

Campus Update



From left to right; Charlie Rogers, Taylen Middendorf, Abigail Welt, Alexis King, Alyssa Rogers and Seth Spady.

2026 George Nigh Award finalists announced

ADA, Okla. – Six graduating seniors at East Central University have been selected as finalists for the George Nigh Award.

The 2026 finalists are Alexis King, Taylen Middendorf Miller, Alyssa Rogers, Charlie Rogers, Seth Spady and Abigail Welt. All finalists are members of the ECU Honors Program.

SEE NIGH, PAGE 3

ECU's Scissortail Creative Writing Festival sets record attendance



SEE SCISSORTAIL PAGE 5

Native American sorority celebrates first semester at East Central University

East Central University's inaugural chapter of the Gamma Delta Pi sorority is celebrating its first spring semester with a series of successes, making history for First American women at ECU and establishing a new community of sisterhood on campus.

SEE SORORITY, PAGE 4

ECU's Spring 2026 Commencement for all students will be held Friday, May 15, at 7 p.m. at Koi Ishto Stadium.

Law Day 2026 brings distinguished guests to campus



Pontotoc County Assistant District Attorney Krystina Phillips (left) was selected as this year's Law Day event speaker.

Phillips is the principal deputy to District Attorney Erik Johnson. She joined the DA's office as the Chief of the Civil Division in 2023 and was elevated to her current position in 2025.

In addition, Chief Justice Cheri Bellefeuille-Gordon (right), a proud member of the Chickasaw Nation, received the inaugural ECU Legal Studies Distinguished Alumni Award. Bellefeuille-Gordon is the Chief Justice of the Chickasaw Nation Supreme Court, where she has served since 2002.

ECU represented at Higher Education and Oklahoma's Promise Day



Students and personnel from Oklahoma's state system institutions gathered at the State Capitol to demonstrate the value and importance of higher education in the state and celebrate the states ongoing support of the Oklahoma's Promise program.

ECU President Wendell Godwin was in attendance, alongside students from the President's Leadership Class and the Department of Politics, Law and Society. ECU Chief of Staff Preston Draper, Dr. Christine Pappas, and more were also in attendance.

TSET tour of the Dan Hays STEM Center, construction progressing on schedule



NIGH

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The George Nigh Award goes to the top graduating senior from ECU annually and is named in honor of the former governor of Oklahoma and ECU alumnus. In addition to his time as governor, Nigh served multiple terms in the Oklahoma House of Representatives and as lieutenant governor.

Alexus King will graduate with University Honors and receive her B.A. in Biology-Health Sciences with a minor in Services to the

Deaf while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Taylen Middendorf Miller graduated with Honors and received her B.A. in English Education while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Alyssa Rogers will graduate with University Honors and receive her B.A. in Education, while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Charlie Rogers will graduate

with University Honors and receive a B.A. in Biology with a minor in Chemistry, while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Seth Spady will graduate with University Honors and receive his B.A. in Business Administration with a focus in Entrepreneurship and a Certificate in Banking and Finance while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Abigail Welt will graduate with University Honors and receive her B.A. in Biology with a concentration in Health Sciences and a minor in Chemistry, while maintaining a 3.9 GPA.

The late Julian Rothbaum, a Tulsa oilman, banker, and state regent for higher education, established an endowment through the ECU Foundation to fund the Award. Each year, top ECU seniors apply and undergo a rigorous application and interview process.



Pontotoc County Board of Health members Preston Draper and Jeff Gibson observed OKWearsBlueDay alongside ECU President Wendell Godwin and other members of ECU's staff and faculty. The day is observed annually during Child Abuse Prevention Month.



New RUSO Regent appointed

Dr. Michael L. Peck of Enid appointed as Regent for the Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO) by Governor Kevin Stitt. Pending Senate confirmation, Dr. Peck will assume his new position June 11, 2026.

SORORITY

From Page 1



From left to right; Gabrielle Nucosee, Adelyn Hernandez, Olivia Terry, Mena Cedartree and Kala Furr.

Gamma Delta Pi is a national sorority for First American women and the first of its kind at ECU. The university chapter was established Oct. 23, 2025, when its founding members were formally initiated.

The idea to bring a chapter to ECU came from freshman Gabrielle Nucosee, whose sister, Nicole Schultz, was already a member of the University of Oklahoma chapter. Schultz contacted the Gamma Delta Pi Governance Board to begin the process.

Destany Schafer-Morgan, a professor in ECU’s Department of Professional Programs in Human Services, was approached to serve

as the chapter’s faculty adviser. Already serving as adviser for ECU’s Native American Student Association, Schafer-Morgan immediately took on the role.

The founding five members each hold distinct roles. Olivia Terry, a Chickasaw citizen with Seminole and Creek ancestry, serves as Clan Mother, the equivalent of chapter president. Mena Cedartree, of Seminole and Creek descent, is White Council, or vice president. Kala Furr, a Chickasaw citizen, serves as Black Council, handling secretary duties and social media. Adelyn Hernandez, a Chickasaw citizen, is Yellow Council, serving as treasurer and leading

recruitment efforts. Nucosee, a Chickasaw citizen with Oklahoma Choctaw, Mississippi Choctaw and Seminole ancestry, is Red Council, coordinating cultural events and bonding activities.

New inductees include Bethany Baggerly, Zaylee Skidmore-Beaney, Lashawna Butts, Taloa Lewis, Elizabeth Marshall and Liz Vandegrift.

The spring semester marked many milestones for the Ada chapter. In February, members organized their first event, the Hearts & Heroes Family Dance, an inclusive Valentine’s celebration for families and community members.

They also participated in ECU’s first Greek Week of the semester, joining daily campus activities alongside other sororities and fraternities. Additionally, Gamma Delta Pi members assisted with ECU’s Native American Student Association Princess Pageant for 2026–27, helping organize and staff the event. Three members competed as contestants, with Nucosee ultimately crowned Miss Native American ECU.

Pi Kappa Tau Reunion

A Reunion Banquet took place inside the ECU Foundation Hall to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the foundation of ECU’s chapter of the Phi Kappa Tau fraternity.



Scissortail

From Page 1



Joseph Fasano



Traci Brimhall



Chera Hammons



Jayde Landreth

The 21st Annual Scissortail Creative Writing Festival at East Central University brought together more than 60 writers and poets from across several states for a three-day event that drew record crowds and strong community engagement. The festival opened April 2 with remarks from founder Dr. Ken Hada and featured a full schedule of readings, including a headline appearance by Joseph Fasano, who read to a capacity crowd and praised the welcoming Oklahoma literary community.

The second day maintained that momentum with multiple sessions and the Scissortail Undergraduate Writing Contest, which highlighted emerging writers from six universities. ECU student Jayde Landreth earned third place and a \$100 prize for her poetry, marking

a meaningful achievement and drawing strong audience support during her reading. The day also featured a reading by Kansas Poet Laureate Traci Brimhall, followed by an open-mic event that allowed students to share their work alongside established authors.

The festival concluded April 4 with more readings from notable writers, including Rilla Askew and Phillip Carroll Morgan, and a featured session by Chera Hammons Miller. Returning to the festival after a decade, Miller shared selections from past and forthcoming work, creating a sense of reunion among longtime attendees. The event closed with continued enthusiasm for the festival's future, with the next installment scheduled for April 2027.



Sukholutskaya receives excellence in teaching award

Dr. Mara Sukholutskaya, received the Lowell Dunham Award from the Oklahomans for Foreign Language Teachers Association (OFLTA).

Sukholutskaya has served as ECU's Director of Global Education for 16 years and has been a member of ECU faculty since 1991, teaching a myriad of foreign language and literature courses in that time.

She has been a Board member of OFLTA for over two decades and is also President for Oklahoma Council of Teachers of Russian (OCTR).

The Lowell Dunham Award recognizes outstanding teachers in the field of foreign language education. The awardee is selected by the OFLTA Board upon the recommendation of an independent award committee.

Art, Design, Media & Communication represented at annual Hedgehog and Fox Lecture



The 2026 lecture was presented by Sarah Engel and Susan Ingram, both from the department of Art, Design, Media & Communication.

The lecture comes from Engel and Ingram’s ongoing multimedia research project, *Ada Rewind • Pause • Fast Forward*, which documents more than a century of local change through re-photography, mapping, and community history. The talk highlights the wartime experiences of Ada’s Jewish community, shifts in local commerce, the evolving roles of women on the home front, and the lives of families with loved ones serving overseas.

Drawing from archival materials, historical imagery,



and firsthand accounts, Engel and Ingram offer a rich and accessible perspective on how global events resonated throughout Pontotoc County.

The lecture is named for former ECU Provost Duane C. Anderson and provides a campus-wide forum on exemplary faculty research and other academic experiences. Anderson established the lecture series during his time at ECU and originally named it for an essay by Isaiah Berlin that he read in graduate school. The essay’s title, “The Hedgehog and The Fox,” was pulled from a line in the work of Greek poet Archilochus.

Winners announced for Employee 28-Day Wellness Challenges

Chair of the Department of Knesiology, Nick Stowers, was named winner of the February challenge - 30 minutes of movement every day.

Professor for the Department of Physical Sciences, Charles Crittell, was named winner of the March challenge - drinking 64 ounces of water daily.

Assistant Professor for the Department of Education, Mark Felts, was named winner of the April challenge - reduce screen time and improve mental health (start a hobby, spend time outside, etc.).



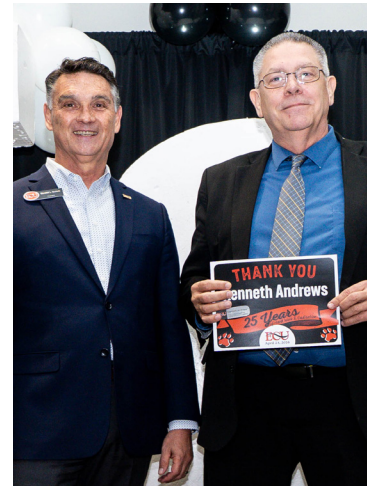
Hunter Allen, an ECU student and member of the McNair Scholars Program, was accepted to present at the New England Science

Symposium at Harvard Medical School in Boston.

The Symposium, established in 2002, provides a forum for postdoctoral fellows; medical, dental and graduate students; post-baccalaureates; college and community college students from across the United States to share their biomedical and health-related research activities through oral or poster presentations, engage in discussions related to career development in the sciences, exchange ideas, and expand their professional networks.

Employee Recognition Banquet





McNair students accepted to national conference

Three students from the McNair Scholars Program were accepted to present at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in Richmond, Virginia.

Students participating in the event included Connor Rakes, Byron Ross and Jayde Landreth (right).



The All Majors Spring Career Fair, organized by the ECU Career Center, saw heavy traffic this April with employers from across the state in attendance.

Campus converges for ECU Research Day/Honors Showcase



ECU Research Day 2026: Patterns & Process was held inside the Chickasaw Business & Conference Center.

Sponsored by the ECU McNair Scholars Program, The NASNTI REACHE Program and the ECU Honors Program, the event allowed students from the McNairs and Honors Programs to present their research to the public during a Poster Session and later during an Honors Showcase.

Upcoming Events

- May 4
- Oklahoma Scholastic Esports: Scissortail HS State, 10 a.m.
 - PAWS for Thought, 11 a.m.
 - Coffee & Cram, 5 p.m.
 - Roary's Athletic Awards Banquet, 6 p.m.

- May 5
- Honors Program Banquet, 6 p.m.

- May 6
- Department of History Scholarship Awards Presentation, 6 p.m.

- May 7
- Intention Bracelets and T-Shirt Giveaway, 1 p.m.
 - Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Open Tournament, 5 p.m.
 - Stonecipher School of Business Awards Banquet, 6 p.m.

- May 8
- Stickball on the Lawn, 12:30 p.m.

- May 9
- Tiger Enrollment Day, 9 a.m.

- May 11
- Retiree Brunch, 10 a.m.

- May 12
- Becoming a Better Local Advocate, 6 p.m.

- May 14
- Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Open Tournament, 5 p.m.
 - Hooding Ceremony for EdD Graduates, 6 p.m.

- May 15
- Pi Sigma Alpha Induction and WRPM Hooding, 12 p.m.
 - Honors Graduation, 4:30 p.m.
 - Spring Commencement, 7 p.m.



2026 Entrepreneur's Cup

Oklahoma's next generation of entrepreneurs were recognized at the 2026 Entrepreneur's Cup Awards Dinner.

ECU Results included:

Seth Spady placed second in the Small Business Division with In"Vase"ive Forestry, Katie Crabtree placed third in the Small Business Division with Heirloom Fashion House and Aubrey Junk & Milana Khaikhan were named a finalist in the Small Business Division with JK Shop.

Thanks to the generous support of Love's Travel Stops, ECU students took home a combined total of \$28,000.

School of Business networking event



The Harland C. Stonecipher School of Business Scholarship event took place inside the ECU Foundation Hall. The event allowed scholarship awardees from the department to network with donors, alumni and faculty.

Careers in Psychology Faculty Panel

Sponsored by the ECU Psi Chi Honors Society, the event was formatted as a discussion of career paths from faculty members in the Department of Psychology for students interested in a career in psychology.

Water Fest returns to ECU!

Water Fest is an annual event hosted by the EPA lab in conjunction with the Oka Institute.

Roughly 15 educational and activity stations were set up across Centennial Plaza. An estimated 400-500 local school children attend the event each year alongside members of the ECU community interested in an experience that is both educational and interactive.



Alpha Chi Induction



The Alpha Chi National Honor Society Oklahoma Gamma Chapter held its Spring 2026 induction ceremony at the end of April with ECU alumna, Delanie Seals, serving as keynote speaker for the event.

'Asian Student Association Night' celebration



Miss Native American ECU Gabrielle Nucosee represented ECU and NASA at the Native American Students Association of UTA 30th Annual Powwow in Texas. Her first appearance since her crowning.

Nursing Pinning Ceremony

The ECU School of Nursing recognized 52 nursing students during the Spring semester's pinning ceremony, celebrating the students' achievements and their transition into the nursing profession.

The nursing pin is a symbol of unity, representing the hardest years of schooling followed by a commitment to spend one's life providing holistic, compassionate care.

Dobro Slovo Induction

The Dobro Slovo National Honor Society induction ceremony took place the final week of April with four current ECU students and one alumnus being inducted.

Inductees Jesse Barker, Rafael Charqueno, Madison Hawkins, John Kelso and Jonathan Willett each recited prominent Russian poems in the Russian language as part of the ceremony.



ECU's Showtime brings back the 60's in style!



ECU Pride presented Frite Nite Drag Show inside Ataloo Theatre



Students' work was on display in the Pogue Art Gallery for the annual Student Art Exhibit with a reception that took place in early April.

Performing Arts closes out spring semester strong



ECU Chorale Concert at First Presbyterian Church



ECU Chamber Ensemble inside Ataloo Theatre



ECU Band Concert inside Ataloo Theatre



ECU Percussion Ensemble inside Ataloo Theatre



OK3 comes to ECU!

OK3 premiered on Season 25 of NBC's The Voice, where they captivated audiences nationwide, earning them a coveted four-chair turn from music icons Reba McEntire, Dan + Shay, John Legend, and Chance the Rapper . Coached by John Legend, OK3 honed their craft and wowed audiences

with their performances on the show. OK3 is a dynamic trio whose roots in Oklahoma City's vibrant music scene inspired their name and sound. Kenna, Sierra and Courtney brought an engaged and excited crowd to ECU's Ataloo Theatre in April.



Greek Week Chariot Race

Greek organizations engage in Greek Week competitions



Greek Week Lip Sync Battle



Greek Week Awards

Campus organizations Chi Omega, Zeta Tau Alpha, Gamma Delta Pi, Phi Kappa Tau and Pi Kappa Alpha all participated in this years Greek Week competitions, with Zeta Tau Alpha being named the 2026 Greek Week overall winners.

In addition to the highly competitive contests that took place across campus, ECU's Greek community participated in a hygiene drive, where a variety of items were collected and donated to Mama T's Transitional Living Community in Ada. This year, students collected an unprecedented 4, 795 items for donation.



From Mockup to Reality

The transformational renovation of the Elvan George locker room was completed in April. A grand opening took place to wrap up the month, allowing athletes, alumni, donors and other members of the ECU community the opportunity to see the new facilities together for the first time.

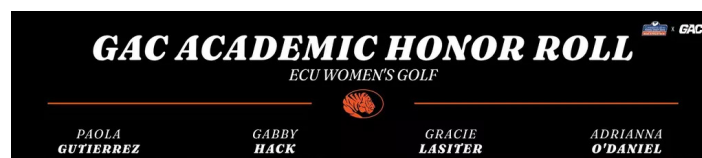


ECU makes history with first-ever night games at Tiger Softball Field

The Tigers debuted the new lights in style, earning a doubleheader sweep over Arlington Baptist. The addition of lights immediately elevated the game-day atmosphere and created a memorable experience for players, coaches, and fans.

The program first competed at the collegiate level in 1995, and earlier this year that inaugural team was inducted into the ECU Athletics Hall of Fame. Adding to the significance of the evening, inaugural head coach Ron Miller threw out the ceremonial first pitch when the lights were officially turned on.

Women's Golf earns spots on GAC Academic Honor Roll



The Great American Conference announced its annual athletic and academic honors recently, with ECU women's golf placing four student-athletes on the GAC Academic Honor Roll.

Representing the Tigers were Paola Gutierrez, Gabby Hack, Gracie Lasiter, and Adrianna O'Daniel, each earning the distinction for the first time in the program's return season.



ECU golf returns to GAC Championship

In their first season back after being reinstated, ECU Women's Golf returned to the Great American Conference Championships. The first time since 2016.



ECU Tiger football spotted helping keep Main Street clean



ECU Tiger Esports held the distinct honor of hosting the Spring 2026 Great American Conference Championship in April. The university was selected as the location for the event due to the ECU Tiger Esports team placing first in the League of Legends competition for the Fall 2025 championship.



ECU men and women's track & field teams wrapped up its regular season with a solid showing at the Great American Conference Championships.

In the men's division, Donald Kipsang led the Tigers with a runner-up finish in the 800 meters and third-place efforts in both the 1,500 and 5,000, while Josh Horne paced the sprint group with a third-place finish in the 200 meters and a fifth-place showing in the 100.

The distance squad added depth with Bhekizulu Khumalo and Emmanuel Kemboi each placing seventh in their respective events, and Brian Mitei adding an eighth-place finish in the 800. In the field events, Gustin Snodgrass scored in both the javelin and high jump with seventh-place finishes.

In the women's division, Mercy Kibiwott led the Tigers with a fourth-place finish in the 10,000 meters, while Jazmine White and Zoe Grooms seventh- and eighth.

Haley Ellison paced the sprint group in the 100 and 200 meters, with additional contributions from Jordan Blades and White, while Destiny Jennings, Chloe Tatum, and Isabel Gabbert competed in the 400-meter preliminaries and Stephanie Ojo raced in the middle-distance events. The Tigers also recorded a ninth-place finish in the 4x400-meter relay.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE



Class
of 2026
SPRING COMMENCEMENT

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

KOI ISHTO FOOTBALL STADIUM

