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OU Online Winter Newsletter, 2026



Celebrating Success: OU Online Honors Graduates with Unforgettable Campus Experience

On December 19, more than 250 graduates and guests gathered in the Oklahoma Memorial Union's Beard Lounge for a celebration that perfectly captured the spirit of Sooner pride—proving that even on one of the most electric days in Norman's history, our commitment to our students comes first.

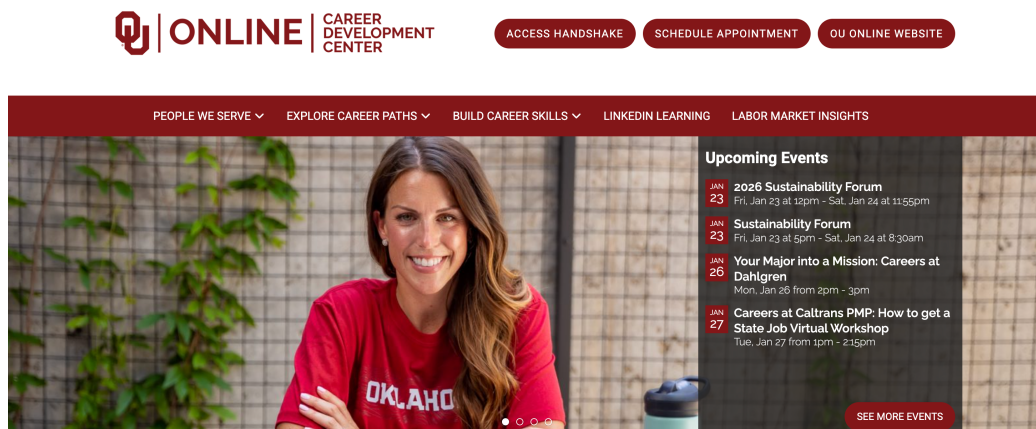
While the university prepared to host the first round of the College Football Playoffs, OU Online kept its promise to August and December graduates, transforming the scheduled graduation reception into an unforgettable tailgate experience. Beard Lounge became a hub of celebration as graduates—many seeing campus for the first time—finally walked the grounds they'd only known through their screens.

backdrop for networking and community building. But the real magic came from watching supporters cheer on their graduates, creating memories that bridged the virtual and physical worlds of the OU experience.

The timing added an extra layer of excitement to an already special day. Our graduates soaked in the full Sooner experience—the traditions, the community, and the unmistakable pride that comes with being part of the OU family.

This reception embodied what OU Online stands for: accessibility without compromise. Our students may earn their degrees from living rooms, offices, and kitchen tables across the country, but they are every bit as much a part of this university as those who walk these paths daily. This event proved that distance is just geography—the Sooner spirit knows no bounds.

To our December and August graduates, Congratulations and **Boomer Sooner!**



Your Career, Your Way: Explore OU Online's Career Development Center

Building a successful career takes more than a degree—it takes strategy, connections, and the right resources at the right time. That's why OU Online created a virtual Career Development Center designed exclusively for online students, bringing professional development tools directly to you, wherever you are.

At career.online.ou.edu, you'll find everything you need to navigate your career journey in one convenient platform. Whether you're exploring new career paths, sharpening professional skills, attending virtual events or actively job hunting, this hub puts powerful resources at your fingertips.

skills, and Labor Market Insights to understand industry trends and opportunities. You'll also find curated career resources, up-to-date articles, expert blogs, and industry news—all tailored to help you advance professionally.

As an online student, you're already demonstrating initiative, time management, and self-direction—skills employers value. Our Career Development Center meets you where you are, offering 24/7 access to guidance and tools that fit your schedule. Whether you're preparing for your first job, making a career pivot, or climbing the ladder in your current field, you'll find resources designed to support your unique path.

Student Spotlight



Chandler Green

Our OU Online students are balancing incredible commitments while pursuing their degrees—from advancing their careers to serving their communities. We're proud to highlight Chandler Green, a student in our Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. Green was recently selected for the prestigious **National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) Foundation Minority Fellowship Program for 2025.**

What inspired you to pursue your degree online, and how has the flexibility of online learning fit into your life?

I am a full-time single mom and work full time, so I knew that in order to reach my goals of pursuing a graduate degree it would need to be online to accommodate my schedule. The flexibility has been incredible. I am able to work, spend my evenings with my son and still receive a great education. I also feel that I get the same, if not better, support from faculty than I would in an in-person program. I love that I am still able to have real class time with professors, build meaningful relationships and feel genuinely supported.

What has been your favorite class or most memorable learning experience so far, and why did it stand out to you?

My most memorable experiences have been two specific moments. First, becoming involved with the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Student Association. Dr. (Katey) Baruth spends so much time sharing and intentionally inputting opportunities for us as students, and because of her encouragement I applied for a fellowship she recommended and was accepted. Getting to tell her that I had been accepted was truly one of the highlights of my experience so far. That moment meant so much to me because it helped me believe in myself and feel proud of how far I have come. I am incredibly grateful for faculty who take the time to invest in their students and genuinely want to see us succeed.

Second, I have deeply valued taking advantage of Dr. (Jordan) Rogers' office hours. She opened that time for us to practice skills, ask questions and use the space in ways that best supports our learning. That time has truly helped me develop my counselor identity and theoretical orientation and feel more grounded as I move toward this profession. I am so grateful for the generosity of her time and mentorship. These experiences have made me feel supported, confident and excited about the counselor I am becoming, and they have had a lasting impact on my growth both personally and professionally.

How do you balance your studies with work, family or other commitments? Do you have any tips for fellow online students?

Balancing my studies with work, family and my social life is something I am very intentional about. I have learned that when I take the time to plan ahead, everything feels much more manageable. I use a planner and like to write the months out in advance so I can clearly see what is coming up and thoughtfully organize my time. This helps me set aside dedicated time for school while also being intentional about when I step away to spend time with my family or take time for myself. I also believe having a support system is one of the most important parts of staying balanced. I am really grateful for the relationships I have built with professors and with other students in my cohort. Having people to connect with who understand the program has been incredibly grounding. We created a group chat for our cohort, and it has been such a supportive space to ask questions, share encouragement and support one another throughout the program.

What are your goals after graduation, and how is your OU Online degree helping you work toward them?

teach in the future so I can give back to counselors who are eager to step into the helping profession. I also hope to eventually open a private practice. Long term, my goal is to start a nonprofit organization in Tulsa that supports youth who want to use sports in a therapeutic way but lack access to those opportunities. OU Online is allowing me to move closer to these goals while also connecting me with incredible resources and people who continue to support my growth. Without OU, I would not have found the fellowship or scholarship opportunities that are helping make these goals possible. The flexibility of the program has also been essential in allowing me to remain financially stable while pursuing a degree that supports both my professional goals and my family.

What would you tell someone who's considering online education but isn't sure if it's right for them?

I think if you are considering online education, it is important to really reflect on what works best for you and your life. Ask as many questions as you can so you can make sure the program is the right fit for your needs. Online education requires discipline and motivation, but it also offers an incredible amount of flexibility and support when you find the right program. For me, it has allowed me to pursue my education without sacrificing my responsibilities as a parent or my financial stability. If flexibility, connection and balance are important to you, online education can be a really meaningful option.

Faculty Feature

Dr. Nate Wiggins

Behind every successful online student is a dedicated faculty member committed to excellence in teaching and mentorship. Our OU Online faculty bring expertise, innovation and genuine care to the virtual classroom. Meet Dr. Nate Wiggins, and learn about the work he is doing with online students in OU's College of Engineering as the director



What makes your program unique, and what do you hope students take away from it beyond just their degree?

The program attracts students who are quickly climbing their career paths, and so as a result we end up with a large diversity of students to learn from, collaborate with and gain a strong professional network.

In addition to our hand-on approach to learning, we offer a capstone opportunity for students so that they can apply what they've learned to either their existing career field or a new field in a way that has potential for publication, patent and professional conference presentation to enhance both academic and professional success.

How do you and your faculty approach online teaching differently than traditional classroom instruction? What pedagogical strategies work especially well in the online environment?

With education and the professional landscape rapidly changing, it's critical to get a mix of current industry trends from professionals alongside cutting-edge technology access. This means having access and learning how to use data and programming tools, as well as leadership theory, so that they are immediately applicable to your work and provide basis for advancement. Our online deployments go through both content specialists and learning technology specialists to make sure that instructions make sense and courses are easy to navigate and intuitive to even the most casual observer. Academic coaches ensure that you have hidden support where you need it most and our program

provides an online learning environment structured for the working professionals in a way that is accessible and inviting.

What's the most rewarding part of leading an online program, and can you share a student success story that stands out to you?

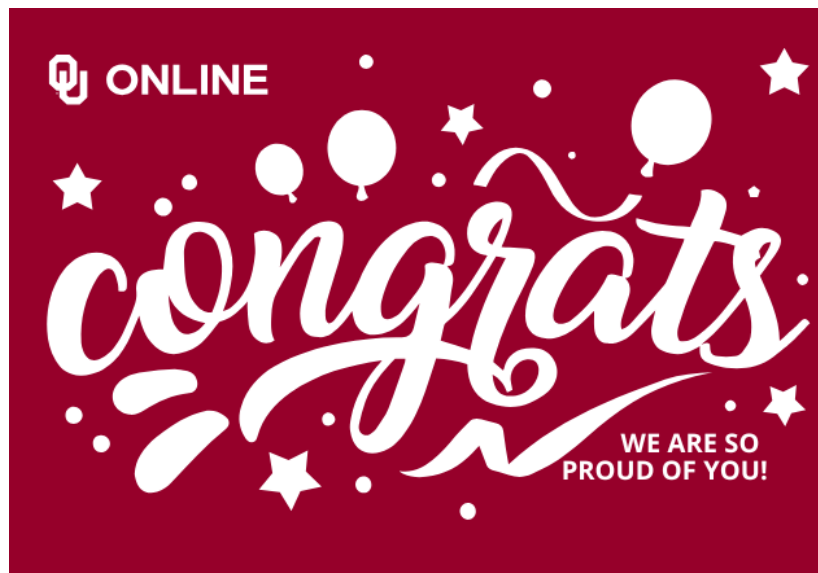
Most jobs get measured in dollars. Mine is measured in student success. I'm in one of the few fields where a promotion isn't something that I would seek. Instead, my success is found in seeing my students succeed, academically and professionally, and knowing that they have a better chance at success because of their OU degree and connections. Something rewarding for me is knowing that a student has succeeded somewhere that they have failed in the past now that they have the skills and confidence.

A student who stands out is one who had a low GPA in his undergrad and so we had to petition the graduate school for his admission. I saw that he took calculus several times, getting an A in the last one. Then calculus II several times. The interesting thing was always the high marks at the end. I talked to him on the phone and asked what he does and he told me that he's a quality engineer. I asked if he's often successful and he said "yes sir, I'll do something until I'm successful and so it makes me successful". We took him on. For his capstone, he worked with some undergraduates from another university. He visited them while on a work trip, handed out cards and later hired a graduate from that program. Our students make work for the other students and we're successful, even if we stumble along the way. That student graduated with a 4.0 from OU.

What trends or changes are you seeing in your field, and how is your program evolving to prepare students for the future?

Can you drive a train, while building the train, while laying the tracks? We're moving at a pace unseen in modern history. "AI is taking jobs" – how exactly? My students are taking jobs, and they're armed with software skills and interpersonal skills in a way that gives them a competitive advantage. To have an AI agent take over a job, you'd need to correctly create requirements for the job (ELM 5573), then figure out if it's economically feasible (ELM 5293) and make sure that it's written correctly (ELM 5543). You'd really want to approach it from a systems perspective to ensure that it's integrated correctly (ELM 5313), using data-driven decision making (ELM 5213 and 5543). You may need to negotiate the best terms and conditions for any vendors (ELM 5423), and so you will need to lead teams with confidence (ENGR 4013 and ELM 5323). If AI is taking over jobs, we like our odds.

Are you looking to further your current career or change career tracks with your OU MS ELM degree and new experience? Cater your projects and capstone to further your career and opportunities and do it in a way that benefits the local and wider community. Systems thinking can really lead to some new and interesting developments, and in our learning environment we can develop prototypes for the next generation of engineering advancement. Enter the program with an open mind and a growth mindset and leave ready to create a new generation of engineers.



Got a promotion? Presented at a conference? Published research or joined an important committee? We want to celebrate YOU!

Your achievements inspire our entire OU Online community and remind us why this work matters. Whether it's a professional milestone, academic recognition or career advancement, your success story deserves to be shared.

Take a moment to fill out our [Celebration Portal](#) and let us honor your hard work. Your journey motivates fellow students and showcases the incredible impact our graduates are making in their fields.

Meet the Team Behind Your OU Online Experience!

the dedicated professionals from our Operations, Marketing and Academic Innovation teams making your OU Online experience possible!

Miriam Olson-Crabtree, Sr. Social Media Specialist

Question: What is your role with OU Online?

I am the Sr. Social Media Specialist at OU Online.

What's your favorite type of content to create or share on OU Online's social media channels, and why does it resonate with you?

I love making videos for Reels, whether

it's campus tour videos or memes. Video content is my favorite to make because it's fun, engaging, and lets me try new things. Not all of our students live close to campus or even in Oklahoma, so making videos of walking around campus is a fun way to bring campus to our students.

How do you think about using social media to build community among online students who may never meet in person?

Social media is a great way for our online students to connect with each other, but it's also an incredible opportunity for us to help create a hub for students to grow together and connect with us. If you're commenting on our social media posts, I'm the person who is commenting back to you! I love having the ability to connect with students one-on-one through responding to comments and DMs. Helping create a positive social space for our students is one of the things I love the most about my job.

What's one thing happening behind the scenes in social media that students might find interesting or surprising?



media? Whether it's student resources, a motivational pick-me-up, or a collaboration with our favorite furry friend, Ellie from the College of Law, I take the time to plan what we post to give our students the best experience when they connect with us.

Outside of work, what social media accounts or content creators do you enjoy following?

I love following local and lifestyle content creators, as well as accounts focused on community outreach and advocacy. I can usually be found watching anything cozy, pinning lifestyle posts on Pinterest, or finding a new read on BookTok.

Clarissa Ward, Course Development Manager

What is your role with OU Online? Can you walk us through your role in bringing an online course to life?

I manage a team of course developers who work with faculty and staff to build high-quality online courses. My team works behind the scenes to review online courses for quality, create graphics for course overview videos, conduct research that informs how we design courses and programs, and much more.



What's the most challenging part of translating a course from a traditional classroom to an engaging online experience?

As a past online student, creating a sense of community and ensuring the course is extremely clear. In person, it's easier to make friends or for an instructor to clarify upcoming assignments. Instead, we need to be intentional with online courses: adding sufficient structure for students working independently and integrating specific opportunities for students to interact with their peers and instructor.

Can you share an example of a course element or feature you're particularly proud of and why it works well for online learners?

When students know who their instructor is, what to expect in their course and why it matters, it reduces stress and helps them stay engaged.

What's something you wish students knew about the thought and effort that goes into designing their online courses?

Each course receives a lot of attention to ensure the course feels organized, engaging, and manageable. Your instructors typically spend months planning and creating content for your courses before the course even starts!

When you're not developing courses, what do you enjoy doing? Any hobbies or interests that fuel your creativity?

Professionally, I enjoy collaborating and presenting with my peers across the state to advance accessibility. Outside of that work, I enjoy reading, walking outdoors, and playing board games.

Praveena Nagarajan, Student Success Lead

What drew you to working in student support, and what keeps you passionate about it?

Education has been a steadfast pillar in my life, so it seems fortuitous that I have built my career around it. I've always had a love for helping people and for problem-solving—student support has allowed me to combine both of those passions in my day-to-day work.



My enthusiasm for education was shaped in large part by my father's journey—he left his small village in India in 1978 with education as his pathway to the American Dream. Growing up, both of my parents stressed the importance of education as a means to create an identity for oneself, to establish independence, and as a way to initiate positive change in the world. As a result, my professional experiences have consistently centered on education, supporting learners across stages—from guiding high school

What's one thing you wish every online student knew about the resources available to them?

Many online learners, especially nontraditional and adult students, try to manage everything independently, so I wish every student knew that it's okay to ask for support! In fact, it's the greatest form of self-care and self-advocacy.

Our students have access to many of same academic and support resources as on-campus students, and those resources are meant to be used early and often. Tools like academic life coaching, tutoring, wellness services, and writing centers play a critical role in building confidence, maintaining momentum, and helping students navigate their goals with clarity. Additionally, professors, faculty, and university staff are there to help students succeed, so don't be afraid to reach out.

Can you describe a moment when you saw a student have a breakthrough or a turning point in their academic journey?

A recent example involved a student who had historically been a high performer but experienced a semester marked by significant personal challenges that created instability in their life. As a result, the student gradually fell behind in coursework. I checked in regularly, and while the student assured me they were connecting with professors and working to catch up, I could see that new deadlines continued to pass and the backlog of work kept growing. A few weeks before the end of the semester, I reached out to talk through how the student planned to tackle the remaining assignments. During that conversation, it became clear that the issue wasn't effort—it was overwhelm and uncertainty about where to start. Together, we organized the remaining work into categories—discussions, papers, and quizzes—factored in extended deadlines, and created a prioritized, week-by-week plan. That moment of organization and clarity marked a turning point, leaving the student feeling more in control and confident in their ability to complete the semester successfully.

What's the biggest challenge you see online students facing, and how do you help them navigate it?

While online learning allows for more flexibility and access, I've seen students struggle with time management and feeling supported without the structure of a physical classroom. The key is to identify and address the barriers early on, connect the student with the right tools and resources to overcome these challenges, and ensure the student feels confident in advocating for themselves.

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- *Communication is Key:* Professors, advisors, and student success coaches won't know how to help unless we know what you need.
- *Advocate for Yourself:* Use the resources, get involved with student associations, and don't be scared to ask questions.
- *Establish Structure:* It's easy to fall behind, so create a routine for yourself, use the aid of calendars, and any other tools to help you stay accountable.
- *Learn how to Prioritize:* Minimize the number of "urgent" things you have to do. Focus on the things that are important/higher stakes and anticipate tasks that will become urgent before they do.
- *Take Care of Yourself:* schedule breaks, step away from your work, and do things you enjoy so you can destress, regroup, and re-energize.

When you're not supporting students, how do you like to spend your time? Any hobbies or interests that might surprise people?

I'm a huge football and basketball fan. I try not to miss any games my teams are playing in:

- NFL - Houston Texans
- NBA - San Antonio Spurs
- NCAA - Texas A&M (sorry, that's my alma mater 🥺) & OU

I love music and going to live concerts (90's and '00s hip hop is my favorite). I'm a foodie at heart. Whether it's cooking or baking, trying new recipes, visiting a new restaurant, or learning about a country/culture through its food, you can count me in!

Get Involved!

[Career Development Center Virtual Events](#) | Please be encouraged to register for any of these virtual events.

[Student Celebration Form](#) | We want to celebrate you on our social media! 🎉

[Student Testimonial Form](#) | Share your story and inspire others!

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Student Support Resources

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