Central Honors Gov. Mary Fallin, Room Dedicated in University Center

Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin attended in late March the dedication of a room named in her honor in Central’s Nigh University Center.

During the dedication, UCO President Don Betz, Ph.D., highlighted Gov. Fallin’s contributions to higher education. “In terms of Oklahoma higher education, we believe that Gov. Fallin made history here. On Sept. 22, 2011, the governor held an important press conference along with the Chancellor [Glen Johnson], and committed our state to an unprecedented plan to change Oklahoma’s future through educating its citizens,” said Betz.

“It was here that she introduced Oklahoma and all of us to Complete College America, and to her vision, a substantial increase in the number of our citizens who will obtain a college degree. At that time she made a vital connection to all of us — between educational attainment and economic prosperity. She’s placed our state on course to increase the number of college graduates by a whopping 67 percent by the year 2023.”

At the recent dedication of the Mary Fallin Room in Central’s Nigh University Center were, from left, Christina Fallin; UCO President Don Betz; Gov. Mary Fallin and husband, Wade Christensen; Chancellor Glen Johnson; and retired UCO President W. Roger Webb.

Attending the event were former UCO President and Oklahoma Gov. George Nigh; former UCO President Roger Webb; Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Chancellor Glen Johnson and Regent Ann Holloway; Regional University System of Oklahoma Regents Richard Ogden, Connie Reilly and Susan Winchester; and members of Fallin’s cabinet and family.

The governor called the experience a humbling one. “I have very fond memories of my years here,” Fallin said, addressing the standing-room-only crowd. She attended Central while working on a master’s in business administration and working at the state Capitol.

“I was a young girl, paying for my own college, but I was also trying to support myself. What I found was that UCO not only offered a great education with great professors — and I certainly learned a lot — but it was affordable to me.”

Fallin said she hopes the students who visit the room, which features photos of her life and career, will see the importance of giving back to their communities.

UCO has a long-established tradition of honoring Oklahoma public servants with room dedications in the university center, including Oklahoma Govs. and U.S. Sens. Robert S. Kerr and Henry Bellmon, and Congressman Carl Albert. The university center is named for Gov. Nigh, Central’s 18th president from 1992-97.
Central remains among the top colleges and universities in the nation, once again ranking as the top public regional university in the state according to the 2014 Best Colleges list from U.S. News & World Report.

Central ranks as No. 29 on the list of Tier One institutions in the “Top Public Schools: Regional Universities - West” category. Central ranks No. 75 in the overall list of regional universities in the West.

UCO President Don Betz, Ph.D., said the ranking affirms the university’s continued commitment to meeting the needs and aspirations of the region through collaborative partnerships and prepared graduates.

U.S. News & World Report releases its list of Best Colleges annually, dividing regional universities into four categories: North, South, Midwest and West. A regional university is defined as offering “a full range of undergrad programs and some master’s programs, but few doctoral programs.”

The rankings use a combination of the institutions’ responses to the magazine’s statistical survey, information from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, and information from administrators at peer institutions, the magazine’s website states. Factors include retention of students, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources, and alumni giving.

Central serves more than 17,000 students pursuing degrees in 115 undergraduate and 59 graduate programs. UCO’s accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Founded as a teachers’ college in 1890, Central has a 19:1 student/faculty ratio.

U.S. News & World Again Names UCO a Top Regional University

UCO, Finding New, Better Ways to Serve Its Students

With a call to embrace change and seek new ways to better serve students, Central faculty and staff more recently offered the following exciting news.

• UCO began offering classes in the fall for a new degree aimed at preparing students for a career in the energy industry. Central’s Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in Energy Economics is being offered through the university’s College of Business.

• Central’s departments of Design and Art recently became the only university departments in Oklahoma to earn accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. The accreditation validates the university’s commitment to “seek optimum learning conditions for art and design students.”

• Central has established an Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The office, similar to ones found at many universities today, will assist the campus community in articulating and implementing university initiatives emerging from UCO’s strategic planning process, Vision 2020.

At the 2014 Oklahoma City ADDY Awards, 31 Central Graphic Design students won a total of 90 awards, more than any other university in the competition.
UCO Honors Donna Nigh, Voice for State’s Disabled

Central’s Department of Advanced Professional and Special Services now bears the name of an Oklahoman who has devoted her life’s work to advocating for those with special needs, Donna Nigh.

A reception was held in mid-March to mark the name change and honor the woman who served as first lady of both Oklahoma and the university. Nigh’s husband, former Oklahoma Gov. George Nigh, was UCO president from 1992-1997.

“For decades, Mrs. Nigh has been a champion for those whose special needs are sometimes overlooked or unmet,” said James Machell, Ph.D., dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies. “In 1982, Mrs. Nigh played an integral part in a movement that led to the formation of group homes for citizens with disabilities in our state.”

Many of the academic programs in the newly named department prepare professional educators who work with exceptional learning needs — special educators, speech-language pathologists, reading specialists, library media specialists, school counselors and school principals.

Donna Nigh, a Central alumna, began her work with Oklahoma’s mentally disabled residents after accompanying her husband, then Oklahoma’s lieutenant governor, on a tour of the state’s three institutions for the disabled. The institutions — located in Enid, Hissom and Pauls Valley — housed 5,000 Oklahomans.

“I felt like those people needed a spokesperson, and I wanted to be that spokesperson,” she said.

Nigh reported that in 2015, Oklahoma will be one of just 14 states with none of its mentally handicapped in institutions. “Because of the Donna Nigh Foundation, which was established when George was governor, we’ve been able to continue our efforts and to help those people that perhaps might fall through the cracks. They don’t qualify for help from the federal government or from the state government, so they can come to us, in hopes that we can help them with their needs,” she said.

Other Recent Top Academic Honors

Central’s efforts to provide a quality education at an affordable price have not gone unnoticed. Here are just a few recent accolades:

— Central’s W. Roger Webb Forensic Science Institute recently joined seven other nationally acclaimed institutions to form the Forensic and Crime Scene Investigation Consortium. Its purpose is to support a fully integrated national forensic and crime scene investigation system through higher education.

— For the second consecutive year, UCO has made the 2014 Military Friendly Schools list, the top 20 percent of colleges, universities and trade schools doing the most to embrace America’s military service members, veterans and spouses.

— The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has invited Central to become a member of its Evidence for Learning Advisory Committee, examining best practices in higher education competency-based education to facilitate the exchange of ideas and jump-start implementation or continuation of best practices with incubator grants.

— Central again has been recognized as a top institution of higher learning for international students, Ranking 14th among all master’s level institutions in the U.S., according to the Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange. Students surveyed cited the university’s long history, small class sizes, quality faculty-student interaction and affordability as top reasons for selecting Central.
Boathouse One Step Closer to Finish

UCO celebrated the on-going construction of its CHK|Central Boathouse on the Oklahoma River with a “beam signing” and reception in late March.

Attendees signed a beam that will be used in the construction of the boathouse, expected to be completed in March 2015.

UCO President Don Betz, Ph.D., called the construction of the CHK|Central Boathouse the next step in a fulfillment of a dream and a demonstration of the power of common vision, collaboration and generosity.

“This is a very special day for us,” Betz said. “Rising just to the north of us is this amazing phenomenon that’s called the metropolitan area — Oklahoma City. Now, 1.6 million people are looking to its future. I cannot tell you how proud and excited we are to be part of that story.”

The construction comes after a successful fundraising campaign that includes support from partners like Chesapeake Energy, MidFirst Bank, Martha Burger, C. Hubert Gragg, the Dobson Family Foundation and Ted Honea.

Oklahoma City Boathouse Foundation Executive Director Mike Knopp cited the Oklahoma River and UCO’s designations as official U.S. Olympic and Paralympic training sites as impetuses for the dream.

“It represents a true spirit of collaboration that began long ago, and now it’s coming to fruition in this incredible project,” Knopp said.

The CHK|Central Boathouse will be home to the Central Women’s Rowing team. The structure will include a live music venue and an art gallery, establishing it as a unique presence “where art meets the river” in the growing Boathouse District.

For more information on supporting the CHK|Central Boathouse and other university initiatives, contact the UCO Foundation at 405-974-2770 or visit www.ucogiving.org.

Once Again, Great Place to Work

The Chronicle of Higher Education named Central as one of the “2013 Great Colleges to Work For.” Central is the only higher education institution in the state on the 2013 list. This is the fifth time in six years that UCO has received the honor.

The most recent honor specifically recognized the university for its professional/career development efforts and for its teaching environment, where faculty believe the institution recognizes innovative and high quality teaching.

Central President Don Betz said the results of the survey reflect the spirit of collaboration, communication and camaraderie among the faculty and staff.