

Campus Update

Oka Con '25 Brings Water Sustainability Leaders to ECU

The Oka' Institute at East Central University recently hosted Oka Con '25: The John & Kay Hargrave Water Sustainability Conference from October 21–22, bringing together more than 600 participants, including tribal leaders, policymakers, legislators, community members, and students, to discuss Oklahoma's future in water sustainability.

The two-day event began with a warm welcome in ECU's Hallie Brown Ford Fine Arts Center from ECU President Wendell Godwin, Ada City Manager Tommy Eaton, and ECU Foundation President John Hargrave. Their remarks set the stage for keynote addresses from Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby and Oka' Institute Executive Director Duane Smith, who emphasized the importance of collaboration in protecting Oklahoma's water resources.

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Vietnam (is not): 50 brings crowds to campus

Internationally recognized author, Vu Tran, headlined an ECU Honors Program event, titled Vietnam (is not): 50.

The event, funded by a grant from the Ross-Osborn Family Foundation, saw faculty from departments across the ECU campus deliver lectures on the history, culture, music and art of Vietnam.

Thuan Nguyen, founder of the OKC Asian District Cultural Association, also spoke at the event and the 2024 Vietnamese film, Mai, was screened.

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Community remembers moment in ECU history

ECU marked the 20 year anniversary of President Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to the university with a series of presentations, testimonials and displays on who Gorbachev was, why he is still a critical figure in global history and how his visit impacted ECU.



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ECU Tigers overcame the rain for Homecoming 2025!

SEE HOMECOMING, PAGES 4-5



Day one sessions highlighted tribal leadership in conservation, including talks from Kristopher Patton of the Chickasaw Nation and Tye Baker of the Choctaw Nation. Panels such as The Value of Water featured representatives from municipal, tribal, and state agencies, discussing how investment and planning support community resilience.

That evening, attendees enjoyed a legislative reception and an immersive dinner, followed by entertainment from

magician and comedian Mike Bliss.

The second day focused on communities and science. Presentations included updates from the City of Wayne, Chickasaw Nation engagement efforts, and Rural Water District #17 in LeFlore County. Science-focused sessions featured Dr. Todd Halihan of OSU on the Arbuckle Simpson Aquifer and a field experience workshop led by Cole Fagen of Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture.

The conference concluded with a field trip to Byrds

Mill Springs, where attendees observed demonstrations showing how land management directly affect water quality.

This hands-on experience highlighted Ada's vital role as a hub for water research and planning including a prescribed burn demonstration and rainfall simulator.

Beyond convening state and tribal leaders, Oka Con '25 underscored ECU's role as a center for water research and education. Students supported registration, assisted with sessions, and



OKA' CON '25

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gained valuable networking opportunities with professionals in water, policy, and conservation.

Oka' Institute Executive Director Duane Smith closed the event by reminding attendees, "we are not just talking about water—we are building resilient communities, and ECU is leading the way."

Plans are already underway for Oka Con '26, with an even greater emphasis on student engagement and community impact.



VIETNAM

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Thuan Nguyen



Author of Your Origins, Vu Tran

ECU History Chair Dr. Christopher Bean opened the event, to a packed Estep Auditorium, with his lecture, "The Vietnam War: The Vietnamese Perspective," followed by a presentation from Thuan Nguyen, who spoke on the Vietnamese community across Oklahoma.

Other faculty members, such as Dr. Melody Baggech, Dr. Christine Pappas, Mohsin Khan, Dr. Mark Walling, Jenn Peek, Dr. Alex Aguirre, Dr. Nathaniel Berman, Dr. Nick Meyers, Dr. Jennifer McMahon and Dr. Joshua Grasso also spoke or performed at the event over the course of multiple sessions.

Special attractions for the event also included a screening of the 2024 Vietnamese film *Mai*, an appearance from the Vietnamese food truck, Hungry Lotus, and a number of door prizes attendees and students.



GORBACHEV

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Representatives from ECU past and present, as well as community members, came together to celebrate the anniversary of Gorbachev's historic visit to Ada, Oklahoma thanks to the efforts of Dr. Mara Sukholutskaya.

Dr. Christopher Bean and Dr. Houston Mount delivered short lectures on Gorbachev to an audience that was comprised of multiple generations, including students who were born after Gorbachev's 2005 visit.

Dr. Alvin Turner, ECU Dean Emeritus, also spoke at the event, returning to the campus that he retired from in 2006. The official presentation concluded with student, Connor Rakes, delivering his own retrospective as both a History major and member of the ECU Russian Club. Several testimonials were also delivered from community members who had firsthand stories about Gorbachev's original visit.



Annual Rothbaum Lecture



Dr. Andrew Lang, an Associate Professor of History at Mississippi State University, delivered the 2025 Annual Rothbaum Lecture inside the Estep Multimedia Center before a crowd of students, staff, and community members.

His lecture was titled, "Abraham Lincoln's Constitutionalism as a Lesson in Gratitude."

Homecoming 2025 Recap: A Weekend of Spirit, Resilience, and Celebration

Despite unexpected weather changes, East Central University's Homecoming 2025, themed Ringmaster Roary's Big Top Bash, brought together students, alumni, and the Ada community for a memorable weekend of Tiger pride.

Festivities kicked off Friday, October 17, with the Annual Homecoming Golf Tournament at Oak Hills Golf & Country Club and the Alumni Gala Dinner and Dance at the Chickasaw Business and Conference Center. Among those honored at the Gala were the 2025 ECU Rising Stars, Samuel Malchar, Dr. Carlee Henderson Cox and Andrea Sifers. Dr. Louise Young was awarded the honor of ECU Distinguished Alumni. Dr. Young, a former instructor who also pursued national advocacy of gay rights, joining the national board of what would become the Human Rights Campaign, one of the strongest LGBT groups at the time, and garnering national awards.

While Saturday's parade and the Big Top Bash carnival were unfortunately cancelled due to inclement weather, the spirit of Homecoming remained strong. The ECU Tigers took the field against Oklahoma Baptist University, delivering a thrilling overtime victory with a final score of 37–31. During halftime, ECU proudly crowned **Scottlyn Hatton** of Ada as Homecoming Queen and **Izzy Stephens** of Tacoma, Washington as King.

The day concluded with the **Black Alumni Association After Game Mixer**, which drew a lively crowd and was celebrated as one of the weekend's standout events.

Homecoming 2025 proved that even when plans change, the heart of ECU beats strong with tradition, community, and Tiger pride.



ECU Alumni Gala Dinner and Dance



**2025 ECU
Distinguished Alumni
Dr. Louise Young**



**2025 ECU Rising Star
Andrea Sifers**



**2025 ECU Rising Star
Dr. Carlee Cox**



**2025 ECU Rising Star
Samuel Malchar**



**BAA - Dr. Donnie Nero Scholarship
Cuisheena Rollins**



**BAA - Dr. Donnie Nero Scholarship
Corri Williams**



**BAA - O.W. Lee Scholarship
Anjana Shrestha**

Annual Alumni Golf Tournament



Winners of the annual golf Tournament
Vision Bank Team (left to right) - Luke Saunders,
Chris Rhynes, Mark Byers, Dillon Byrd



Jamie Davis named 2025 Outstanding Adan in the Arts



The Ada Arts Council has announced Jamie Davis as the 2025 Outstanding Adan in the Arts.

Davis currently serves as Director of Event Management at ECU, having previously served as Technical Director of the Hallie Brown Ford Fine Arts Center.

He has been an active member of the ECU theatre community since 1976, thanks to the support of his parents, who were both active in theatre and ECU employees themselves.

Employee Spotlight



Penny McCain

Penny McCain currently serves as the Assistant Director of Admissions in the Office of Admissions. She has been a member of the ECU family since 2016.

“Penny is an absolute gem! She has such a great work attitude and dedication to her work that you get to see on display each day with her interactions with other employees and our students. She is one of those special pieces in this puzzle that make ECU such a great place!”



Two faculty members from the College of Health Sciences, Mr. Jose Montalva and Dr. Leah Dudley, participated in the National Safety Workshop for River Field Studies, held at the Rice River Center, Virginia Commonwealth University, in Richmond, Virginia.

This event was an intensive, weeklong workshop designed to enhance safe and effective river field education. Organized by the River Field Studies Network, the program aims to train the next generation of river scholars and stewards through immersive, hands-on learning experiences.



70th Annual Faculty Art Exhibit was featured inside the Pogue Art Gallery



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Upcoming Events

Nov. 3

- Honors Students & Student Support Services Enrollment

Nov. 4

- Graduate Students & Seniors Enrollment

Nov. 5

- Junior Enrollment
- Last Day to Withdraw with "W"
- SCAUG Winter Meeting, 8 a.m.
- Paws and Relax, 11 a.m.
- Soccer vs. Harding U., 3 p.m.

Nov. 6

- Sophomore Enrollment
- SWAB Bone Marrow Drive, 8 a.m.
- Community Read & Author Visit, 10 a.m.
- SGA Town Hall, 5:30 p.m.
- Super Smash Bros. Tournament, 6 p.m.
- Volleyball vs. SWOSU, 6 p.m.

Nov. 7

- Continuing Freshmen Enrollment
- SWAB Bone Marrow Drive, 8 a.m.

Nov. 10

- New Freshmen Enrollment

Nov. 11

- High School Concurrent Enrollment
- ECU Gold Program Veterans Day Ceremony, 2 p.m.

Nov. 12

- Tiger Tank and Limes Lecture, 8 a.m.
- Stickball on the Lawn, 12:30 p.m.
- Paws and Relax, 1 p.m.

Nov. 13

- Volleyball vs. OBU, 6 p.m.
- Stokes Lecture, 6 p.m.
- ACT II Presents Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Musical, 7 p.m.

Significant progress made on the Dan Hays STEM Center throughout the Fall semester



Student Editorial: Finding new communities in a familiar place

By Eli Grasso, ECU Student, Biology Major

East Central University is a deeply special place to me. What I would like to express is not just what makes ECU special as a student, but why I am grateful for being accepted into the ECU community.

I did not start my college career here at ECU. I am originally from Ada, but when I thought about where I wanted to go for college, I was not thrilled about the opportunity of staying here in my hometown for the next four years. So, I ended up at a private college in Iowa, looking for a more adventurous college experience than I had assumed I would find at a place like ECU.

After a semester in Iowa, I came to the conclusion that many young people come to: life does not always work out like you think it will. I was overwhelmed being far from home and surrounded by people who came from prep

schools in the Midwest or Northeast. And, of course, I would have had to take out an intimidating amount in loans to stay for another semester. So, when it came time to make a change and transfer somewhere else, there was really only one place to come back to.

In the Spring of 2023, I enrolled in classes here at ECU. As soon as I came on campus - a place I was familiar with, having grown up here - I felt relieved, and even more importantly, welcomed. Even though I had treated the idea of going to college less than a mile from where I went to high school as a "downer," and even though I had originally walked away from being accepted to ECU, I was welcomed back. I was a part of the Honors program from that Spring semester onwards, and I met so many great people that way. And even though I had not semester, I was still treated

as part of the group.

It is hard to believe that my first semester here was five semesters ago. Time has passed very quickly, and looking back on everything I have been able to do, I am immensely grateful for having been accepted into the ECU community. I have been able to take amazing classes, meet great people who will be lifelong friends, participate in research both in the lab and in literature, have the opportunity to travel to UCLA to talk about research work, and fly to Washington, D.C. with the Russian Club to find cultural connections. And despite it all, I have precisely zero dollars of college debt.

More than any achievements or any milestones, I have been able to be a part of a big and amazing community.

I have worked with great professors like Dr. April Nesbit in Biology, Dr. Ken Hada in English, Dr. Mara Sukholutskaia in Languages, and Dr. Steve Benton in the Honors Program.

I have met great friends like Zachariah Hobia (From whom you have heard already!), and I have been a part of great organizations like the Honors Program, Russian Club, Tri-Beta (the Biology Club), and the Creative Writing Club.

I would not trade away the friendships and collaborations I have made here for anything. I am grateful for ECU because not only was I accepted here from the very start, but I was able to find everything - and everyone - I needed to thrive.

