Connors Ranks #1 In The Nation for Native American Healthcare Education
According to Diverse Magazine, Connors State College was recently ranked first in the nation for health care programs for Native Americans. Diverse Magazine sets the standard for reporting on diversity, access and opportunity for all in higher education.

The report, based on U.S. Department of Education data, ranked Connors State College first in Health Professions and Related Programs and in Registered Nursing, Nursing Administration, Nursing Research and Clinical Nursing.

“We are very happy with the findings of Diverse Magazine,” said CSC President Dr. Tim Faltyn. “We work diligently to create an atmosphere where all who come to learn receive the highest quality education available.”

Native Americans make up 35 percent of Connors’ student body. As a result, high importance has been placed on improving the college experience for Native Americans.

Connors State College (CSC) was recently awarded a five-year Title III grant totaling $5 million from the U.S. Department of Education. Connors was one of only a few institutions in the U.S. to receive the entire $5 million. Other awarded institutions received less than half of that amount.

A portion of the grant is designated for the development of a Native American Success & Cultural Center to boost Native American student success, including supplemental instruction, academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, and cultural resources.

“We strive every day to make a difference in the lives of our students, faculty, staff and community,” said Faltyn. “Diverse Magazine’s report is a great indicator that we are achieving our goals.”

Photo: Nursing students (foreground, L-R) Kaley McNeil, Tahlequah; Bailey McClellan, Muskogee; Luis Navarro, Tahlequah; (background, L-R) Monica Wiedel, Muskogee; and Stephen McClurg, Fort Gibson, are all Cherokee students who are pursuing nursing degrees at Connors State College.
Quarter Million Dollar Bull Sale Shatters All Records

Connors State College concluded its bi-annual Bull Test Sale on December 4, 2014, with more than a quarter million dollars in sales – a record shattering figure that left smiles on the faces of all parties. Cattle breeders and buyers from across the Midwest packed into the CSC bull test and sale facility in Warner, while others placed bids online.

The 51 bulls sold brought a record-breaking average of $5,333 per head, while the top seller, raised by Lee Angus of Vinita, brought $9,750.

"With the cattle market so strong nationally, I almost expected this sale to break records," said Blake Nelson, Director of Farm Operations and the Bull Test. "But to see a grand total of more than $270,000 is something we’ve only dreamt of doing, until now."

According to Nelson, recent years’ sales have seen a steady rise in cattle prices, while the breeders entrusting their stock to Connors continue to outdo themselves in genetic quality. These factors and more set the stage for increasing dollars added to the college’s auxiliary accounts.

Encouraging producers to “Count on Connors” for their next herd sire, students within the college’s agriculture department, as well as the entire farm crew, work alongside Nelson for months in order to prepare for the sale. From advertising to scraping bulls, and from working pens to writing invoices, the students and staff partake in every aspect of the event.

Breeders from across Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri put their bulls on test at Connors in order to reach the most rapid weight gain in a controlled time period. At the end of each test period, the bulls are performance tested – ultrasound, gain tested, and semen checked – before they are allowed to go through the sale.
Connors State College recently was awarded the “Excellence in Default Prevention” certificate for their work in educating students on default prevention.

In 2011, colleges across the country took notice as the Department of Education published three year cohort default rates (CDR) for each school. This CDR represented the percentage of a school’s borrowers who entered into repayment in 2009 that defaulted within the first two years. Schools with a CDR of 30 percent or higher were handed immediate restrictions. The sanctions for a school in this category would include restricted disbursement times and further monitoring from the Department of Education. If the rates did not improve to below 30 percent within three years, that school would lose the ability to process Direct Loan and Federal Pell Grant funds. Community colleges were hit the hardest.

Connors State College received an initial three year CDR of 26.6 percent, and the Financial Aid Office took immediate action calling for a summit of campus leaders.

“We saw it as a campus-wide issue,” said Baxter Stewart, CSC Financial Aid Director. “Almost all of our students receive some type of federal financial aid, and 26.6 percent is too close for comfort. We were concerned about some of our students over borrowing without understanding their full commitment to repay. We knew we needed a team effort for change to be possible.”

Soon after the announcement, the Financial Aid Office developed a comprehensive plan to address the CDR in a proactive way. The plan included contacting past students in repayment, reaching out to current students through orientation classes, and holding frequent seminars on campus covering vast aspects of personal financial literacy. They submitted the plan to USA Funds along with a three-year $150,000 grant proposal to aid in default prevention and financial literacy. The Financial Aid Office was ecstatic to find out that they received the grant in July 2012.

“This was a true game changer for our office,” said Stewart. “We’ve been able to hold events, install software, and receive training that never would have been possible without the grant.”

In 2014, CSC received its 2011 three-year CDR of 22.4 percent, down more than four percentage points from its initial score. In the 2013-2014 school year, more than 300 students participated in financial literacy seminars, and every CSC student with loans received a personal loan evaluation showing their lender’s contact information, amounts owed, and estimated future repayment amounts. With the new CDR and increased outreach on campus, CSC was awarded the “Excellence in Default Prevention” certificate from USA Funds for leadership and achievement this past November.

Elizabeth Wanger, a Financial Aid Counselor in her fourth year at CSC, took leadership in this area in 2014 adding Default Prevention Specialist to her title. She along with Dr. Tabatha Hibbs recently pioneered a Peer Mentoring program at CSC with help from the USA Funds grant. The peer mentors must apply or be nominated to be accepted into the program. After undergoing multiple trainings, the mentors are assigned to a student who may have a tough time acclimating to the college environment. More than a tutor, these mentors frequently contact and coach the students they are assigned throughout the semester.

“It is a tremendous honor to receive this award but we are far from finished,” Wanger said. “Financial literacy is an often under looked part of the college experience, and we want our students to be able to focus on learning and career preparation without being saddled by exorbitant student loan debt. We hope to expand outreach efforts from our office long after this grant is gone.”

Photo: Elizabeth Wanger, CSC Default Prevention Specialist, shows off the “Excellence in Default Prevention” certificate awarded to the college by USA Funds.
At their December 5, 2014, meeting, the OSU A&M Board of Regents approved Connors State College’s request to begin the initial phases of renovating the first floor of Russell Hall. Initial plans call for the north wing of Russell Hall to house the Ken Ogdon Connors State College Museum. Through the generosity of the Ogdon Family, the museum will feature a historical display of Connors over the past 106 years, as well as a gift shop and an art gallery featuring work from students, faculty, alumni, and the community.

The central hall of Russell Hall will be home to the Native American Success and Cultural Center as part of the Title III grant program at Connors. This space will feature Native American cultural and historical resources, conference rooms, and administrative Offices.

The changes will bring new life into the building originally constructed in 1931, and honor the history and future of Connors State College.
Residents inside Countryside Estates will be feeling the warmth of the holiday season after receiving hand-made lap blankets from Connors State College students. The Native American Student Association wanted to reach out and help others in their community.

The students met twice a week to make the blankets as a way to honor their elders. “Elders’ wisdom and understanding have always been revered in Native American Culture,” said Callie Connolly, Connors’ NASA advisor. “This project just seemed to reflect NASA’s values.”

The Connors State College Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow spent a cold December day taking glamour shots of residents at Warner’s Countryside Estates, for the residents to use as Christmas gifts for their families.

The event was coordinated by the ACT secretary/treasurer, Jennifer Rose, who often can be found volunteering in the community in memory of her late daughter Cheyenne.

“I received a request that the residents at the nursing home wanted to do glamour shots,” Rose said. “As we all know, that costs money that the residents don’t have. Money to spend on hair, makeup and photos. So, I volunteered my time and donated the use of my makeup and rollers, and helped round up some things to help the process.”

Fellow ACT members Kaylee Casey, Claire Burnett, Morgan Cook and advisor Stacy Pearce provided the backdrop, Christmas props, cameras and their photography skills, while Rose and cosmetologist Ashley Henderson worked their magic with hair and makeup.

“The vision of our chapter and the National ACT organization is to develop and strengthen agricultural communication students through professional and philanthropic growth opportunities,” said advisor Stacy Pearce. “We looked at this opportunity as a way to give back to our local community, while also developing backdrop photography skills.

The joy we saw on the residents’ faces when they saw their reflection in a mirror, and their excitement to give a new photo of themselves to family, really touched all of our hearts,” Pearce said. “We had a great time spreading Christmas cheer this year.”

The ACT chapter also adopted a resident from the Countryside Estates Angel Tree.

“There was a resident who had no family, but just wanted a pair of tennis shoes,” said Rose. “My ACT chapter, and an anonymous ‘angel’ provided the resident with that gift and other stocking stuffers.”

Photos: (Top) Countryside Estates residents and staff. (Bottom) Claire Burnett and Kaylee Casey pose for a glamour shot with George.
Connors State College recently sold the Charles Haskell Building in Muskogee, Okla. The proceeds in excess of $320,000 will be used to help students obtain degrees and to benefit the Muskogee community.

“One hundred percent of the proceeds from this sale will go in the Connors State College Presidential Endowment Fund to provide book scholarships for CSC students,” said Dr. Ryan Blanton, CSC’s Associate VP for External Affairs. “Often times, purchasing books is the largest obstacle in obtaining a degree. With this scholarship fund we can alleviate that burden for our students in need.”

The Haskell Building was deeded to Connors in 1992 by the State of Oklahoma to serve as the hub of Connors’ operation in downtown Muskogee. Connors vacated the building in 2011 when they outgrew the space, but held the deed until they could find a developer committed to revitalizing historic downtown Muskogee.

“It was important to us to preserve the history of the Haskell building and to see that it be used to benefit the Muskogee community,” said CSC President, Dr. Tim Faltyn. “We are committed to Muskogee and we wanted to see that commitment continued by the new owners.”

Connors administrators worked diligently with Muskogee economic development professionals and city leaders to find the best use for the building. The property was purchased by Historic Preservation and Renewal, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation that has proposed a multi-million dollar investment in the community to convert the building into downtown housing.

Connors State College has long been involved in the revitalization efforts of Muskogee County through their participation in the AIM project, the Muskogee Difference Healthcare Scholarship, the Muskogee Area Chamber of Commerce, the Muskogee Vision Committee and many community and economic development efforts.

“The City of Muskogee’s partnership with Connors State College over the years has been a beneficial one for Muskogee County,” said City of Muskogee Mayor Bob Coburn. “We are doing great things to revitalize this city and Connors State College has played a large role in this effort. We wouldn’t be where we are today without their support.”

Photo: The Charles Haskell Building, circa 1922. 🖼
Cowboy Cattle Showdown Introduces Area Ag Youth to Campus

Midway through the fall semester, Connors State College Aggie Club members started planning a cattle show for area 4-H and FFA members.

“We decided to put on the Cowboy Cattle Showdown because we wanted to bring college students and youth together, and to help promote Connors’ agricultural majors and programs,” said Morgan Cook, Aggie Club President. “We provided a 60 percent payback to exhibitors, while a small portion of the proceeds was essentially a fundraiser for our club.”

Given that there were two other major cattle shows also going on that cold, December Saturday, members didn’t expect a ton of entries. “We had more than 130 head entered, with exhibitors from across Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri,” said Cook. “We definitely count this as a success.”

Held at the Warner Campus indoor arena, the show’s judge was South Dakota State University Livestock Judging Coach, Joshua Cribbs.

McPeak’s Be A Champ Camp sponsored the “Be A Champ Showmanship Challenge,” providing $500 in added money and prizes.

Getting in on the action, the CSC Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow chapter decided to test their photography skills in the arena and at a backdrop. “The other ACT members and I want to learn the art of livestock and show photography,” said Samantha Gillespie, ACT President. “We took the opportunity to practice and provided our ring shots for free to all exhibitors, via our chapter Facebook page.”

Following the Aggie Club’s lead, the club charged a fee for backdrop photos, using the proceeds as a fundraiser. “We’ll use the funds to bring ag comm professionals to campus for lectures and will try to attend professional development conferences, as well,” said Gillespie.

Diamond Cowboys Help Honeymooners

On Oct. 2, Maggie Ledbetter Sandusky and her husband, Ethan, were returning to the campus of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, from their honeymoon in northwest Arkansas. Traveling that day along I-40, they had to pull over to avoid a rainstorm. Later, between Warner and Checotah they, along with other vehicles, hydroplaned, missed hitting multiple cars and veered off the left shoulder before spinning out of control into the trees.

Two Connors State College students, Chandler Smith and McKaine Foster, returning from a hunting trip, witnessed the wreck and rushed to their aid. Not only did these two Connors State baseball pitchers have to run a mile back to render aid, but one also dashed to the mile marker to figure out how to give the ambulance directions.

Foster said, “We just did what anyone would do.” Both boys are involved in their churches. “There couldn’t have been two young men more uniquely suited to minister to our kids at just the right moment,” said Tammi Ledbetter.

A minister of Eufaula Calvary agreed to help Ethan retrieve the belongings from the Honda after Garrett Wrecking used two wreckers and a winch to tow it to the Checotah location. Later, Hunter’s Corner bought it for salvage, covering the cost of the wrecker bill. By midnight, Maggie’s father, Gary, had them back to Texas.

“It was a pretty dramatic way to finish a honeymoon, and yet, God protected them through it all with the help of some amazingly kind Okies,” Tammi Ledbetter said.

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Connors State College equine and rodeo programs recently hosted two competitions – the Alumni & Friends Versatility Ranch Horse Show and a Timed Event Rodeo, which were open for entry to students, alumni, friends and the public. Prizes for all competitions included stable and saddle blankets, buckets, hay bags, ropes, halters and more.

In partnership with Nutrena, the third annual Timed Event Rodeo, held Friday, November 21, had more than 150 entries competing in breakaway roping, calf roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing and team roping. Of those entries, 32 were current students and 27 were former students and alumni.

**TIMED EVENT RODEO PLACINGS:**

**Calf Roping:** (1) Glen Jackson; (2) Stephen Reger; (3) Zalin Edwards, current student; (4) Marco Thompson; (5) Tyler Warren.

**Breakaway Roping:** (1) Keri Lawson, alumna; (2) Konnor Upton; (3) Michelle Armstrong.

**Steer Wrestling:** (1) Marc Gouldsby; (2) Dylan Humphrey, alumni; (3) West Ratliff.

**Barrel Racing:** (1) Leah Graber; (2) Payton Hill, current student; (3) Kinsley Sweptson, alumna; (4) Ronna Bell, current student.

**Team Roping:** (1-tie) Eric Flurry / Rocky Ross; (1-tie) Destry Graham, alumni / Rocky Ross; (3) Cody Barley / Tanner Ward; (4) Destry Graham / Heath Osborn; (5) Destry Graham / Tanner Ward.

The Versatility Ranch Horse Show took place Saturday, November 22, and was comprised of ranch riding, ranch trail and working ranch horse classes. Open to all for competition, the show featured added prizes specifically for alumni riders, alumni horses, and current students.

**VERSATILITY RANCH HORSE SHOW CLASS PLACINGS:**

**Ranch Riding:** (1) Keri Lawson riding Wily Tuko Rox; (2) Brock Griffin on Pretty Lil Pistol; (3) Jake Lawson on Miss Cool Sabre; (4-tie) Jake Walker on Stormy’s Star Playboy; (4-tie) Kasey Wagnon, current student, on Dualin’ Sparks Ray; (4-tie) Keri Lawson on Jessie’s Miss Gold.

**Ranch Trail:** (1) Keri Lawson riding Wily Tuko Rox; (2) Jake Lawson on Miss Cool Sabre; (3) Jake Walker on Stormy’s Star Playboy; (4) Jessica Hill riding Honeybee.

**Working Ranch Horse:** (1) Jake Lawson riding Miss Cool Sabre; (2) Keri Lawson on Wily Tuko Rox; (3) Casey Beverlin riding Pedro; (4-tie) Keri Lawson on Jessie’s Miss Gold; (4-tie) Brock Griffin on Tater.

**OVERALL PLACING**

**Alumni Horse:** (1) Wily Tuko Rox, 2004; (2) Miss Cool Sabre, 2010; (3) Jessie’s Miss Gold, 1999; (4) Stormy’s Star Playboy, 2012.

**Alumni Rider:** (1) Keri Lawson on Wily Tuko Rox; (2) Jake Lawson on Miss Cool Sabre; (3) Brock Griffin on Pretty Lil Pistol; (4) Jake Walker on Stormy’s Star Playboy.

**Current Student Rider:** (1) Kasey Wagon; (2) Cody Mathis; (3) Jessica Hill; (4) Kerianne Mithcell.

**Youth Rider:** (1) Cate Blanton.

**Pee Wee Rider:** (1) Dewey Lawson.

Photos: Competitors at the third annual Timed Event Rodeo and Versatility Ranch Horse Show (Top-Bottom) – Payton Hill, barrel racing; Keri Lawson, breakaway roping; Cate Blanton and Brock Griffin, versatility ranch horse show; and Tanner McElhaney, steer wrestling.
At Connors State College’s Kimberly Phillips, M.Ed., was recently elected as President for the Phi Theta Kappa Regional Advisors Association. Her election to this regional organization is a testament to the dedication and skill level she has shown in her career.

Phillips is a certified Appreciative Advisor with over ten years of advising experience in Higher Education. At Connors, she is the Disabilities Coordinator, Academic Advisor and Co-Advisor for Phi Theta Kappa. She has co-advised the Mu Chi chapter with Colleen Noble since November of 2012. While serving as a co-advisor for Mu Chi, the membership has doubled and the chapter has had a New Century Scholar, Hites Family Community Scholarship recipient, Coca-Cola Scholarship recipient, and many Phi Theta Kappa transfer scholarship recipients to various four year universities. Kim is an adjunct instructor for Connors and Northeastern State University for Child Development.

Phillips has been married to Ben for more than 17 years and they have two daughters, Kylie and Shelby. Phillips is currently the Vice President of Delta Kappa Gamma Epsilon Chapter, sits on the boards for Oklahoma Academic Advising Association (OACADA), Oklahoma Association on Higher Education and Disabilities (OK-AHEAD), and Muskogee Public Schools FACS (Family and Consumer Sciences) advisory board, and is in the Partners in Policymaking Class of 2015. Her favorite quote is “Be the change you want to see in the world,” by Gandhi.

**Alumnus John Whisenant**

John Whisenant, a native of Gore, Okla., played for the Connors State Cowboys basketball team graduating from Connors State with an Associate Degree, before earning a degree in physical education at New Mexico State University, where he played for the Aggies for two seasons. He then earned a Master's Degree from Pittsburgh State before launching a very successful coaching career.

Whisenant began his coaching career at Coffeyville Community College where he posted a 48-10 record, then joined the coaching staff at the University of New Mexico where he accumulated a record of 137-62, including two Western Athletic Conference championships. He later served as the vice president of basketball operations for the New Mexico Slam in the International Basketball League where his record was 51-35.

He spent four seasons as head coach at Arizona Western University, where he won three league championships (97-60) and later coached his son's AAU team, where he dominated with a record of 176-16.

While serving as a consultant for the Sacramento Kings, under the Maloof family, he became the assistant manager for the Sacramento Monarchs of the WNBA. Whisenant became the general manager the following year, and then took over as head coach in the middle of 2003. In 2005, he won the WNBA Coach of the Year Award and his Monarchs won the WNBA championship title over the Connecticut Sun.

Whisenant later coached the Monarchs to its second straight Western Conference Championship by beating the Los Angeles Sparks. However, the Monarchs lost the WNBA title to the Detroit Shock.

He became the New York Liberty's coach in 2011 and after the 2012 season Whisenant announced that he was resigning from his coaching position.

Whisenant has a WNBA coaching record of 139-102 including one championship.

Whisenant is a partner in a commercial real estate firm in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
Nella Worthan, SGA President

Sophomore Nella Worthan from Westville, Oklahoma, holds many roles at Connors: SGA President, Vice President of the President’s Leadership Class, a mentor in the Peer Mentoring Program; while also actively pursuing an Associate’s Degree in Psychology. After CSC, she plans to attend Oklahoma State University to pursue a Bachelor’s in Psychology followed by a Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology or Clinical Social Work.

“I want to make a positive difference in the lives of people who are in need of someone to just listen,” said Worthan.

Though from Westville, she grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, and considers both cities as her hometown, as they each helped shape who she has become.

These two towns are not the only places she considers home—Connors holds a place in her heart, as well.

“After four amazing semesters, I will anxiously and woefully begin my last at this wonderful place,” said Worthan.

“Connors has become another place I consider my home and it will be bittersweet to have to leave when I graduate in May.”

One thing Worthan enjoys most about the many roles she has taken at CSC is the opportunity to help others. Those who she helps are striving students and to be able to have a positive influence on them gives her a sense of accomplishment.

At Connors, the faculty and staff do their part to ensure each student doesn’t feel like a random number or an occupied seat.

“They make a significant effort to get to know the students and genuinely care about our success, not only as students, but as individuals as well,” said Worthan.

The determination to have a life of success and happiness is what drives Nella to do her best, not only at Connors, but in everything she chooses to do.

“I look forward to the growth and prosperity of this brilliant institution,” said Worthan. “I also look forward to starting a career in which I am able to help those in need of someone to guide them to success like so many have done for me.”

Greg Broussard, Instructor

Greg Broussard, a Biology Instructor at Connors State College, teaches a variety of courses, from Anatomy to Zoology and several in-between.

Broussard earned a Bachelor’s of Science degree from Midwestern State University, in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1998 and then pursued his master’s from the same. For his master’s research, he conducted a survey of spiders in the Chihuahuan Desert of western Texas. This study resulted in the discovery of at least two new species of spiders, one a possible new family. One of these species was named in his honor. This spider’s scientific name is Drassylus Broussardi and is a member of the spider family commonly called ground spiders (Gnaphosidae).

He also conducted research and studied entomology while in the doctoral program of the Entomology and Plant Pathology Department at Oklahoma State University. At OSU, he learned a tremendous amount while conducting scientific experiments and taking classes in Entomology, the study of insects.

Broussard has been part of the Connors family since 2009 and has a broad background in biology, which has been very beneficial in teaching a variety of classes. While he loves teaching, interacting with students and helping them achieve their educational goals is his favorite part of the job. Broussard is fascinated by all aspects of biology, and loves sharing this fascination with others, going so far as to take students to the Panama rainforests to study Tropical Rainforest Ecology.

Connors provides students with the knowledge and tools to be successful in their future educational endeavors. For Broussard, the biggest thing he does is letting students know what is required to be successful and helping them get to that point. It is something that both the student and Broussard work towards together.
The Connors State College community was shocked and saddened by the loss of one of their own. On May 2, 2014, freshman basketball player, Sherrell McHenry passed away. On Dec. 2, 2014, McHenry’s number two jersey was retired, in a ceremony taking place immediately following the Cowgirls’ 6 p.m. game.

McHenry’s enthusiasm, constant smile and quick wit were an encouragement to her Cowgirl’s basketball team. She was able to strike a balance that set a positive example for her teammates and her coaches.

Her coaches remarked that she was one of the hardest working players on the team and yet she was one of the first to joke around with them. Her teammates say she was a motivator for them, one teammate saying she would always go to McHenry with her problems and McHenry would encourage her to pray and to think positive.

“The loss of someone close to us is a reminder of how precious and fleeting life can be,” said CSC President, Dr. Tim Faltyn. “It also reminds us of the importance of reaching out to one another to offer strength and support.”

McHenry was known as a good kid both on and off the court. She excelled on the court and in the classroom.

“What really hit home for me was when her father began to speak. He said words that opened my eyes and let me reflect on some things. After losing his daughter, he is still very positive and strives to help many people. I believe this goes to show how great Connors is as a family school and how much they honestly care about students.”

- Student Reflection

Sherrell’s story inspires me to be positive in all that I do so hopefully I can influence people like she did.

- Student Reflection
Mid-Season Basketball Recap

COWBOY BASKETBALL

The Connors State Cowboys are right where they want to be, sitting atop the Oklahoma Collegiate Athletic Conference basketball standings, ranked No. 8 in the National Junior College Athletic Association national poll and have an impressive 15-1 record.

Reaching that fete has been no walk in the park for the Cowboys and their coach, Bill Muse, who is in his 23rd junior college campaign.

Connors began its steady rise to No. 8 with a preseason ranking of 27 in the NJCAA with a ball club that had just two returning starters.

The Cowboys moved to No. 17 in the rankings in the NJCAA's first poll after the season opened play posting nine consecutive wins. The Cowboys then ran its winning streak to 12 and with it came a No. 12 national ranking. The Cowboys' win over Northeastern A&M gave them a 15-1 season mark and a No. 8 ranking. Connors was also ranked No. 20 in the Sporting News Magazine Pre-Season national poll.

“This is just a tribute to our program and what we (assistant coach Cameron Henderson) have been able to accomplish here,” said Muse. “Our kids have worked very hard to reach this point. Right now we don’t have a lot of weaknesses. It’s hard to point out any when you are 15-1. I told our guys just before they left on Christmas break, the last four or five games of the first semester our winning margin was 25 points per game, even on the road. I was really pleased with what we did as we broke for the Christmas holidays.

“But, what we have to do the second semester is to be more consistent at the free throw line (223-of-353, 63.2 percent). That’s the one thing we have to improve on and I believe we will.”

The one thing that Muse is extremely pleased about is the defensive play of his squad. The Cowboys have held the opposition to just 29.3 points an outing and 40.5 percent on field goal shooting.

“The strength of this club at the mid-way point is our defense,” said Muse. “We can really guard people, that’s not a problem.”

Offensively there hasn’t been a problem either for Connors. The Cowboys are averaging 92.4 points a game while shooting 56.8 percent from the field and 38 percent from behind the 3-point arc.

One of the big reasons for Connors success offensively is that four players are averaging double figure scoring, along with national leaders in assists and rebounding.

“We’ve got a lot of help from our freshman this season,” said Muse. “We knew we had a talented group coming in but you never know how quickly they will come together. Chemistry plays a big part in developing a team. They all work very hard on the court and in the classroom. We hope our first semester carries over into the second and we get the opportunity to return to Hutchinson.”

COWGIRL BASKETBALL

When Rusty Laverentz took over the reigns as head coach of the Connors State Cowgirls last July he didn’t know what to expect. The former University of Central Arkansas assistant inherited a squad which produced just five wins a year ago and just two returning starters.

Expectations were not high as he entered his first season. However, after the first semester of action, Laverentz and his squad has already surpassed last season’s win total. Entering the second semester, the Cowgirls are 6-9. It’s a record the Cowgirls have reached despite an injury to a key player and a reduced squad. The Cowgirls finished the first half of the year with just eight players.

“The best thing about this group is that
we have fun. We care about each other and that shows because we are starting to play much better,” said Laverentz.

The Cowgirls are now cruising straight ahead into Oklahoma Collegiate Athletic Conference action.

“We have already played three of the top teams in our conference and opened second semester action with Northeastern A&M,” said Laverentz.

The Cowgirls are currently 1-4 in OCAC play.

“We have played the top four teams and after that anyone can win this league. We want to be in the top five of the league and gain a first-round bye for the Region II Tournament in March,” said Laverentz. “If we do that it’s a pretty good accomplishment.”

Enter his 20th year at CSC, softball head coach Rick Carbone is expecting great things from this season’s team, which starts with an outstanding pitching core of Kristen ‘Big Red’ Reasnor and University of Tulsa transfer Jill Roye.

He returns the nation’s NJCAA top hitting Marucci Award winner in sophomore, Reasnor, who was a Region II First Team selection her freshman year.

Royer was selected to the Conference-USA second team All-Freshman team and was 1-of-25 finalists for the Division I National Freshman of the year by the National Fastpitch Coaches Association.

“Having ‘Big Red’ and Jill inside the circle gives us an outstanding pitching staff this season,” said Carbone. “They have outstanding arms and both can hit the softball.”

“Along with our other returnees and the outstanding group of incoming freshman we have, I expect us to compete, win our conference and go even further,” Carbone said. “If they perform as I expect, we could make a trip to St. George, Utah, for the national tournament. I have high expectations from this group.”

The Cowgirls open the 2015 season on February 17 at home against Coffeyville Community College.

Connors State baseball, coming off a 46-13 record and an Oklahoma Collegiate Athletic Conference baseball title last season, is ranked No. 14 in the nation by the Collegiate Baseball Newspaper.

Perry Keith is entering his 30th season as head coach of the Cowboys with a career record of 1,421 and 412. The Cowboys placed third in last year’s Region II baseball tournament.

The Cowboys open the 2015 season on February 11 at Biff Thompson Field with a doubleheader against Bacone College.

Photo: Kristen ‘Big Red’ Reasnor.
Students attending Connors State College now have specific assurances about courses they need to take to meet requirements for a bachelor’s degree in one of three information technology areas at OSU Institute of Technology, as a result of a new articulation agreement between the two institutions.

The agreement is one of many plans Connors and the state's community colleges are working to develop as part of a concerted statewide effort to ease the transition for students moving from community colleges to the university.

“I am thrilled with this articulation agreement,” said CSC President, Dr. Tim Faltyn. “It is a great example of community college faculty working with university faculty to get things done for our students. These agreements benefit the entire state.”

The new agreement is for a bachelor’s degree in Information Technology, Instrumentation Engineering Technology or Civil Engineering Technology, spelling out the courses at Connors State College that meet OSUIT’s specific degree requirements in the School of Information Technology.

“Successful transfer is a top priority for IT students. With this agreement, Connors IT students can rest assured that the program they take at CSC will dovetail perfectly with the program at OSUIT,” said Dr. Ron Ramming, senior vice president for academic and student affairs. “The collaboration between CSC and OSUIT has resulted in a seamless transfer opportunity for our students.”

The signing ceremony, held at OSUIT, was attended by administration, staff and students from both institutions. Dr. Glenn Thompson, senior manager for IT strategic solutions at Cherokee Nation Businesses spoke, as did OSUIT President, Dr. Bill Path, and CSC President, Dr. Tim Faltyn.

“Connors State College routinely sends us students who are well prepared to study information technology at OSUIT, but the students don’t always take their courses in the optimal sequence,” said OSUIT President, Dr. Bill Path. “With the joint-adviser system we’ve established, students will receive recommendations for course selections that will improve their paths toward successful degree completion at both institutions.”

CSC Sr. Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, Dr. Ron Ramming, said the initiative, a top priority for Presidents Faltyn and Path, is an ambitious undertaking because each college has its own course requirements.

“Each community college is different. They have designed their programs to reflect their communities and their missions,” said Ramming. “But, we all recognize that providing a clear four-year pathway to a degree for prepared students is the right thing to do.”

Photos: (Top) An articulation agreement for Information Technology was signed by (l to r), Randy Ritchey, Chair, Information Technologies Division, OSUIT, Rhonda Wilson, Chair, Business/CIS Division, CSC, and Dr. Ron Ramming, Senior VP for Academic & Student Affairs, CSC.

(Center) OSUIT President, Dr. Bill R. Path, and CSC President, Dr. Tim Faltyn.

(Bottom) An articulation agreement for Instrumentation Engineering Technology and Civil Engineering Technology was signed by (l to r), Dr. Abul Hasan, Chair, Engineering Technologies Division, OSUIT, Lynette Rock, Chair, Math & Science Division, CSC, and Dr. Ron Ramming.
Occupational Therapists Needed: New Program Will Train Assistants For The Field

Occupational therapy assistant Sheridan Hollifield uses gentle encouragement and a moving cellphone to catch the eye of 8-year-old Zamarie Whitfield. Hollifield’s skills are in short supply around Muskogee.

Indian Capital Technology Center seeks to address that shortage by starting an Occupational Therapy Assistant program this August at its Muskogee campus.

The program, held in conjunction with Connors State College, will enable students to earn an Associate in Applied Science degree as an occupational therapy assistant, as well as a certificate from ICTC.

Penny Stack, chairwoman of the ICTC’s Occupational Therapy Assistant program, said ICTC seeks to provide an affordable program for students seeking OTA certification.

“There is basically a shortage of occupational therapy practitioners in the area,” Stack said. “And rural service areas are depleted for occupational therapy practitioners and OT assistants.”

According to a 2010 report prepared by the Eastern Regional Health Care Coalition, many occupational therapy assistants were nearing retirement age. The report said 39 percent of OTA’s in the area are above the age of 50. The area covered by the report included the counties of Muskogee, Wagoner, McIntosh, Cherokee, Sequoyah, Adair, Okmulgee, Washington, Nowata, Craig, Ottawa, Delaware, Mayes and Rogers.

Lisa Wade, with the Eastern Regional Health Care Coalition, said the demand is greater now than it was when the report was issued four years ago.

Stack said the number of health care related careers is expected to grow by 8 percent in eastern Oklahoma and statewide between 2012 and 2017.

Although Connors offers the degree, ICTC will offer the program.

The program will be housed in ICTC’s new Health Sciences Building, which is under construction, but expected to be completed in time for the first class to start this August.

The program is limited to adult ICTC students who have completed a certain number of college credit hours and have been accepted for admission at CSC.

Application deadline for the 2015-2016 OTA program is May 28. Applications are available at all ICTC campuses or online at www.ICTCtech.com.

Tuition for the one-year program is estimated at $5,200, and financial aid is available. People also could qualify for the Muskogee Difference Scholarship if they live in Muskogee County and commit to work in the county.

Stack said the program is in the process of getting accredited from the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy.


Photo: Hollifield, left, moves a cellphone to catch 8-year-old Zamarie Whitfield’s eye while occupational therapist Christy Steele holds the child during a session at Ramsey Therapy Group.
If a program President Barack Obama is proposing comes to fruition, Dr. Tim Faltyn sees great benefits for Connors State College students.

Obama announced that he would like to “see the first two years of community college free for everybody who is willing to work for it.”

“What we know is that over a course of a lifetime the higher a person’s degree attainment is the higher their income is,” said Faltyn, Connors State College president. “So, we’re really focused on college completion, and we’ve been really successful.”

Connors has increased their associate degree graduation rate by 11 percent in the three years Faltyn has been their president.

“I’m really proud of our team because we’re poised for growth even though we didn’t know this was going to happen,” Faltyn said. “We think this will be great for the community and the college.”

The program proposed by Obama is expected to cost the federal government $60 billion over 10 years, said White House spokesman Eric Schultz.

Students would qualify if they attend at least half-time, maintain a 2.5 GPA and make progress toward completing a degree or certificate program. Participating schools would have to meet certain academic requirements.

The White House said the federal government would pick up 75 percent of the cost, and the final quarter would come from states that opt into the program.

Thirty-six months ago Connors State College embarked on a master planning process that will increase their student capacity from 2,400 students to 5,000, Faltyn said.

“We’ve been preparing for the last three years for increased capacity and growth,” Faltyn said. If the president’s proposal becomes law, “there would be a short period of ramping up to ensure the college has the staff and infrastructure in place.”

Phase one of Connors master plan, which includes $19 million of new construction and renovation projects, will be completed in the spring of 2015, Faltyn said. The growth will be primarily academic space, basic infrastructure and the rest comprised of student unions, he said.

Connors has a seven-county service area that covers 4,553 square miles. “That area is predominantly rural and serves areas that have high poverty rates,” he said.

“That’s why the president’s program could be a game changer, and that’s why if you remove the financial barriers for some of those folks, Connors could have a positive impact on their quality of life,” Faltyn said.

People who graduate with a two-year degree typically go on to get a bachelor’s degree, he said.

“So this program would likely boost their educational attainment in our area even more so,” Faltyn said. “That’s why I think this proposal is an actual investment.”


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Program Would Help With Two-Year Degrees

Student Leaders Attend State Nursing Convention

Two CSC Student Nursing Association members attended the Oklahoma Student Nursing Association Convention in Norman, Oklahoma, where they had the chance to learn about a wide range of topics within the medical field.

Sarah McLain, CSC Student Nursing Association President, and Lisa Jack, Treasurer, attended the event.

“The ONSA put together an amazing convention. The day was packed full of learning opportunities on many different subject matters,” said Sarah McLain, Muskogee sophomore. “The breakout sessions were hosted by Nursing Instructors from area colleges, nurses, and also some great test taking strategy sessions. I enjoyed having the opportunity to attend the convention and represent CSC Student Nursing Association.”

McLain and Jack have shared their experience with their fellow nursing students and believe other nursing students could benefit from attending the convention as well.

“I think that attending the Convention just increased my desire to finish my current program, continue my education, and to never forget why I wanted to be a nurse,” said McLain.
President’s Leadership Class

The President’s Leadership Class at Connors State College organizes and participates in civic engagement and on-campus activities. Students are required to maintain excellence in academics and are provided the opportunity to network and cultivate their leadership skills.

“The President’s Leadership Class is an elite group of student leaders, on and off campus, that work on bettering the college, student experience, and campus, while also exercising and enhancing their leadership skills and abilities,” said Nella Worthan, Westville sophomore and PLC Vice President. “In addition, we also work closely and are exposed to outstanding leadership within the college, as well as leadership extended through the community and even the state.”

Twenty-one students were selected by the PLC Interviewing Committee to become members of the President’s Leadership Class for the Fall 2014 semester.

“Students benefit from being in the PLC by receiving a Regents Full Tuition Waiver, 10 hours/week college work, classroom instruction in leadership, leadership opportunities, opportunities to meet leaders from across the state, networking with students from across the state, and opportunities to make connections to further their educational and professional development,” said Debara Corrado, Director of Assessment and Student Learning, President’s Leadership Class Instructor and Advisor, and Biology Instructor.

PLC students must maintain a 3.0 GPA and receive no lower than a “C” during high school and college work. Students can participate in four semesters of the PLC program at CSC.

“PLC classes involve both instruction and experiences with leadership activities, but it also involves service to CSC and to the community,” said Corrado.

In addition to academic requirements, working on campus and taking classes, students complete a major project, hold fundraisers and participate in community service activities.

“Some examples would be that PLC participates in planting seasonal appropriate plants in the PLC garden on campus every semester,” said Worthan. “PLC works the Hospitality Room for Connors Alumni on all the home basketball games. We recently became involved in offering concessions to many of the Alumni Rodeo events. We also assist in campus-hosted events such as the annual Brain Bowl and the Interscholastic Contest.”

Corrado was the PLC advisor from 1998-2001 and 2012-present. She teaches the PLC classes, advises the students and provides them with the resources they need to complete their projects.

“I set the example and expectations then turn them loose to accomplish the goals that they decide upon,” said Corrado.

“Coming from my background, I never in my wildest dreams and expectations would have seen myself having the opportunity to be able to do any of the things I’ve been able to do through my membership with the President’s Leadership Class,” said Worthan.

Photos: (Top) Debara Corrado. (Bottom) PLC members and Corrado after planting the President’s Leadership Garden.
Fall 2014 CSC Wellness Challenge Motivates Employees to Step, Shrink, Win

For Shawna Carrier and Jonathan Rowe, a heaping helping of competitive spirit spiced-up their recipe for better health as they stepped and shrank their way to become the Fall 2014 CSC Campus vs. Campus Wellness Challenge individual champions.

For the third semester, the CSC Wellness Committee sponsored a campus vs. campus wellness challenge to encourage and support employees interested in making their personal health a priority. Three campus teams – Warner, West and Port – provided the high fives, camaraderie, and a healthy dose of friendly smack talk as they vied to earn the traveling campus wellness trophy and CHAMPUS title.

Unlike previous CSC wellness challenges that focused exclusively on weight loss, the Fall 2014 competition offered participants an opportunity to earn points in a variety of areas like counting steps through FitBit activity trackers, reporting minutes of weekly physical activity, reducing weight and/or waist circumference, and participating in “extra credit” activities like Wellness Wednesday nutrition classes or the Student Government Association-sponsored canned food drive.

Overall, 47 employees participated on one of the three teams with 91 percent losing weight and inches from their waist during the challenge.

Jonathan Rowe and Shawna Carrier emerged as the top individual winners, while the Port Campus (Team SupPORT) earned its third-in-a-row wellness CHAMPUS title.

In addition, first and second place medals were given to the two top participants from each campus in four different categories. Those winners were:

**MOST STEPS**

**MOST ACTIVE**

**SUPER SHRINKERS**

**EXTRA CREDIT**

_SHAWNA CARRIER_
Clerk, Bursar Office
Muskogee Port Campus
Lost 6.64% of body weight, 14.40% waist circumference, earned 337 total challenge points.

**Overall Changes Since the Challenge Began:** “My clothes are so big I had to buy a few new ones. I feel amazing and have been able to get off two of my medications. I feel much more confident and not nearly as self-conscious. I never thought I’d be able to run again, but I am. I can usually get in five miles before 8 a.m., and I remember when the thought of walking one mile was exhausting.”

**Specific Changes That Helped Success:** “I walk five miles at least five days a week, on purpose. I pay closer attention to what I eat and remember to eat to live, not live to eat. I don’t deny myself anything if I really want it, but I make myself earn it. I never reward myself with food, because it defeats the purpose. Above all, I make sure I remember that I am worthy of spending a couple of hours a day on myself.”

**Support From Others:** “The support I have received has been astounding...all the way from Dr. Falyn to the students. Connors isn’t like any other employer...we are truly a family. Without my Connors family and FitBit, I would probably still be sitting at home watching another episode of The Biggest Loser and crying my eyes out...my Connors family believed in me when I couldn’t believe in myself.”

**Future Goals:** “My long-term goal is to lose 75 more pounds, but more than that, I would rather just keep the good habits I’ve made and maybe make a few more good habits. Different things motivate different people. The campus challenges just happened to be one of the things that motivated me. I think it’s a great way to bring people together and inspire them to try to live a healthier lifestyle.”

Fall 2014 CSC Wellness Challenge Motivates Employees to Step, Shrink, Win
Connors Connection

JONATHAN ROWE
Director, Student Activities
Warner Campus
Lost 4.46% body weight, 9.375% waist circumference, earned 498 total overall points.

Overall Changes Since the Challenge Began: “Some of the obvious changes would be clothes fitting better and higher energy levels. That being said, I believe my biggest change has been the way I view obtaining weight loss and the lifestyle changes that come with it.”

Specific Changes That Helped Success: “Besides exercise, playing sports and cutting way back on soda, the number one change that I have made is walking around campus more than normal.”

Support From Others: “Having a workout partner has always been something that pushes me to do better. During this challenge, the FitBit has been just that for me. Being able to see my coworkers do well and achieve such high steps each day has really pushed me. I have received support from coworkers since we were in a campus vs. campus challenge. We would lift each other up and push each other to do better.”

Future Goals: “My long-term goal is to live a healthier lifestyle, which will lead to continued weight loss and a better overall me.”

TEAM Support
Port Campus
CSC’s Three Rivers Port Campus worked together to secure its third campus vs. campus wellness challenge victory. Port Campus Administrator Rhoda Strode and other team members shared insights about what promoted the team’s success.

Strategies for Wellness Success: “We talk to each other every day, if possible. We listen to each other, and if there is a struggle that we can help with, we make suggestions and offer support to help the suggestion work for the other person. We celebrate successes. We eat together. We walk together. When we’re not successful, we encourage each other anyway.”

Noticeable Benefits of Wellness Success: “Morale is very high on our campus because we have been winning, I think maybe it’s a cumulative effect from winning. And, we don’t seem to be all catching the same bug and passing it around like we have in other semesters.”

Employee Support and Success: One faculty member found that walking more increased her connection to the rest of the campus team. Another instructor made a point of talking with all team members with great encouragement. Port’s big individual winner is also its greatest cheerleader. Even employees without FitBit activity trackers committed to healthier eating and getting regular exercise in their week.

Thoughts about the Challenge being about more than weight loss: The expanded point system worked well for us. It allowed some people who didn’t have weight to lose to contribute to the team through exercise. The FitBit leaderboards were great because each week we could see the leaders and shoot for out-walking them. The Waist Out (measuring waist circumference and the beginning and end of the challenge) was a good addition because it made us measure where we didn’t want to.”

Connor's Connection
Faculty and staff were the first to enjoy the new $6 million Student Union during the college’s 2014 Holiday Party. The Student Union contains a ballroom, community meeting space, state-of-the-art dining facilities and three distinct entrances to better accommodate students.
It’s been said your college years are always with you. While this is true, we want to know where you are taking Connors State College! Send a photo of you wearing your CSC gear – we want to see where CSC travels. Wear it on vacation, out to dinner … anywhere you go! Photos will be featured in the next issue of the *CONNECTION* and uploaded to Facebook. The image with the most votes will win a prize. Send photos to: dearconnor@connorsstate.edu.
New bulls are checked in at the Bull Test Facility for the spring sale.