniently located within walking distance of both the herbarium and the garden itself, these dorms offer easy access to the heart of MoBot.

Around 3 p.m., we set out for our first scientific stop: the behind-the-scenes tour of the herbarium and Library. However, we took a wrong turn and ended up making a full circle, only to discover that the Bayer Center had been right in front of us the whole time!

At the Bayer Center, we were warmly welcomed by Lauren Boyle, the collection manager, our very own Virgil, guiding us through the fascinating journey behind the scenes of the herbarium and library.

For any plant lover, taxonomist or biologist, visiting this herbarium is like stepping into a dream. Home to a breathtaking collection of over 7,000 plant specimens from every corner of the globe, the herbarium is a treasure trove of botanical diversity. Each sample is meticulously curated, labeled, and preserved under ideal conditions of temperature and humidity. The accompanying library is equally impressive, housing rare botanical books, some dating back more than 400 years, offering a glimpse into centuries of scientific exploration and discovery.

Among the most awe-inspiring moments of the visit was seeing, firsthand, a specimen collected in Chile by Charles Darwin himself, and another gathered from the Congo Basin by Dr. Jane Goodall. With her recent passing, standing before her contribution was a poignant reminder of how scientific legacies endure, preserved not only in books and memories, but in the very specimens that continue to inspire generations of researchers.

But it's not only plant specimens, books, and scientific knowledge that hold a special place at the Peter H. Raven Library and Archives, named after one of the institution's most influential directors, which houses over 250,000 items. This vast collection also preserves the intellectual roots of plant taxonomy, reflecting centuries of accumulated knowledge and cultural exchange from around the world.

As we explored, it became clear that the history of

plant science is deeply intertwined with global traditions and discoveries. Consulting original sources is not only essential for resolving taxonomic discrepancies, but also for appreciating the evolving value of plants throughout human history.

We also learned about the vital and often overlooked work of book restoration. Many of the documents housed in the herbarium are centuries old, and some have suffered the effects of time and poor storage



conditions. On the fourth floor, there is an entire room dedicated to the preservation and restoration of these ancient texts, a space where craftsmanship meets conservation.

The meticulous, almost artisanal work carried out here is essential to safeguarding the integrity of this priceless collection. It's a quiet but powerful reminder that preserving knowledge is just as important as discovering it.

On the third floor, we had the privilege of meeting Dr. Charlotte Taylor. Over her distinguished career, she has named more than 500 new plant species, making her the most prolific living female plant taxonomist in the world. Despite her towering achievements, she graciously took time to speak with us.

Taylor shared insights into her ongoing work, which still focuses on identifying plant specimens from South America. She even opened several cabinets filled with what appeared to be hundreds of unprocessed samples, each one a potential new discovery. Her deep love for plants radiated through every word and gesture, and she encouraged the students to reconnect at a future conference, leaving them inspired by her passion and dedication.

On day two, after a much-needed night of sleep -well-earned after eight hours of travel and an inspiring first day exploring the herbarium and library- we were ready to dive into the heart of our botanical adventure. At 8 a.m., we gathered with fresh energy and eager anticipation to visit the crown jewel of the itinerary: the botanical garden.

Even though it's fall, and perhaps not the peak of the flowering season, the Missouri Botanical Garden still offers a remarkable experience. The sheer diversity of plant species, the meticulously maintained gardens, and the captivating water features make this visit truly unique. Spanning 79 acres, the garden showcases stunning horticultural displays and features top attractions such as the Climatron, the Japanese and Chinese gardens, the Arid House, the historic Sachs Museum and the elegant Tower Grove House.

Long before it became one of the most celebrated botanical gardens in the country, the Missouri Botanical Garden was the private estate of philanthropist and botanist Henry Shaw. In 1859, Shaw generously opened his garden to the public, sharing his passion for plants and education with the city of St. Louis.



After his death, Shaw was laid to rest within the grounds of the garden he loved so deeply. More than a century later, his legacy continues to bloom.

The Climatron features a stunning geodesic design, reminiscent of our Kerr Activities Center at ECU. Inside, you'll find over 2,800 plants representing 1,400 different species. Vividly colored flowering epiphytes and orchids create striking contrasts, while cascading waterfalls enhance the immersive atmosphere. This tropical oasis is maintained by a computer-controlled climate system, keeping temperatures between 64°F and 85°F, even during winter. It's a true rainforest experience, right in the core of the U.S. Midwest.

Can you imagine walking into a cactarium that feels like a quiet village tucked away in the middle of the Sonoran, the Atacama, or even the Moroccan Desert? The Shoenberg House was truly remarkable, a living

museum where cacti and succulents from every arid place of the world thrived together. Even the rocks played their part, becoming the stage where both the tiniest and most majestic plants revealed their unique beauty.

The phrase "stop and smell the roses" invites us to pause, breathe, and find peace amid the chaos of everyday life. But here, beneath the towering Ginkgo, surrounded by the shifting greens of hostas, the quiet elegance of the Japanese garden, or the lush path through a slice of tropical forest in northeastern Missouri, that idea becomes something deeper. Plants offer more than food or decoration -they are the living face of nature, woven into culture, memory, and identity. They continue to inspire curiosity and research. That's what this botanical garden does: it reminds us of the beauty, meaning, and knowledge that plants bring-and encourages us to explore even more.

EAST CENTRAL



NORTHEASTERN STATE



DECEMBER 6, 2025 | 1:00 PM (CT)
DOC WADLEY STADIUM



VS



1ST ANNUAL
FIRST AMERICANS
BOWL



Environmental Health Science
EHAC Accreditation
Anniversary



50TH

Foundations to Frontiers



DEC 6TH | 5:30 P.M.

FOUNDATION HALL | CHICKASAW
BUSINESS & CONFERENCE CENTER

ECU ATHLETICS



HALL OF FAME

CLASS OF 2026







WAYNE WHEAT BRAXTON REEVES JT GASSO DAVID MOORE 1995 ECU SOFTBALL TEAM

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