

Campus Update

ECU receives unprecedented \$17M gift

ADA, Okla. – In early December, philanthropist MacKenzie Scott and the philanthropic organization, Yield Giving, gifted ECU a \$17 million donation.

The gift comes at a pivotal time for ECU as construction continues on the new state-of-the-art Dan Hays STEM Center/School of Nursing and the university advances its ECU Forward Capital Campaign.

SEE GIFT, PAGE 2



ECU leads Regional University enrollment growth

A preliminary Fall 2025 enrollment report from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) shows ECU leading Oklahoma's regional universities in enrollment growth. The university was recognized by OSRHE for a 9.3% increase in enrollment for the Fall 2025 semester, outpacing the statewide regional university growth rate of 1.2%.

ECU's student body continues to grow with students from 26 countries and 32 states attending. More than 80% of ECU students come from Oklahoma, while more than 13% identify as Native American, reflecting the University's longstanding relationships with tribal nations across the region.

State of Education in Oklahoma

ECU kicked off January 2026 by hosting a State of Education in Oklahoma event on campus.

Representatives from ECU, the Pontotoc Technology Center and Ada City Schools, among others, attended the event to discuss Oklahoma's current state of education.

Attendees were also listened to a panel of Oklahoma legislatures including Oklahoma Rep. Ronny Johns and Senators Adam Pugh and Jonathan Wingard.



2025 Fall Commencement fills Kerr Activities Center

SEE COMMENCEMENT, PAGE 4

Environmental Health Science celebrates 50 years

The Environmental Health Science Program at ECU celebrated 50 years of accreditation in December. The EHS program is the only Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health Science offered in Oklahoma—and has been continuously accredited by the National Environmental Health Science and Protection Accreditation Council (NEHSPAC) since its founding in 1970.



GIFT

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Discussing how this unexpected gift will be used, ECU President Wendell Godwin said, “Our leadership team will be very strategic and intentional about how the investment will be utilized across campus. We launched our new strategic plan this year and have already identified a number of areas for improvement across campus. We are deeply grateful that Yield Giving chose to invest in ECU. Their belief in our mission and the leadership team gives us great momentum moving forward. As we move through the process, some of the funds will be used immediately to enhance critical campus infrastructure, while additional funds will be endowed to support the University’s mission and long-term vitality for generations to come.”

Godwin further stated, “ECU is proud to be ranked as one of the best values in higher education in Oklahoma and to have led the state’s four-year universities with a 9.3% enrollment increase this semester. We are a key workforce driver for Oklahoma. In 2024 alone, ECU generated more than \$231 million in economic output for the state, and 82.4% of our graduates are working in Oklahoma five years after graduation.”

Yield Giving is a transformative philanthropic initiative founded by Scott and dedicated to accelerating equity and opportunity by directing substantial, unrestricted funding to high-impact organizations across the United States and beyond.



ECU ranked 2026 Best Value College in Oklahoma

ECU has been recognized as a leading university in Oklahoma by Research.com. ECU was ranked the No. 1 Best Value College and the No. 4 Most Affordable College in the state for 2026 by the website. For more information, visit ecok.edu.

Online Master’s in Library Media ranked among best in Oklahoma

ECU’s online Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Library Media has been recognized by Mastersinlibraryscience.org as one of the top-ranked programs of its kind in Oklahoma. The fully online program is designed for working educators seeking school library media specialist certification.

ECU Tiger Esports concluded the Fall 2025 semester with their League of Legends varsity team participating in the fall's Great American Conference (GAC), winning Tiger Esports first-ever GAC championship.

Additionally, the Super Smash Bros. team competed in the National Esports Collegiate Conference (NECC) Division 5 Championship against Sonoma State University, securing a second major win for Tiger Esports this fall and the first title achieved by the Super Smash Bros. team.



ECU Honors Showcase



Staff & Faculty Holiday Party



ECU Honors Program Graduation Ceremony

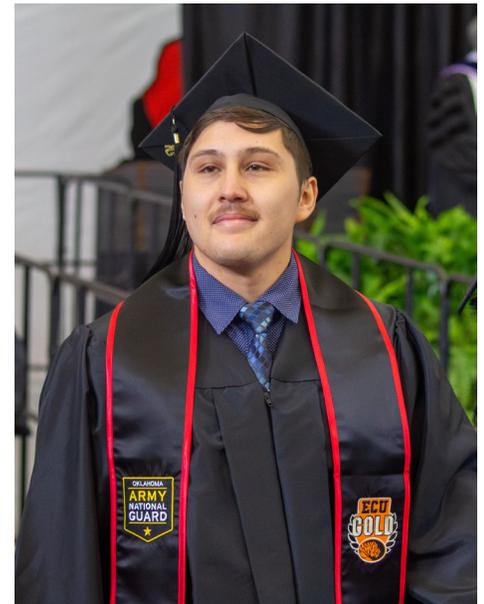


ECU Fall 2025 Commencement

Celebrating a new class of graduates



ECU's Fall 2025 Commencement took place Dec. 13 with Chickasaw Nation Lt. Governor Chris Anoatubby speaking to the 331 graduates and their families alongside ECU faculty and staff.



For Spring 2025 commencement photos, visit ecutigerpics.pixieset.com/fall2025commencement

ECU faculty presented Ada Rewind: The War Years

Professors Sarah Engel and Susan Ingram from the Art + Design : Media + Communication department at ECU led a presentation hosted by the Ada Public Library titled Ada Rewind: The War Years – Ada’s Experience of World War II. The public talk examined how World War II shaped life in Ada and surrounding communities. Engel and Ingram’s ongoing multimedia research project, Ada Rewind • Pause • Fast Forward, documents more than a century of local change through re-photography, mapping, and community history.

ECU Band Concert and Chamber Ensemble closed out the Fall



Nathan Chronister

Brad Henry scholar selected

ECU Accounting major and Pauls Valley native, Nathan Chronister, has been selected as the 2026 Brad Henry International Scholar.

Chronister traveled to Wales, United Kingdom in mid-January to attend Swansea University for the spring semester, paid for by the Brad Henry International Scholarship.

Upcoming Events

- Feb. 3
- SGA Meeting, 6 p.m.
- Feb. 4
- Paws & Relax, 4 p.m.
- Feb. 5
- East Central Regional Science Fair, 9 a.m.
- Dr. Bill Osborne Book Talk, 3 p.m.
- Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Open Tournament, 5 p.m.
- Fancy and Fancy Free Prom, 6 p.m.
- Feb. 6
- Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus, The Musical, 5:30 p.m.
- Feb. 10
- Retiree Brunch, 10 a.m.
- Baseball vs. Rogers State, 2 p.m.
- Feb. 11
- Stickball on the Lawn, 12:30 p.m.
- Paws & Relax, 5:15 p.m.
- Feb. 12
- Blind Date with a Book
- Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Open Tournament, 5 p.m.
- Townhall with Okla. Rep. Cyndi Munson, 6 p.m.
- Feb. 13
- Baseball vs. HSU, 2 p.m.
- Feb. 14
- Baseball vs. HSU, 12 p.m.

ECU Athletics Hall of Fame ceremony brings some of ECU’s best back to campus

Honorees for the 2026 ECU Athletics Hall of Fame included Class of 1973 football student-athlete Wayne Wheat, Class of 2017 men’s basketball student-athlete Braxton Reeves, Class of 2011 distinguished baseball alumnus JT Gasso, and 2016 football student-athlete David Moore. Also welcomed into the ECU Athletics Hall of Fame was the team that laid the foundation for their program’s success, the inaugural ECU Softball team from 1995.

First snow of 2026 touches down across campus



Rising Through the Struggle: My Journey Back to College

By Nacole Brown, ECU Student

Going back to college in my 40s has been one of the hardest, rawest, and most transformative decisions of my life. Some days I feel strong, focused, and unstoppable. Other days I feel like the weight of school, life, motherhood, and responsibilities might crush me. Being a Chickasaw woman, a single mother, and a full-time student with an entire lifetime lived before ever stepping back into a classroom — my journey is anything but simple. But it's mine, and every messy, beautiful, painful part of it matters.

I'm not the traditional college student. I'm a mother of two — Bryshá and Skylar — juggling schoolwork with bills, parenting, and the realities of life. I've lived in Ada, spent seven years in Las Vegas, worked multiple jobs, earned certifications, opened my own body-sculpting business, and built a life rooted in resilience. Coming back to school wasn't about fitting in; it was about finishing something that has been calling my name for years. It was about proving to myself, to my kids, and to my community that it's never too late to rise.

The Good: When Strength Speaks Louder Than Fear

On the good days, I walk into class with confidence. My life experience is

something textbooks can't teach. I know how to be patient, how to handle pressure, and how to keep going even when life hits hard. Being part of the Chickasaw Nation's School-to-Work program gives me the balance I need — income, structure, support, and purpose. Working under Dr. Judy Parker has helped me see how my future fits into something bigger, especially within health policy and leadership.

And then there are the moments that mean the most — when my kids tell me they're proud of me. When they see me studying, they see discipline. When they see me exhausted but still pushing forward, they learn courage. My education isn't only for me. It's for them. For my community. For the generations behind me. For the legacy I am building.

The Bad: The Quiet Battles Nobody Sees

Let me be honest — this semester has tested me in ways I never saw coming. I'm now in the last two weeks of the semester, the time when everything piles up at once. Assignments, exams, responsibilities, life stress — all crashing down together. And mentally? It gets heavy.

But nothing — absolutely

nothing — has pushed me the way my accounting class with Dani has.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, I walk into that room with the same prayer: "Lord, please let me understand today."

And some days, I do. Some days the numbers make sense. But other days I feel like I'm drowning in journal entries, formulas, and financial concepts that refuse to stick. I've put in the blood, sweat, and tears — staying after class, practicing, joining study groups, watching videos, rewriting notes — doing everything I can.

I have classmates my age, but the difference is many of them work in financial fields. Money is their everyday language. For me, every chapter is a war. And when test day comes, it's like my brain freezes. Everything I studied disappears. I fail, even when I gave it everything I had.

Those moments hit the hardest.

They make me feel small in a room full of young adults who pick things up fast. They make me question myself:

"Am I too old for this?" "Why can't I get it like everyone else?" "Am I really going to make it through this?"

Some days I'm an overachiever with fire in my spirit. Other days I want to tuck my tail and run.

The Ugly: The Moments That Test My Soul

There are nights I cry out of pure frustration. Times I feel guilty for not understanding fast enough. Mornings where I wake up already exhausted. Days where I'm holding everything together by a thin thread — school, home, finances, parenting, responsibilities, expectations.



The ugly part is the silence. The part no one sees. The mental breakdowns. The doubts. The fear of failing. The pressure of trying to succeed while carrying a whole life on my shoulders.

But even in all of that... I'm still here.

A Dream That Belonged to the Younger Me

When I was younger, I dreamed of going to Langston University. So many of my friends and family went there, and the experience was powerful — cultural, historical, grounding. Growing up as a Black and Native woman, I was raised mostly within my Black community, and that shaped me deeply. But

there was so much history I never learned. History that doesn't get taught in regular classrooms. History that lives inside an HBCU like Langston.

I used to wonder why that wasn't my path. Why I didn't get to feel that cultural connection, that pride, that community.

But that dream belonged to a younger version of me.

Now, as a proud ECU Tiger, I understand something deeper:

Langston shaped those before me. ECU is shaping me.

ECU has given me opportunities, support, and

lessons I never saw coming. I've met people who inspire me. Professors who challenge me. Experiences that have stretched me and strengthened me in ways I didn't expect. I now know I'm exactly where I'm meant to be.

And Still — I Rise

Even through the tears, the fear, the frustration, the late nights, and the failed tests — I rise.

Because quitting would hurt more than trying. Because I've survived harder things than any accounting exam. Because my kids are watching. Because my community is cheering for me. Because I deserve this degree — even if I have to

crawl to get it.

This journey is not pretty. It's not easy. It's not simple.

But it is powerful.

Being in college in my 40s is a battlefield of responsibility, burnout, hope, and grit. Some days I feel strong. Some days I feel weak. But through it all, I've realized:

Age is not a weakness. Struggle is not failure. And progress is still progress — even when it hurts.

My journey may not be perfect, but it is mine. And no matter how hard it gets...

I'm not stopping. Not now. Not ever.

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE
TIGER
Tangles

\$5,000
in cash prizes awarded to ECU students

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Show starts @ 6:00 P.M. Doors open @ 5:30 P.M.

FEBRUARY 27, 2026
 Hallie Brown Ford Fine Arts Center | Ataloo Theatre

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