SEARCH PROFILE:

PRESIDENT



Oklahoma City University

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE OPPORTUNITY 3

OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY 4

OKLAHOMA CITY 8

THE PRESIDENT 9

HOW TO APPLY 11



THE OPPORTUNITY

Oklahoma City University (OCU)—a private, nonprofit university located in the historic Uptown 23rd District of Oklahoma City, affiliated with The United Methodist Church—invites inquiries, nominations, and applications in the search for its next President. The university offers a wide variety of degrees in the liberal arts, fine arts, sciences, healthcare, performing arts, and business and is consistently ranked as one of the top universities in the country by Niche and is listed in Forbes' "100 Best College Buys."

The university seeks a collaborative, engaging, and innovative leader with a commitment to building robust relationships within and beyond the university community. OCU's next President will step into an institution that has made recent critical decisions that have positioned the campus for future financial stability and enrollment success, as well as leveraged its committed alumni and external partners to achieve record fundraising over the past five years. OCU is embedded in a dynamic urban environment and will play a key, visible role in the 2028 Olympics, an opportunity the next President is expected to leverage. The next President is expected to begin July 1, 2027.



OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY

Oklahoma City University is a national leader in education for performing arts, healthcare, business, science, and leadership. It strives for excellence while celebrating individuality that has been leading students to their creative edge for nearly 125 years. OCU is a diverse community of academic achievers, big thinkers, independent spirits, and dedicated artists. At OCU, students from across the globe follow their passions and excel in the arts and sciences, religion, business, law, healthcare, and the performing arts. Since its founding, the connection to the Oklahoma City region, its people, and The United Methodist Church has been a constant—even as the student population and their educational needs have changed since 1904.

Every era since its founding has kept the values of the institution at the core of its education for each generation of students. The Great Plan developed in the early 1950s emphasized the importance of broad learning for everyone, instead of technical training: that Plan was designed to elevate the academic discourse and thereby deepen the quality of education offered to all students. In the decades that followed, with enrollment increasing, this approach was successful not only in offering a distinctive education but in promoting the value of liberal education: the Great Plan inspired positive changes across campus and a move toward interdisciplinary approaches at all levels. Departments worked together to create courses that approached lofty topics from a variety of perspectives and taught students to look at life in a new way.

As a result of the commitments of leaders, students, faculty, staff, and donors, this private, nonprofit university located on 104 park-like acres in the heart of the historic Uptown 23rd District of Oklahoma City is now a thriving community where students excel.

The university continues to build on its reputation for academic success: OCU achieved its first institutional accreditation in 1951, with the most recent reaffirmation from the Higher Learning Commission in 2022. Specialized accreditation for many programs attests to the strengths and reputation of the distinctive academic programs. OCU now offers more than 70 undergraduate majors and 20 graduate degrees, including the Juris Doctor, Master of Business Administration, Master of Fine Arts, Master of Science, and Doctor of Nursing Practice, and has seen significant growth in online and graduate enrollment since 2021.

According to national rankings, Oklahoma City University continues to stake its claim as one of the top private, not-for-profit universities in the nation. Niche listed OCU among the top 10% of colleges in these categories: Best Small Colleges in America, Best Christian Colleges in America (#27), Best Colleges for Performing Arts (#30), and Best Colleges for Music in America (#31). OCU also ranks among the top 20% nationally in these categories: Top Private Universities, Colleges with the Best Academics, Best Colleges for Nursing, Best Colleges for History, and Best Colleges for Kinesiology and Physical Therapy.

MISSION

Inspired by a culture of creativity, Oklahoma City University fosters an immersive, personalized experience that welcomes and prepares students to pursue boundless opportunities.

VALUES

Create: Be innovative and enterprising
Excel: Be extraordinary
Lead: Empower yourself and others
Respect: Value each other
Serve: Pursue generational impact
Collaborate: Cultivate community

VISION

Oklahoma City University will be an innovative academic institution with local impact and global reach and reputation. By providing a student-focused learning environment and an inclusive, values-centered culture that engages the community and the world, Oklahoma City University will be a university of choice for talented and high-potential students, faculty, and staff.

OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY (CONTINUED)

OCU FAST FACTS (FALL 2026)

Total enrollment:

2,795 (1,526 undergraduate; 830 graduate; 439 law)

Known race/ethnicity of student body:

55% White; 14% Hispanic; 7% International; 9% Multiple Race; 8% Black or African American; 4% Asian; 3% American Indian or Alaska Native; <1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

Gender of undergraduate student population:

67% female, 33% male

Pell-eligible students:

24%

Origin of student population:

57% from Oklahoma, 36% from other U.S. states,
7% from more than 40 other countries

Undergraduate admissions acceptance rate:

~71% (ACT range 20–27)

Student-faculty ratio:

11:1

Average class size:

17

First-year retention:

84%

Six-year graduation rate:

65%

Number of faculty:

326 (88 full-time, tenured or tenure-track; 103 full-time, non-tenure-track; approximately 135 adjunct)

Number of athletic teams:

17 (Sooner Athletic Conference, NAIA)

OCU POINTS OF PRIDE

- Connections with local, state, and federal government.
- Seventy-eight percent of faculty members hold the highest degrees in their fields. Professors, not graduate assistants, teach all classes.
- The Tribal Sovereignty Institute was established to build on the long-standing relationships of the OCU School of Law with tribal communities and OCU's scholarship on sovereignty and American Indian law. Building on the history of the specialized center, first established in 1988, the newly renamed Tribal Sovereignty Institute seeks to pursue sovereignty initiatives beyond the legal realm through cultural preservation, language revitalization, and economic development.
- Overseen by the Division of Student Affairs, more than 60 student organizations encourage students to connect with others and develop their interests, explore new perspectives, and prepare for their careers. They include organizations focused on academic excellence, Greek life, performing arts, student government, multicultural student associations, community service, and political and religious interests.
- OCU's Ann Lacy School of American Dance and Entertainment is consistently rated among the top U.S. destinations for dance programs on industry lists such as Backstage, DanceUSA.org, and College Magazine. More than 60 OCU dancers have gone on to become Rockettes or Radio City song and dance ensemble members, and more than 100 OCU graduates have been featured in Broadway musicals.
- The Wanda L. Bass School of Music boasts a reputation for producing star performers, like Kristin Chenoweth and Kelli O'Hara.
- The OCU Stars have won more than 80 national championships and consistently field top programs in a variety of sports in the Sooner Athletic Conference (NAIA). OCU student-athletes also excel in the classroom, with athletes typically maintaining an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher.



OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY (CONTINUED)

- More than $34 million is awarded annually in academic merit or performance scholarships, with automatic academic scholarships for first-year students reaching as high as $13,000 a year. Many other scholarship programs—such as the Clara Luper Scholars and the American Indian Scholarship Program—offer additional assistance to students. More than 90% of students receive academic merit, performance, or need-based financial aid.
- Since 1978, part of the OCU campus has been listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. This district, comprising the Administration Building, Fine Arts Building, and Goldstar Building, was nominated for its statewide significance in education and in the United Methodist community.
- OCU was designated by Viqtory, an advocacy organization for supporting students in the military, at the Gold level on its Military Friendly® School List for 2026-27.
- The Meinders School of Business recently launched the Executives-in-Residence Program to connect students with a select group of top executives, offering invaluable mentoring, one-on-one conversations, and potential career networks.
- The Kramer School of Nursing addressed a critical workforce and health need in 2023 by establishing the first 12-month, in-person Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program in Oklahoma; all students in the first cohort passed the NCLEX exam.

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

OCU is proud of the ways academics combine the close connections of a small, tight-knit campus with a volume of academic options you would typically find only at a larger institution. The Division of Academic Affairs, overseen by the Provost, encompasses eight schools and colleges, as well as the offices of the Registrar, Study Abroad, Institutional Research and Assessment, Honors Program, and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

- The Ann Lacy School of American Dance and Entertainment is widely regarded as a nationally preeminent program for dance education and professional preparation. OCU offers bachelor's degrees in American Dance Pedagogy, Dance Management, Dance Performance, Dance Science, and Entertainment Business.
- The Kramer College of Nursing and Health Professions includes the Kramer School of Nursing, the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program, and the Master of Physician Assistant Studies Program. OCU offers 18 nursing degree programs and certificates and boasts a Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination pass rate of 100%.
- The Meinders School of Business offers 32 bachelor's, master's, and certificate degrees and programs. Students receive a broad-based view of management that emphasizes ethics, entrepreneurship, and social responsibility. The school is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), placing it within the top 6% of business schools in the world.
- The Petree College of Arts and Sciences is home to more than 55 undergraduate degrees and minors ranging from classic degrees in the sciences, languages, and arts to cutting-edge programs in esports management and game design and animation.
- Founded in 1907 as Oklahoma's first law school, the OCU School of Law offers a vibrant community for students from a variety of cultural and academic backgrounds. OCU Law is dedicated to educating those who will serve as guardians of the law; graduates have a 90% average employment rate.
- The School of Theatre offers three undergraduate degrees: Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Design and Production, and Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Innovation and Entrepreneurship (BATIE). Students benefit from professional training with strong foundational experiences.
- The Wanda L. Bass School of Music offers 16 bachelor's and graduate degrees in vocal or instrumental performance, composition, conducting, music theater, and education and develops musicians equipped to make significant artistic contributions to society. The school stresses virtuosic versatility to prepare students for music careers in the 21st century.
- The Wimberly School of Religion offers majors in religion, religion/philosophy, youth ministry, religious education, and pre-seminary, as well as minors in religion, interfaith studies, and religious education. This school is the home of the Vivian Wimberly Center for Ethics and Service Leadership and the Owen Wimberly Center for Continuing Education in Religion.



OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY (CONTINUED)

OCU is one of just two campus locations for graduate religious studies offered by Saint Paul School of Theology, a seminary that prepares graduate students for a new world of ministry. Since 2008, Saint Paul at Oklahoma City University has brought together OCU, the Oklahoma Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference to offer unique opportunities in Native American ministries and restorative justice/prison ministries in Oklahoma City.

ADVANCEMENT

Under President Kenneth R. Evans's leadership, Oklahoma City University has experienced a period of significant philanthropic growth, expanded alumni engagement, and strengthened relationships with donors and community partners. The Office of University Advancement has played a central role in supporting the university's strategic priorities, securing transformational gifts, and positioning OCU for continued success.

The office has also strengthened alumni engagement and donor stewardship through expanded events and outreach across the country, deepening relationships with alumni, donors, and friends while connecting them more closely to OCU's students, leadership, and institutional priorities.

OCU has surpassed $100 million in philanthropic support since 2021, a record pace for the institution. Fiscal year 2026 was the most successful fundraising year in university history, with $32.6 million raised in gifts and commitments. One of the university's most significant current philanthropic initiatives is the renovation of the Kirkpatrick Fine Arts Center, launched with a $13 million lead gift from the Kirkpatrick philanthropic partners.

With strong momentum and broad donor support, the project is on track for construction in 2027 and a reopening as the Kirkpatrick Performing Arts Center in fall 2028. The renovation will transform one of Oklahoma City's important performing arts venues, enhancing opportunities for OCU's nationally recognized performing arts programs while strengthening the university's role as a cultural destination for the broader community. The next President will have the opportunity to help bring the campaign to a successful close and celebrate the reopening.

FINANCES

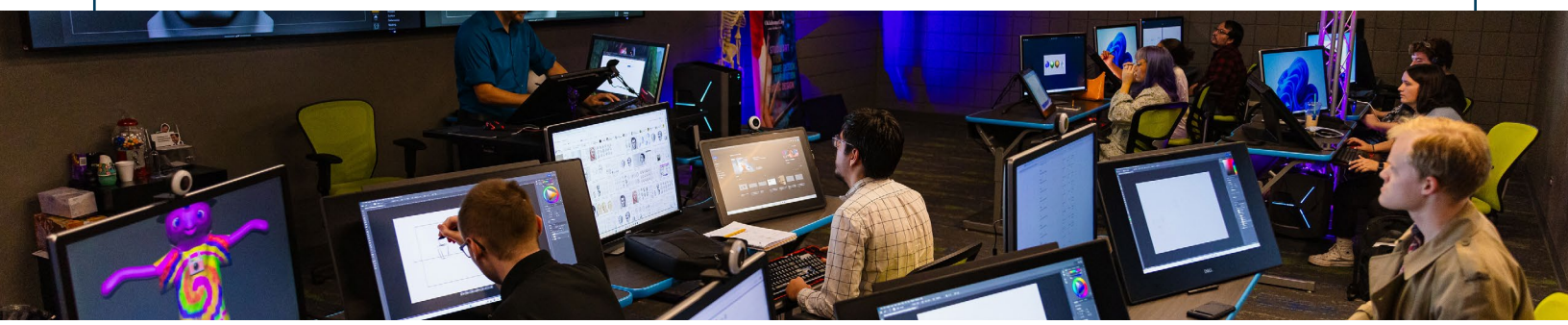
Oklahoma City University benefits from a diversified academic portfolio that includes nationally recognized performing arts programs, a law school, and a growing array of undergraduate, graduate, and professional offerings. This distinctive market position, combined with strategic partnerships and program expansion, has helped OCU maintain stable enrollment in a challenging higher education environment.

OCU operates on an annual budget of approximately $75 million and is supported by endowed funds of approximately $227 million, including the university's endowment and funds held for its benefit by the Oklahoma Methodist Foundation and the Oklahoma City Community Foundation. Labor and benefits represent the largest share of the annual operating budget, at approximately 62%. Tuition and fees represent approximately 81% of operating revenue.

Like many private institutions, OCU faces headwinds from demographic declines in traditional college-age populations, public scrutiny of the value of higher education, and inflationary pressure on operating costs. In response, university leadership has taken deliberate steps to strengthen long-term financial sustainability through disciplined expense management, targeted investment in growth, and diversified revenue. Online programs have grown from approximately 6% of enrollment in fall 2022 to 20% in fall 2026, graduate and professional offerings have expanded, and strategic partnerships have extended OCU's reach. Over the past three years, OCU's operating position has improved each year, and the university has monetized select non-core assets to establish a quasi-endowment that provides transitional support while growth initiatives mature.

LA28 OLYMPIC PARTNERSHIP AND STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

OCU has been selected to serve as the Oklahoma City Satellite Olympic Village for the LA28 Olympic Games, welcoming more than 250 athletes, coaches, and delegates from 32 countries in summer 2028. This partnership will elevate OCU's international visibility and community engagement while bringing significant investment to campus, including a $4 million grant from the Oklahoma Department of Commerce for residential facility enhancements.





OKLAHOMA CITY

With a metro area home to more than 1.5 million Oklahomans enjoying an average of 300 days of sunshine per year, Oklahoma City (OKC) is the state capital and most populous city in the state of Oklahoma. With a cost of living significantly lower than the national average, OKC offers a unique blend of affordability, opportunity, and community that makes it an attractive place to call home. The city also boasts a strong and diverse job market, particularly in sectors like energy, aviation, healthcare, and technology—offering career stability and growth. OKC houses major Federal Aviation Administration facilities, including the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center, which is the largest FAA facility outside of the Washington, D.C., area. Along with the FAA's presence, Tinker Air Force Base makes aviation a key component of OKC's economic landscape.

Beyond economics, OKC is known for its friendly, welcoming atmosphere and a sense of community that appeals to both residents and visitors. OKC has the fourth-highest Native American population of any city in the United States. Oklahoma is home to 38 federally recognized tribes and is in the heart of Indian Country.

The city has invested heavily in revitalization efforts, which have led to a vibrant downtown area filled with restaurants, entertainment venues, galleries, museums, and cultural attractions such as the Oklahoma City Museum of Art and the Civic Center Music Hall. Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy easy access to gardens and parks, lakes, and the extensive Oklahoma River trail system. Positioned near the geographic center of the United States, Oklahoma City serves as a major transportation and logistics hub, making it ideal for businesses and convenient for travel. OKC is also home to the NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder and several minor league teams. A new downtown arena – the Continental Coliseum – is currently under construction and will house the OKC Thunder beginning in the 2028-29 season.



THE PRESIDENT

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

The President is the chief executive officer of Oklahoma City University and reports to the Board of Trustees. The President leads a $75 million operating budget, an enrollment of approximately 2,800 students, and a community of approximately 191 full-time faculty and 275 staff.

The Board of Trustees is comprised of 25 voting members, led by Chairperson Jane Jayroe Gamble. Members of the Board of Trustees include OCU alumni, public servants, academicians, accountants, lawyers, philanthropists, and community leaders. Trustees are appointed to three-year terms, with a three consecutive terms limit. The United Methodist Church enjoys at least three, and at most, four appointments to the Board of Trustees, including the Resident Bishop of The United Methodist Church for the Oklahoma Conference, a representative from the Oklahoma Conference, a representative from the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, and a representative from the Oklahoma Methodist Foundation.

The next President will succeed Dr. Kenneth R. Evans, who will retire on June 30, 2027, after six years of service.

LEADERSHIP AGENDA

- **Capitalize on OCU's current momentum and identify opportunities for growth.** The next President of OCU must be prepared to carefully assess the successes of the past five years – which have seen significant achievements in fundraising and enhancing the university's fiscal position – and continue and build on that momentum. Existing institutional strengths – such as the performing arts – have remained robust, while additional healthcare programs and new online programs have stabilized enrollment and accessed new markets. OCU's next President will need to continue this positive trend – particularly by focusing on existing areas of institutional distinction and success – while balancing the academic and business interests of the institution.
- **Be a visible and accessible leader for external and internal constituencies.** OCU has a tight-knit, welcoming campus culture that values connection with its leader. Students are deeply engaged on and off campus, and faculty and staff are committed to the institution and to one another. The next President will lead by listening, communicating openly, and being present, especially during challenging moments, while making difficult decisions transparently and inclusively. The President will also invest in the people who make OCU work, building trust, supporting shared governance, and strengthening a culture where faculty and staff feel valued. Additionally, the next President will need to communicate robustly beyond campus and connect with external partners to strengthen existing relationships, identify opportunities to expand them, and build OCU's brand in the region.
- **Leverage OCU's location in a growing and dynamic urban setting for institutional success.** The university is centrally located in a growing and thriving urban center, which serves as a state capital and is one of the 10 largest cities by land area in the United States. With additional capacity to contribute to meeting the region's healthcare needs, increasing connections to major partners such as Tinker Air Force Base, and a law school in the heart of OKC, OCU's next President will find an institution ready to make rapid strides in its visibility. The next President will need to leverage these strengths, as well as the upcoming international presence of the campus in the 2028 Olympics, to bolster brand and name recognition and to communicate OCU's vision externally.
- **Be a capable and responsible steward of institutional resources.** Like most small, private, liberal arts institutions in the United States, OCU continues its focus on financial sustainability in the face of declining undergraduate enrollment. However, OCU's operating position has improved steadily under President Evans as fundraising has set new institutional records and diversified academic programs have strengthened enrollment. The next President

will need to be highly strategic in supporting existing programs and identifying new opportunities to continue the institution's progress toward long-term financial health. To accomplish this, the President will lead the campus community with a positive but realistic vision to further strengthen the university's financial position.

- **Lead philanthropy and build on record momentum.** OCU has raised more than $100 million in philanthropic support since 2021, including the most successful fundraising year in its history. The next President will serve as the university's chief fundraiser: cultivating major donors, foundations, and corporate partners; engaging alumni and the Board of Trustees in advancement; completing the Kirkpatrick campaign; and advancing OCU's comprehensive campaign into its next phase.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

OCU's current five-year strategic plan, approved by the Board of Trustees in 2023, concludes in 2028, early in the next President's tenure. The President will build on its progress while leading the development of OCU's next strategic plan. Within the first two to three years, success will include:

- **Strengthened financial health:** Continued improvement in OCU's operating position through enrollment growth, improved retention, and diversified revenue, with costs and revenues aligned for long-term sustainability.
- **Fundraising momentum:** Successful completion of the Kirkpatrick campaign and continued growth in philanthropic support, positioning OCU for the next phase of its comprehensive campaign.
- **Distinctive student experience:** Expanded high-impact and experiential learning, strong career outcomes, and a culture of belonging for all students, including the growing number of online, adult, and nontraditional learners OCU serves.
- **Investment in people:** Progress toward competitive compensation and stronger retention of faculty and staff, supported by a cohesive, high-performing leadership team.
- **Partnerships and visibility:** Strengthened relationships across Oklahoma City, the region, and The United Methodist Church; new partnerships that support enrollment and community impact; and a successful role as the LA28 Satellite Olympic Village.
- **Trusted leadership:** Strong, transparent relationships with the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, and students, grounded in shared governance.
- **The next strategic plan:** A collaborative, inclusive process to build on the current plan and chart OCU's direction for the years ahead.



QUALITIES OF THE NEXT PRESIDENT

The ideal candidate to serve as the next President of Oklahoma City University will:

- Hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution; a terminal degree is preferred.
- Possess a significant history of higher education leadership appropriate to this role or possess another compelling skillset that would position them for success in this role.
- Demonstrate an entrepreneurial mindset and the ability to plan carefully and creatively.
- Be prepared to embrace the distinctive mission of OCU, which is grounded in its affiliation with The United Methodist Church.
- Be a visionary who is able to lead innovation at OCU and inspire support for that vision.
- Possess well-developed business acumen that can be aligned with the unique needs of a private, tuition-dependent, mission-driven institution of higher education.
- Be prepared to foster a culture of belonging and inclusivity across campus.
- Have the skills to engage external partners across Oklahoma City and the broader region to develop partnerships, secure resources, and enhance the visibility of OCU.
- Bring a record of successful fundraising, donor cultivation, and alumni engagement.
- Understand enrollment strategy and the financial realities of a tuition-dependent institution.
- Demonstrate experience partnering effectively with a governing board and a commitment to shared governance.
- Have a record of leading organizational change and stewarding human, fiscal, and capital resources.



HOW TO APPLY

Applications should consist of a substantial letter of interest, a CV, and a list of five professional references with full contact information and a note indicating the nature of your working relationship with each. No references will be contacted without the explicit permission of the candidate. Application documents can be submitted in confidence at the following link: www.academicsearch.org/OCUPresidentApply.

Nominations and expressions of interest can be submitted electronically, and in confidence, to: OCUPresident@academicsearch.org.

The position is open until filled, but only applications received by **Monday, January 25, 2027**, can be assured full consideration. The university is being assisted by Academic Search. Confidential discussions about this opportunity may be arranged by contacting consultants Chris Butler at Chris.Butler@academicsearch.org and Gabriel Esteban at Gabriel.Esteban@academicsearch.org. Further information about Oklahoma City University is available at https://www.okcu.edu/.

Oklahoma City University is committed to diversity and equal opportunity in education and employment. We do not discriminate based on sex, race, age, ancestry, color, disability, genetic information, national origin, marital or medical status, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, parenting, veteran status, or perceived characteristics.

ABOUT ACADEMIC SEARCH

Academic Search is assisting Oklahoma City University in this work. For 50 years Academic Search has offered executive search services to higher education institutions, associations, and related organizations. Academic Search was founded by higher education leaders on the principle that we provide the most value to partner institutions by combining best practices with our deep knowledge and experience. Our mission today is to enhance institutional capacity by providing outstanding executive recruitment services, executive coaching, and transition support, in partnership with our parent organization, the American Academic Leadership Institute.

50 years

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