

# OBU

SPRING 2018

## Students serve refugees in Athens

PAGE 9

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As we celebrate another successful academic year on Bison Hill, we recall many successes experienced together along the way. On May 18, we recognized the class of 2018 during Spring Commencement. OBU transforms lives. Our new graduates will now carry the mission of OBU into the next chapter of their lives and into the lives of those they encounter.

As you read this issue of OBU Magazine, you will see first-hand how OBU students and alumni take their life changing experiences to the far corners of the world. You will learn how our team of OBU students on a GO Trip to Greece impacted the lives of refugees. You will see how three student journalists toured the Holy Land while honing their craft of storytelling in the setting of Israel.

You will learn how Ford Music Hall has been renovated and repurposed as the new Ford Hall, now a home for the entire Warren M. Angell College of Fine Arts. You will read how this facility, while still housing music practice rooms and a rehearsal hall for the Bison Glee Club, has been transformed into a collaborative space for all students of the Angell College. You will also read how OBU's Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic has found a new home on Kickapoo, bringing its mission of transformational healing to the broader community while continuing to serve the campus.

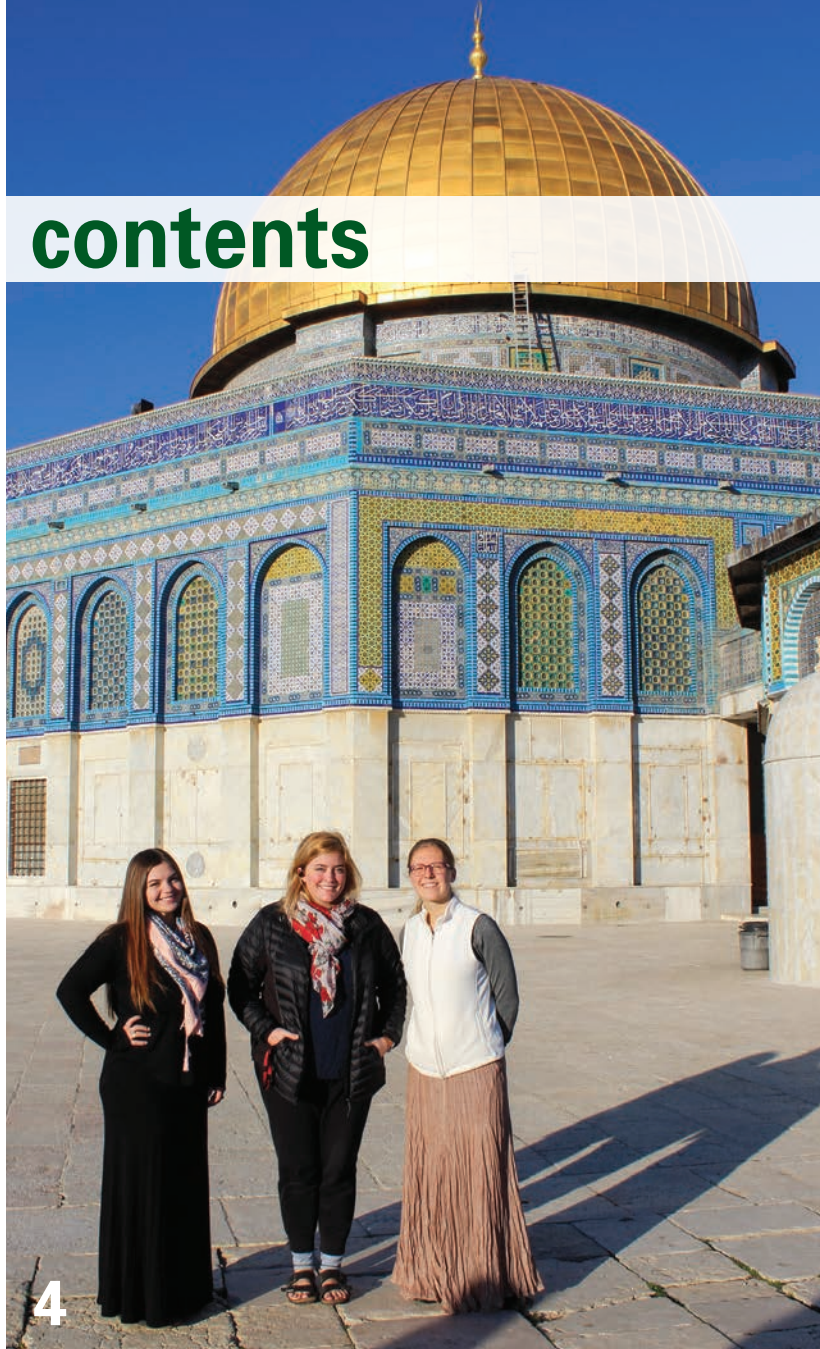
You will read about our Distinguished Teaching Award winner, Dr. Vickie Ellis, and how she enthusiastically connects students with her passion for communication studies, and how she found her purpose in the college classroom. You will learn about six alumni recipients of the Profile In Excellence award and how their varied careers have impacted countless people through their callings. You will read about Dr. Warren McWilliams retiring after more than 40 years of service on the faculty of the Hobbs College.

As you read about these stories and more, I pray that you will be blessed by the continuing mission of our University, that you will be challenged by these stories of our students, faculty and alumni, and that you will be encouraged for the exciting future in store for our beloved University.

May God bless you as He continues to bless OBU!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David Wesley Whitlock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Wesley Whitlock  
OBU President



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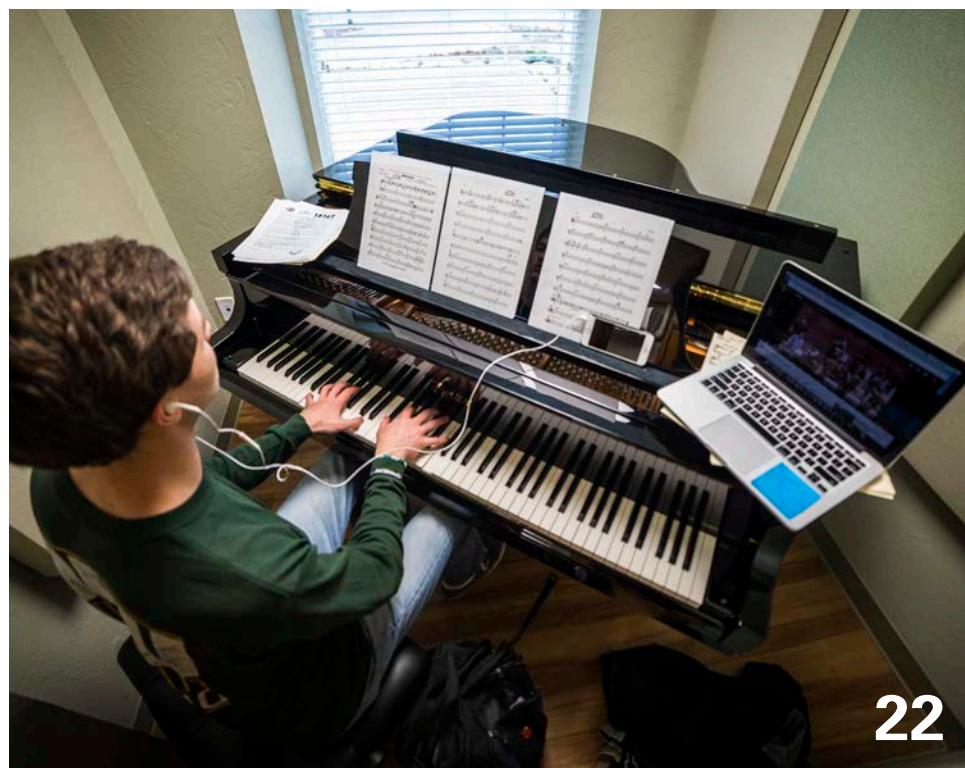


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In January of this year, a team of 17 students and mentors traveled to Athens, Greece, to serve and share the love of Christ with refugees in the area. See page 9.

# OBU

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# Anderson Publishes Book on Christian Worldview



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More than five years ago, Dr. Tawa Anderson began a journey to create a text that would aid OBU students in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of a Christian worldview.

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The full story can be found online at [obumagazine.com](http://obumagazine.com)

Teaching a course on a complex topic, such as one's worldview, is enough of a challenge for any professor. However, Dr. Tawa Anderson, assistant professor of philosophy and director of the honors program, not only met that challenge, but also took on a more daunting task: writing the book.

After five years of research, collaboration, writing, revising, editing, footnoting, indexing and proofreading, that task finally came to fruition. "An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God's Perspective in a Pluralistic World," was released by InterVarsity Press Academic Oct. 10, 2017.

"It is very fulfilling to pour five years of your life into something and see it published on the other end," Anderson said. "It makes you smile and realize that all of the work was worth it."

Anderson and his colleagues, Dr. Michael W. Clark, legislative counsel at the Center of Arizona Policy; and Dr. David Naugle, professor of philosophy and distinguished university professor at Dallas Baptist University, wrote the text as a complement to OBU's J-Term "Christian Worldview" course, offered each year during the January three-week intersession.

"If [OBU's] Christian worldview course didn't exist, we would not have conceived of this book," Anderson said. "I am thankful for the opportunity and encouragement OBU provided to start this project, bring it together and finish it."





# Covering the Globe... Through the Eyes of a Journalist

**OBU STUDENTS  
EXPERIENCE ISRAELI  
CONFLICT, TOUR THE  
HOLY LAND, IN UNIQUE  
JOURNALISM TRIP**

Students taking trips around the world are common on Bison Hill. Global Outreach (GO) trips take place every summer, J-term and spring break, with 200 to 300 students and mentors traveling to all corners of the world, reaching out to those who are in need of love and service. However, instead of going with a specific mission to serve a people group, three OBU student journalists took advantage of a unique opportunity to travel to Israel to observe the people, understand the nature of the modern state of Israel, witness the effects of conflict, and view it all through the eyes of a journalist.

When students Chelsea Weeks and Anna Dellinger, along with December 2017 graduate Alyssa Sperrazza, left for Israel Dec. 30, 2017, they weren't sure what to expect. They traveled as part of a Passages Israel trip with a special agenda focused on journalism and reporting, joining 29 other college students from around the nation.

Over the past three years, more than 100 OBU students have participated in Passages trips. While those trips focus on biblical sightseeing, this trip was different. It was built with journalism students in mind, with a tailor-made agenda fitting their needs. This included seeing most of the “must-see” sights of biblical Israel, but also focusing on the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict and included an assignment to complete a compelling, internationally relevant news story as part of the trip’s curriculum.

The students were recommended by Holly Easttom, assistant professor of journalism at OBU and the adviser for the student-created weekly newspaper, “The Bison.” A group called the Philos Project, which promotes positive Christian engagement in the Middle East, co-sponsors “Passages” trips to Israel in order to give “Christian college students with leadership potential a fresh and innovative approach to experiencing the Holy Land.”

This trip was unique, in that it took the standard Passages itinerary and altered it specifically with aspiring journalists in mind. The specialized program was planned in conjunction with Jerusalem Dateline, a news service of the Christian Bible Network.

Senior Anna Dellinger, who graduated in May with a degree in news and information, and who served as editor-in-chief of “The Bison” this spring, was unsure of what to expect upon arriving in the land of King David.

“While I thought I knew some things about Judaism and ancient Israel, I had no knowledge of Israel as a modern state,” she said. “I learned about a people that has overcome many exiles, wars and transitions of world power. I also learned a lot more about the historical context for the Bible stories I know so well. It made my faith more tangible. As far as journalism is concerned, I learned a lot about the importance of being ‘on the ground’ and not trusting everything I read in the news. Israel is often portrayed extremely negatively in the news, but from what I learned, most of that news is one-sided or lacking in crucial pieces of truth.”

Dellinger was humbled and excited for the opportunity to cover international news while experiencing the Holy Land.

“The opportunity was not one I could pass up,” she said. “Traveling is one of my passions, so this definitely fit the bill. On top of that, it is the birthplace of Christianity, and I wanted to learn more about the foundation of my faith. The

aspect of it being a journalistic trip was an added bonus, because I want to be a journalist in another country. I would have deeply regretted not going on this trip.”

Alyssa Sperrazza, who graduated in December with an interdisciplinary degree in news and information, cross-cultural ministry and political science, saw this trip as a dream come true.

“The trip was pitched as a somewhat ‘intro to international correspondence’ which is something I’m wanting to do during my career as a journalist,” Sperrazza said.

“It’s hard to teach international correspondence from a classroom in Shawnee, Oklahoma, so I knew this would be an amazing learning experience, and I also wanted to see if this was something I really wanted to pursue. This was an incredible opportunity to learn how to report in a foreign country, specifically one that is in the middle of a lot of conflicts right now. I knew I couldn’t pass up an opportunity to report in the Middle East, all while getting to see the Bible up close.”

Weeks, a junior news and information major and current news editor for “The Bison,” learned a great deal during the trip about the professional art of news gathering.

“The purpose of the trip is to take Christian students and give them the ability to tour the Holy Land,” she said. “For me, there was this battle going on between religion and occupation. I wanted to do this to better my resume and portfolio, but I also saw it as a chance to strengthen my faith and my walk.”

“At OBU, news gathering is easy. But when you’re dropped into a country where you know no one, the way you find something is different. To think outside the box with the way you find a story is something totally different. Now I find myself constantly looking for a story in new ways.”

Sperrazza, who served as editor-in-chief of “The Bison” before graduating, was deeply affected by her visit to the Holy Land.

“I had heard from people who had gone to Israel that it makes the Bible ‘come alive,’ and they weren’t lying,” she said. “It was amazing to be able to walk along the ruins of the Temple or stand on top of the Mount of Olives or along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. To be able to walk where Jesus walked is an incredibly humbling experience.”

“The most rewarding part was either Jerusalem’s old city or the Jerusalem market, because we got to experience the culture of that,” Weeks said. “We also got to experience a Shabbat dinner. Experiencing another culture that is part of the roots of your faith opens your eyes and helps you decipher everything that you learn.”

## IMPACTED BY MODERN DAY ISRAEL

The group toured the major sights expected on a trip to Israel. They took in the Sea of Galilee, Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. They visited the Jordan River, where some members of the group were baptized. They visited Gethsemane, and many other locations. They were inspired in their faith as they walked the same places where Jesus and His disciples walked and where so many stories from the Bible took place.

Yet, they were also powerfully impacted by modern day Israel.

“I was surprised by the vast amount of creativity and ingenuity displayed by Israel,” Dellinger said. “This tiny country in the Middle East is one of the world leaders in technology, small business startups, water engineering and agriculture. They don’t have much opportunity to export crops or items produced by factories, so they export ideas and technology. It is very impressive.”

Sperrazza said her perspective changed dramatically on the real status of Middle East relations and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

“From a journalistic viewpoint, it was incredibly eye-opening. Western media has a tendency to report about the Middle East and only show the negative stuff or amp up the conflict to make it more ‘entertaining,’ but what we saw contradicted a lot of the coverage I’d seen. People weren’t that concerned with President Trump announcing the

move of the American embassy and there were a lot of cases where Palestinians and Israelis were friends, not enemies fighting with tanks and guns. Of course, those things do happen and we were lucky enough to go along the Gaza Strip to see what it’s like to live in a constant war zone, but the everyday life almost caught me off guard.

“I learned very quickly that the reality of Israel, Palestine and the surrounding regions is much more complex and not at all black and white when it comes to who is right and who is wrong. I didn’t become an expert on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the short 10 days I was there, but I definitely came back home with a greater understanding of the work that has been done and how much work is yet to come.”

The people themselves were a surprise for Weeks.

“One of the biggest surprises for me was how generous the people are,” Weeks said. “We went to the Golan Heights and saw a hospital where Israel was providing medical care. We also went to the Gaza Strip. One thing I learned about Israel is that although Hamas has overtaken Gaza, Israel still sends 400 trucks a day into Gaza to give them food, water, supplies and electricity even though Hamas sends missiles and rockets into these towns. Israel still helps feed the people in Gaza even when their own people won’t.”

Sperrazza also was startled by the contrast of reality versus some of her errant misconceptions.

“It sounds naive in hindsight, but I was surprised by how normal life was in Israel,” Sperrazza said. “I was expecting a place that was really tense, especially since we went so quickly after President Trump’s embassy announcement, but what I saw was just people going about their everyday lives, completely ignoring that fact that rockets could launch and hit their location in under a minute. It was really eye opening and taught me something I will take into every place of conflict I go during my career. That is, despite the war, life goes on. In a way, the normalcy of the everyday life is how people fight back without ever raising a weapon.”

## PREPARED ON BISON HILL

Sperrazza, who now lives in Washington, D.C., and works at The Pulitzer Center, believes that her education gleaned at OBU prepared her not only to experience this trip but also to learn the maximum amount possible and apply it in practical ways in her career.





Seniors Chelsea Weeks and Anna Dellinger, along with other Passage students, were baptized in the Jordan River.

“I have to give so much credit to our journalism professors, Holly Easttom and Stephen Draper,” she said. “I would never have believed you my freshman year if you told me that in less than four years, I’d get to write my first international article. They both have done a phenomenal job in the journalism department and I can’t wait to see how they continue growing it and pushing out incredible writers, filmmakers and photographers. I can say with absolute certainty that, without their guidance and teaching, I never would have been equipped to go report in Israel.”

Dellinger also believes her courses and experiences on campus at OBU helped to ready her for this experience.

“One of the most noticeable key ideologies from OBU that guided my entire Israel experience was integrating faith with learning,” she said. “In learning about Israel, I was able to pick up historical, political and geographical knowledge and combine it with my knowledge of the Bible and the Christian faith to create a more enriching and memorable learning experience. My experience in writing for “The Bison” and being involved in different types of multimedia news classes prepared me to better document my experience and come away with new perspectives.”

## ENCOURAGED TO GO

Whether students are called to trips such as this one, in order to hone their professional skills, or trips that are intended to serve people groups around the world, Weeks encourages current and future students to take advantage of the opportunities in front of them.

“Going on trips like this broadens your horizon. It stretches your mind,” she said. “You’re put outside of your comfort zone and forced to do something you weren’t comfortable with before. It gives you the chance to learn new things about other cultures and to have those memories shape you as a Christian, as a worker and as an American.

“This experience has made me grateful for so much, because I don’t have to live in fear. When you see people who are constantly under the influence of fear, it makes you feel good that you don’t have to live that way; but you also feel a little guilty. It makes me want to be more active in my community and also to be more willing to go other places. It really opened my mind.”



# Hobbs College Library Releases Second Book of Collection

Through publishing its new library, the Hobbs College of Theology and Ministry finds an effective way to encourage and equip students of the Bible, educating them on scripture, theology and ministry.

The 21-volume “Hobbs College Library” recently released its second book. The latest edition “Preaching by the Book: Developing and Delivering Text-Driven Sermons,” was written by Dr. Scott Pace, Reverend A. E. and Dora Johnson Hughes chair of Christian ministry and associate professor of applied ministry.

The Herschel H. Hobbs College of Theology and Ministry created the library to provide a full theological foundation for further study, equipping Christians with tools for growing in the faith and for effective ministry. Each book is an easily digestible 100 pages, written by world-class scholars, who break down theology for the average person. The hope of the College is to encourage the reader to pursue a deeper understanding of these topics.

With the vision for the Hobbs College Library clearly in focus, this book is designed to equip ministry leaders who serve the local church with diverse levels of experience and educational backgrounds.

“‘Preaching by the Book’ is designed to help preachers and teachers faithfully and effectively communicate the life-changing truth of scripture,” Pace said. “It provides a step-by-step model for developing biblical messages that, I hope, will be a helpful guide.”

“Preaching by the Book” is a practical handbook offering foundational guidance for preachers beginning to explore their gifts and fresh insights for seasoned veterans desiring to refine their craft. The book challenges preachers to develop their style and their substance by considering their unique personality and gifts, the work of the Spirit, and the particular audience on a given occasion. Released March 15, 2018, the book is available on Amazon.com.

“The Story of Scripture: An Introduction to Biblical Theology,” was the first installation to the library. Upcoming volumes will specifically focus on student ministry and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.





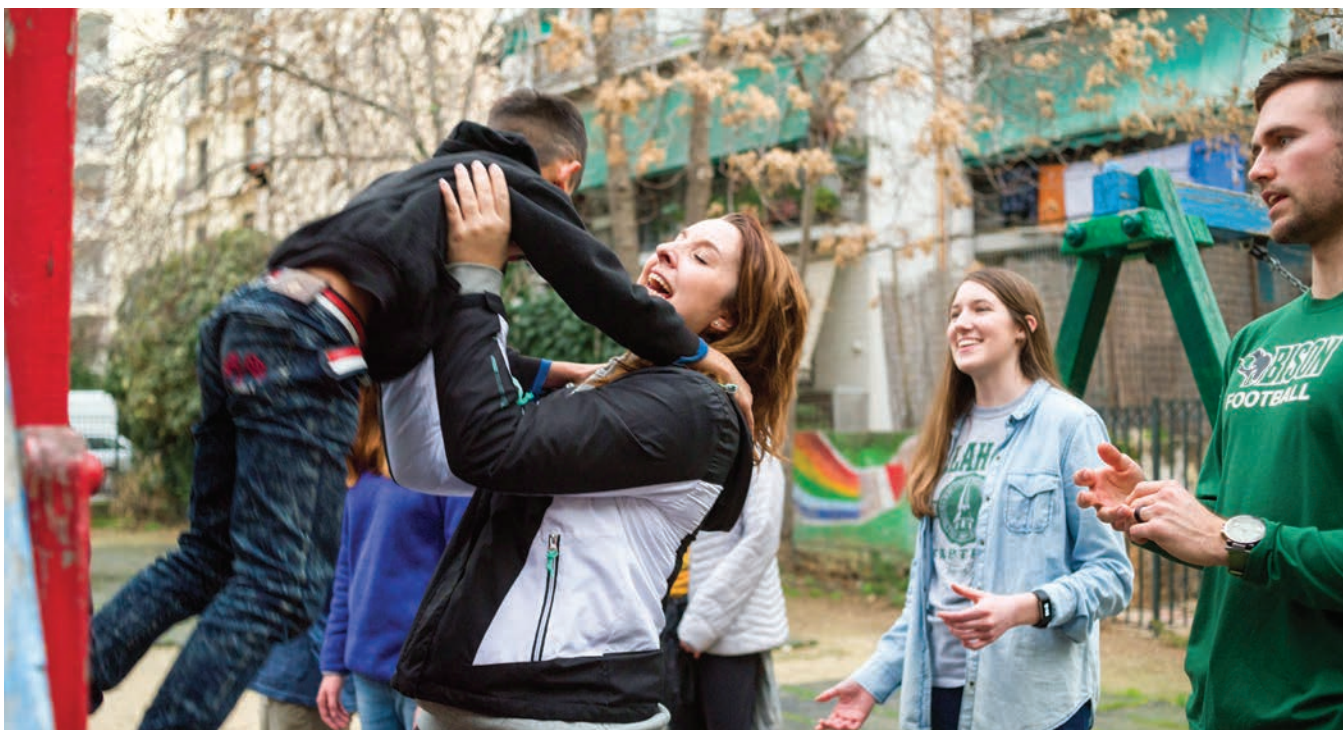
# OBU Team Travels to Athens to Serve Refugees, and Returns with Opened Eyes and Burdened Hearts

PHOTOS BY JEREMY SCOTT

BY CATHERINE FINCH

While OBU is located in the central Oklahoma community of Shawnee, its impact reaches across the nation and around the world. In fact, a central component of the University's mission statement is a call to "engage a diverse world." One of the quintessential ways OBU achieves this aspect of its mission is through Global Outreach Trips or "GO Trips."

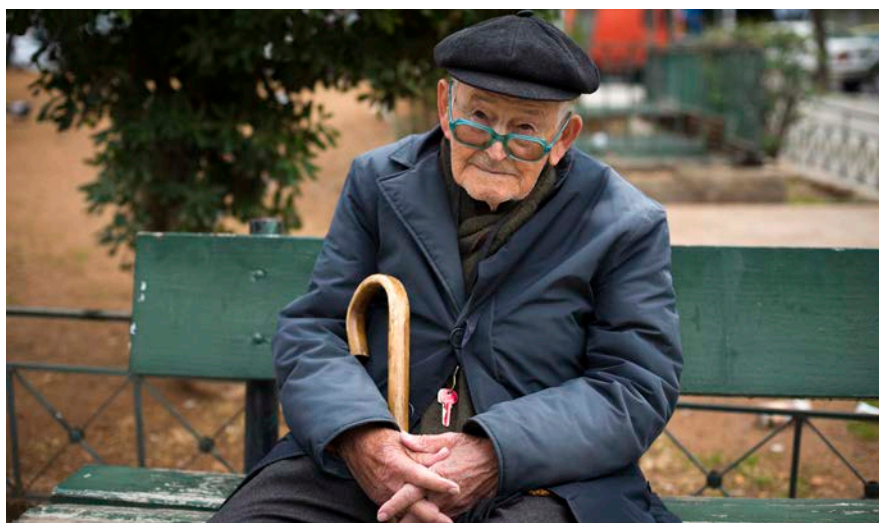




**I**n January of this year, a team of 17 students and mentors traveled to Athens, Greece, to serve and share the love of Christ with refugees in the area.

In an effort to help students think both globally and locally, the Avery T. Willis Center for Global Outreach partners with students, faculty and staff to provide support and opportunities for students to reach out to people in Shawnee, Oklahoma City, the United States and all around the globe. GO Trips provide unique opportunities for participants to learn new perspectives while experiencing the integration of faith and learning.

While in Athens, the 13 OBU students and four mentors who accompanied them spent most of their time in one of the most densely populated places in Europe, Kypseli. Although identified as a “neighborhood,” the area is a far cry from the American idea of what a “neighborhood” encompasses.



Home to 200,000 refugees and immigrants from around the world, Kypseli does not feature the comforts and security one would identify with a neighborhood in America. Rather, it represents a place of uncertainty, where people huddle together to escape the dangers of their homelands while dealing with the pressing issues of poverty and displacement. The OBU team was fully submerged into the world of

these refugees and saw a side of Greece many do not expect or want to see.

Junior science major Kayla Thompson was surprised by what she found.

“I had never been to Greece before,” she said. “Although many parts of Greece are gorgeous, we spent the majority of our time in the more





poor, dirty and crowded areas. As we walked down the streets, we saw curbs lined with scratched and dented cars. We saw buildings covered in graffiti. We saw homeless people huddled in sleeping bags. We met Greeks struggling to withstand the economic crisis, some who have been unemployed for years. We also met refugees from many nations, including Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan; refugees who had left their homes, or what was left of them and traveled across the Mediterranean to Greece for a safer and more promising future.”

The sole purpose of the GO Trip to Athens was to serve the refugee population. The OBU team accomplished this through partnerships with multiple local organizations that operate exclusively for the benefit and betterment of the refugees. One such organization is “Streetlights,” a ministry dedicated to equality, cooperation, community and collaboration for refugees. “Streetlights” opened in February 2010 and offers refugee children a place to play in a safe, secure area. As a result of their efforts, the ministry has a very good reputation in the Kypseli community. The OBU team members stayed in the upper level of the “Hive,” the name for the children’s safe place, and were able to experience the work of the ministry in an up-close and personal way.



Another prominent ministry in the Kypseli area is the “Hope Café,” an organization providing meals and a food and clothes bank. The café goes beyond providing for the refugees and offers employment, as the refugees themselves run the café. The OBU team served the ministry of “Hope Café” by sorting clothes in the clothes bank and preparing meals in the café.

The OBU team also partnered with “Good Samaritan,” a Christian organization that teaches English through Bible stories and offers childcare, laundry services and a clothing bank. The team assisted “Good Samaritan” by helping out in the nursery and showing love to all of the children there.

Many people go on a trip like this expecting to preach the Gospel orally wherever they can find an ear to listen, whether the audience is receptive or not. However, the OBU team learned to preach the Gospel by simply living out Christ’s love to those around them. Loving on refugee children just as they are and meeting them in their place of need spoke volumes to both the children and their parents. While witnessing the hopelessness of the lives of those around them was difficult and often discouraging, the OBU team found sharing Christ’s love to the refugees bridged the gap of the language barrier and cultural backgrounds.



Former OBU photographer Jeremy Scott was impacted powerfully by the experience. As a photographer, he also had to be mindful of the photos he took for security reasons. For many refugees, they are escapees from a violent situation or homeland and if any photos of them were to surface anywhere on the internet, their lives would be in danger. Scott recorded images from the trip with this in mind, beautifully capturing the lives and culture of the refugees without jeopardizing their safety.

For all who went, the response and reactions were similar. Each team member’s eyes were opened to the devastation and hopelessness the refugees faced. They all walked away mindful of how important it is to engage a diverse world.

“I think we emphasize the importance of widening our worldview, but I think God also shows His love in new colors and new stories,” said Jasmine-Rose Mitchell, junior early childhood education major. “I do believe we understand God more when we learn about other cultures, countries and people. I think GO Trips are vital for OBU students, faculty and staff because they are experiences that teach you more about God, more about yourself and more about His people. The trips help you love, feel compassion and explore worlds outside of your own.” ■

# A Biblical Model *for* Communicating

Dr. Vickie Ellis found her way to teaching through difficult situations in her own life and discovered blessings she never anticipated.

**E**llis first decided to pursue a teaching career when she realized, as a single mother of a 2-year-old and a 3-year-old, she needed a way to provide for them.

“I had great teachers when I was growing up,” Ellis said. “One was Connie Montgomery. I met her in the sixth grade when I wanted to be in a speech contest. She was a treasure. I ended up being in speech and debate all through junior high and high school and I loved it. So, when I was faced with the prospect of having two little ones to raise and not having any income, I remember thinking about how I might enjoy teaching the courses I loved in school.”

Ellis pursued an education degree at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and following graduation, taught high school English, coached speech and debate, and directed theatre arts. While teaching, she worked on her master’s degree at the University of North Texas. Upon completion, she began teaching courses as an adjunct at several community colleges in Texas while pursuing her doctorate in education. She and her husband then taught

at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri, for six years.

Ellis’ husband, Barry Ellis, was recruited to the University of Central Oklahoma where he serves as associate professor of finance. They moved to Edmond to be close to his position and a year later, she came to work at OBU.

“I came back to my undergrad communication studies roots with this position,” she said. “It was dynamically related to the research that I had done in education. Combining my love for communication and education, it seemed like the perfect opportunity.”

Ellis tries to make all of her classes engaging for her students, but her real reward is watching them grow and develop into God-centered communicators.

“I hope I don’t have quiet classes or boring classes. My hope is for my students to be fascinated by this subject matter that God gave us,” she said. “I get a special seat for four years of their lives in the communication discipline. It’s almost unbelievable that God gave me this



## Upward Influence: PELZ EFFECT

"subordinates would initiate more upward messages if they believed their superiors had upward influence" (as cited in Putman & Cheney, 1994, p. 74).

blessing as a result of needing a way to provide for my two little ones years ago."

Sensitivity and honor are at the core of her teaching. She tells her students they must be sensitive to their audience because when they honor the audience God has given them for any particular moment in time, they honor Him.

"That's a dignifying way to celebrate Jesus every day. It's an honor to get to teach that because it's so important to God's Kingdom. To celebrate who God made them. For us to not recognize and celebrate that means that we are hurrying too much. We are not being thankful enough about the people that God places for us to interact with. It's a holy, spiritual opportunity every time we interact with somebody."

Holly Easttom, assistant professor of journalism, has known and worked with Ellis since Easttom first came to teach at OBU 10 years ago.

"Vickie is the perfect storm: a generous heart, scholastic brilliance, energy, authentic kindness and an unstoppable force of nature," Easttom said. "She is instantly kind and has this beautiful way of focusing on you when she is talking to you that makes you feel like you are the most important person in the world. She has this great combination of energy, grace and academic rigor. She has the 'x-factor' when it comes to academia and that is something I want to model."

Receiving the Distinguished Teaching Award in 2017 came at the perfect time for Ellis as she experienced

several major life issues immediately preceding and following receipt of the award.

"The timing of the teaching award was a gift from God, a life-saver and probably a career saver," she said. "I didn't know about life on the other side of my dad and then my mom passing away, along with some other family crises that all happened at the same time. The teaching award was a unique blessing."

She credits her opportunities and success to her experiences with and the support of her colleagues.

"When you are around amazing people, it brings out the best in you," she said. "I get to be inspired everyday by amazing professors and administrators. I have learned so much about leadership from my dean [Dr. Chris Mathews]. I love that he is mission focused and human oriented. It intersects in such a way that it is inspiring. I am motivated by him, other administrators here, my colleagues and my students."

Ellis has two children: a son, Branson Stephens, '00, who works as an astrophysicist for Lawrence Livermore National Lab in Livermore, California, and a daughter, Nola Stephens, who is a linguistics professor at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

In her spare time, Ellis enjoys art and Broadway musicals, claiming "Thoroughly Modern Millie" as her all-time favorite.

"When I am watching a musical, I am there; I am on the stage and



in the song," she said. "I also love the experience of the arts and art museums."

But she is most famously known for her love of Christmas because, "If you are a Christian, you get to celebrate all year, not just on Dec. 25," she said.

Her favorite verse is Isaiah 26:3: "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."

"When things feel like they are upside-down, I just think of that verse and I think about His desire to keep me in His peace," she said. "And when I am saying that verse, I am in His peace." ■

# Q&A

Dean Odus Compton

## Working to Help Students

## Find Their Place on Bison Hill



For 24 years, Odus Compton, '87, associate vice president of student development and dean of students, has served as a role model, minister, encourager and mentor through his many roles at OBU, significantly impacting the lives of students and encouraging them to live in faithful service to Christ.

### Q What motivates you about being dean of students at OBU?

A The opportunity to help shape and support the culture at OBU is a major part of my calling and to do that from the dean's chair is both challenging and exciting. I am grateful to be a part of the University's mission as we seek to "transform lives" and serving in this role gives me a great vantage point to do so.

### Q What are some of the most rewarding aspects of being dean of students at OBU?

A Watching our students as they dive into the various opportunities afforded to them to grow into the men and women that God has designed them to be never gets old, whether that is a small group in the dorms, a ministry group off campus, a GO Trip, a student organization, or in the classroom. I love students and have dedicated more than 30 years of my life to seeing God raise up students to go into the harvest.

### Q What is the most challenging?

A Students have incredible challenges today, perhaps more than during any other time in history. It is heartbreaking at times to hear their stories and know what they have been through and are currently going through. The enemy wants to steal, kill and destroy, and he is relentless at times.

### Q What are some of your main job responsibilities as dean of students and associate VP for student development? Which areas do you oversee?

A As dean of students, I give oversight to the student services aspect of the University, which includes residential life, student activities, career development, international student services, diversity and multicultural student services and the RAWC. As associate VP for student development, my responsibilities also include giving leadership and facilitating collaboration within spiritual life and student life on campus.



**Q What do you think sets OBU apart from other universities?**

**A** I believe that our history calls forth for faithful commitment to Christ in His call on us as an institution and as individuals. I also believe that God's hand has been on this place in a real and powerful way for more than 100 years. The impact of this University in every sector of the world, whether in business, education, the arts, ministry, missions, or the sciences, is a result of the stellar faculty, staff and administration that impact some of the best students on the planet.

**Q During what years and in what roles have you been on Bison Hill?**

**A** I was a student from 1983-87, assistant campus minister from 1988-91, and Baptist Collegiate Ministries director/religious activities director from 1991-2002. I came back to OBU in 2008 and served as church relations director until 2010 when I became the student ministry director. In 2016, I was promoted to associate vice president of student development/dean of students.

**Q What does the future of student development look like at OBU? Are there any initiatives you would like to share?**

**A** One of my stated objectives in coming into this position is that the "student" must be at the core of what we do in "student development." Programs will come and go, but we need to always evaluate what we do and where we are going based on the effectiveness and benefit to our students.

**Q What is something that might surprise people about being the dean of students?**

**A** It seems that many in our community think that the only thing I do is discipline. I actually enjoy hanging out with students and hearing about their passions and dreams for the future.

**Q Why did you choose OBU, both as a student and also for the majority of your career?**

**A** I came here as a student because I felt God calling me here and had that confirmed during Welcome Week my freshman year. I am only the third person in my family of ten to graduate from high school, and the only one to graduate from a university. While a student here, I gained a vision and a passion for what God can do through a college generation yielded to Him. This place gets in your blood and it is certainly in mine.



Compton spends time with student Jasmine-Rose Mitchell, a junior early childhood education major from Spring, Texas. Mitchell is the Welcome Week Steering Committee Co-Chair this year.



# Dr. Warren McWilliams: 42 Years on Bison Hill

## *Legacy and Impact*

Dr. Warren McWilliams, Auguie Henry professor of Bible, sits in an office half-emptied of belongings, coffee in hand, exuding a spirit of welcoming and intentionality unlike any other. A few boxes here or there, he gradually packs up more things day by day in preparation for his retirement at the end of the spring semester.

But don't think for a moment this seasoned professor is finished working. Though he has charitably offered up most of his library of books to his colleagues, McWilliams holds a wealth of knowledge within the library of his mind.

And the library is vast, along with his impact on thousands of students throughout 42 years of teaching for the Herschel H. Hobbs College of Theology and Ministry. Among those students impacted, Dr. Heath Thomas, '98, now serves as dean of the Hobbs College.

"Like so many others, I can be counted as a former student of Dr. Warren McWilliams," Thomas said. "His legacy, I believe, is found in the students whom he trained now serving in churches, leading on the mission field and teaching in universities, seminaries and classrooms in Oklahoma and around the globe. They carry with them something that Dr. McWilliams models: a deep and abiding commitment to Jesus and excellence in the intellectual life. I am honored to be part of his company."

### **Theology, Ethics and Beginnings**

McWilliams, a 1968 OBU alumnus, majored in psychology with a minor in philosophy. He became interested in historical theology and systematic theology while attending Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. After earning his M.Div. at Southern, and continuing on to earn both an M.A. and Ph.D. at Vanderbilt,

McWilliams taught two years at Stetson University in Florida before returning to Bison Hill to join the faculty at his alma mater. He soon began teaching a course which eventually became known as biblical ethics.

"In a theology class you might look at 'humans are created in the image of God,' and what does that mean to be in the image of God?" McWilliams said. "The ethics side is the practical application of theology: what could we do, empowered by God, not that we're bringing the kingdom of God by ourselves, but, what could we do to make the world better ... alleviating, lessening poverty, hunger, racial discrimination. I'm not an activist or a crusader, but I'm very interested in the practical application of ethics, and I do what I can."

McWilliams received OBU's Distinguished Teaching Award in 1986 and the OBU Alumni Association's Profile in Excellence Award in 2010. He currently teaches theology classes and freshman Bible, a full circle to the courses he originally taught when beginning his teaching journey on Bison Hill.

### **M\*A\*S\*H, Anyone? (Theology of Pop Culture)**

Many former students and colleagues are quick to remember McWilliams' nearly-trademarked affinity for the TV show "M\*A\*S\*H," which he often uses for teaching illustrations. However, his

enjoyment of popular culture predates and extends beyond the 11-season run of his favorite series.

He grew up reading the comic strips in newspapers and watching Saturday morning TV shows. And though he claims to have a "blind spot for contemporary music," McWilliams said he has come to appreciate music through his family's musical talents.

"Across the years, I've dabbled in what I would call the theology of popular culture," he said.

Along the lines of Robert Short's "The Gospel According to Peanuts" and "The Parables of Peanuts," a book on sermon illustrations from Dr. Seuss became one of McWilliams' first publications. He later became interested in "M\*A\*S\*H" and wrote papers on the ethics and theology of the show. One article reached a national publication.

"[In] the old idea of apologetics there are questions, concerns or objections, and then Christianity offers the answers. I've found that pop culture offers a very good statement, a concern or an issue."

### **Epistolary Theology and the Lost Art of Letter Writing**

Along the way, McWilliams became interested in a broad movement known as narrative theology.



“A lot of contemporary – at least Protestant – theologians talk about the importance of narrative, story, and communicating the Gospel, interpreting the Bible.”

His interest in letters and the influence of “The Screwtape Letters” by C.S. Lewis led him to write “Dear Chris: Letters on the Life of Faith,” published by Baylor University Press.

The book focused on fictional correspondence between him and a former student, who came back to homecoming five years after graduating. This was prior to email, so they corresponded through letters after reconnecting at homecoming. He dedicated the book to his past, current and future students.

McWilliams defines epistolary theology as communicating theological truth through letters. But, letters also play a vital role in his personal life.

“Old-fashioned, snail-mail, handwritten letters are a vanishing art,” McWilliams said.

During his senior year of college, he began writing letters daily to his late wife, Patty McWilliams. Years ago, he began writing letters to his wife and daughters at Christmas and other important life events like graduations and weddings.

To create an illustration for a children’s sermon at University Baptist Church in Shawnee, McWilliams asked his wife if she kept any of the letters he sent her throughout their marriage and dating. Using a box of hundreds of letters he wrote her and another box of hundreds of letters she sent him, he was able to make his point: “I wanted to describe the Bible as God’s love letter to His people.”

### **The Issue of Suffering**

“Suffering is the biggest professional and practical issue of my entire life, academic life at least. It’s part of who I am. I’ve been intrigued by the issue of evil and suffering for a long time,” he said.

Thinking back to his honors project in college, McWilliams recalls writing a paper on research he conducted by administering psychological exams to children with terminal diseases at a nearby hospital. He recalls while he was in seminary, listening to sermons from his pastor on how a Christian handles the loss of a child, having personally experienced the death of his own child from leukemia. This event reinforced McWilliams’ interest.

McWilliams has written many books on the topics of evil and suffering including “Where is the God of Justice? Biblical Perspectives on Suffering,” “Fear No Evil” and “When You Walk Through the Fire.”

“The death of my wife happened a few years ago ... you’ve got the book learning and the theoretical stuff, and then you have the reality to deal with,” he said.

### **Wisdom, Life and Other Matters**

McWilliams has written lessons for Lifeway (formerly the Baptist Sunday School Board) for more than 30 years. Reflecting on how he’s maintained the writing job for so long, he said his daughters and wife have suggested his writing must be decent.

“Both of my daughters were English majors at OBU. It’s a scary thought to have them look at anything I wrote,” he said.

Another possible factor may be McWilliams’ work ethic to finish writing assignments on time.

“I’m so Type A,” he said. “I’m going to meet a deadline – it’s just a stereotype I embrace.”

However, a high work ethic comes with a warning from McWilliams.

“The challenge for everybody, not just me, is balance,” he said. “You cannot neglect your family or church. I could be a pretty good loner, but there’s a lot of difference between solitude and being lonely.”

McWilliams encourages everyone to pursue friendship.

“I’ve always had some really good friends,” he said. “I could track – at least through my teen years on – a person or two outside of my family who was my best friend. I always have some people that are really close and share interests. I use that phrase in Proverbs: ‘Iron sharpens iron.’”

### **Retirement**

“I’ve enjoyed what I’ve taught, and I’ve enjoyed the students, he said. “I have a deep respect for OBU.”

McWilliams said one of the things that has kept him here for 42 years is the collegiality – the friendships within his department, as well as outside his department.

Dr. Carol Humphrey, professor of history, is one such friend and colleague.

“Through the years, I have always found Warren to be supportive and encouraging to me as a teacher and a researcher. I have always been amazed at how much he clearly loves teaching and encouraging his students to grow as individuals so that they can graduate and impact the world,” Humphrey said. “Warren has been a fantastic professor and a wonderful colleague at OBU, and he will be greatly missed when he retires this year.”

McWilliams recently served as the interim pastor at University Baptist Church. He hopes to continue reading a great deal in his retirement, and the rest of his time is up in the air.

“Six weeks following retirement, I may latch on to something that’s never crossed my radar screen,” he said. “I bore easily. I may learn how to sleep in. Or, I might be teaching an 8 a.m. freshman class. Who knows?” ■

For online exclusive content about Dr. Warren McWilliams, including a video interview and Profile in Excellence articles, visit [obumagazine.com](http://obumagazine.com).



## Bringing Hope and Healing to Bison Hill and Beyond

OBU opened the new Ronald N. and Lou T. Kemp Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic in April to provide OBU's MFT graduate students opportunities for supervised clinical experience while providing therapy services to people on campus and in the community.

OBU's Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) graduate program is built around the mission of transforming lives and bringing healing through the power of therapy. Students and faculty offer counseling services to the campus community, providing high quality therapeutic services to bring healing to individuals, couples and families alike.

In early April, OBU opened a new location for the Ronald N. and Lou T. Kemp Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic on Kickapoo, just south of the Art Building and Art Annex. Funding for the renovation of this facility came from the University along with a \$200,000 grant from the Avedis Foundation, a local charitable organization with a "vision to measurably improve the health, wellness and quality of life" for local citizens. Dr. Ronald Kemp, '58 and his wife, Lou Kemp, '57, provided \$250,000 to establish an endowment for ongoing operational needs for the clinic.



The new clinic will serve not only the OBU campus but also the greater Shawnee community as well, and will feature graduate level therapists in the Marriage and Family Therapy program. OBU MFT faculty and the clinic director provide ongoing clinical supervision in order to ensure high quality services for all clients. Therapists work with their clients to encourage a strengths-based approach to healthy living that incorporates mind, body, faith and community. The MFT Clinic commonly treats a range of issues including depression, anxiety, relationship concerns, grief, faith concerns, self-harm, addiction and a variety of other health issues.

The building was modified to include eight counseling rooms and an office for the counseling clinic's director. It also includes space for faculty members and students in the MFT program.

Dr. Canaan Crane, director of the MFT program and associate professor of psychology, is excited about the benefits the new facility brings to his students as well as members of the community.

"I know that this remodeled space will provide a welcoming place for individuals, couples and families to work toward healing," he said. "Our therapists are dedicated to working collaboratively with clients on developing ways to pursue emotional and relational health. We believe that people, working together, can find healing and renewal."

Dr. Tara Signs, MFT Clinic director, is excited to bring the clinic into its new home and out into the greater community.

"I think it's important to recognize the stigma that only individuals with a mental illness or those experiencing a severe interpersonal crisis may benefit from therapy," she said. "The reality is that we all experience life's challenges and stresses. It's inevitable. Sometimes those problems and demands become overwhelming and at times difficult to manage. When this happens, the OBU MFT Clinic is available to provide a safe and confidential space where people can find healing."



## The Marriage and Family Therapy Difference

MFTs are trained to provide a systems-oriented treatment approach to work with mental, emotional, behavioral and interpersonal issues. A therapist may work with couples and families together, or with individuals to address mental health concerns, improve relationships, positively affect the family dynamic and improve communication between loved ones. The job of the marriage and family therapist is to identify factors disrupting the family and work together to resolve them.

The field's growing prominence is partially due to this family-centered approach and demonstrated effectiveness. More than 6.1 million people are seen annually by MFTs, according to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT).

While most forms of counseling take an individual route, MFT's think relationally, looking at systemic change. This approach recognizes that while individuals may make choices and changes in their own lives, the system around them must also be brought into the process in order to maximize the effectiveness and results of therapy.

All courses within the graduate program are taught from this perspective, which translates to excellent preparation for its graduates in their work with families and couples, as well as individuals.

# vision *for a* new century

The Campaign for Oklahoma Baptist University 2.0

## Generosity and Support Impacts Students Directly



Dr. Will Smallwood  
Senior Vice President  
for Advancement and  
University Relations

Another exciting academic year has just finished on Bison Hill, and we give thanks for the opportunity to send forth more graduates to engage a diverse world and live worthy of the high calling of God in Christ. These graduates are visible examples of our partnership in the worthy calling and work of Oklahoma Baptist University. The generosity and support of countless alumni, students, faculty, staff and friends of the University enable us to achieve great things around campus and for our students.

In March, we hosted the sixth annual OBU Green and Gold Gala, with Olympic Gold

Medalist Mary Lou Retton serving as the keynote speaker. This year's gala generated \$40,000 for the general endowed scholarship fund, making an impact on countless current and future students at OBU. Also, as a direct result of the Gala, new supporters have emerged providing resources for scholarship endowments and other gifts.

Our Vision for the New Century Campaign 2.0, with the elevated goal of \$60 million, is now within sight with nearly \$51 million gifted toward that goal. These funds have accomplished remarkable things including the renovation of Ford Hall, a modern



Mary Lou Retton, Olympic gold medalist, delivered the keynote address to a packed house at OBU's sixth annual Green and Gold Gala March 8 at the Chevy Bricktown Events Center in Oklahoma City. Designed to generate support for student scholarships, the 2018 Gala added \$40,000 to the student scholarship endowment.





gathering place for all students in the Warren M. Angell College of Fine Arts. Significant gifts have also supported our new Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic, which you have read about in this magazine, including an extremely generous gift from the Kemp family who was inspired by the purpose of this facility. You can read about their gift and their passion for the clinic on the bottom of this page.

OBU's Women of Vision giving circle completed its third year with more than 80 members joining together to provide a gift of more than \$70,000. During their annual luncheon, members voted to use the dollars raised to renovate a portion of the lower level of the Geiger Center to move Spiritual Life from Montgomery Hall to that location, adjacent to Student Life. This will offer students more space and resources for meaningful spiritual encounters and a more visible space for Spiritual Life in the heart of campus. That project will be completed this summer.

The Avery T. Willis Center for Global Outreach prepares hundreds

of students and mentors each year to serve the worldwide community through global engagement opportunities in the United States and throughout the world. The Harder Missions Endowment, now valued at more than \$600,000, helps offset the cost of these trips for students, faculty, and staff. We are thankful for supporters of this endowment and for the generous contribution of Betty Harder, who upon her passing left an estate gift that established this endowment. She and her family had a passion for seeing more students participate in GO trips, so that they might be transformed as they transform the world with the power of the Gospel.

This year alone, 243 students and mentors have participated in 24 GO Trips, to locations including Greece, Brazil, east Asia, Ghana, Hawaii, North Africa, Ethiopia, Russia, Spain and Switzerland. These trips are made possible by the generosity of people like you, who give directly to students and who provide transformational resources like the Harder Missions Endowment to help reach the world for generations to come.

Since 2009, the University has established eight new endowed faculty chairs and professorships that allow us to recruit the very best scholars who believe and live the mission of the university. Professors such as Dr. Vickie Ellis and Dr. Warren McWilliams, both of whom are featured in this magazine, exemplify the world-class caliber and faithfulness of OBU faculty, and the support of donors who establish endowments helps to perpetuate that legacy of teaching excellence. Likewise, through your investment of endowed faculty development funds for nursing and teacher education, faculty remain on the cutting edge of their disciplines and grow in their knowledge within their fields, ultimately leading to the best possible education for their students.

As we begin the summer and reflect upon this past year, we do, indeed, have much for which to be grateful. As we celebrate these successes, may we continue onward, working together to build on the foundation of excellence long established on Bison Hill, as we strive to forge an even brighter future for generations of Bison to come.

### **Ronald N. and Lou T. Kemp Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic**

Ronald and Lou Kemp visited campus May 16 to tour the new Ronald N. and Lou T. Kemp Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic. The Kems generously donated a \$250,000 endowment to help fund the operation of the new clinic. Dr. Ronald Kemp, '58, and his wife, Lou Kemp, '57, served as marriage and family therapists for many years, investing their lives to restore family relationships.





Ford Music Hall has proudly stood on Bison Hill for 67 years, a symbol of the University's heritage of excellence in musical education. Built in 1951 following a generous gift from the Ford family, it has served as the practice facility for music majors and the home of the famed Bison Glee Club. While the level of performance and dedication to craft transpiring within its walls has never waned, the passing of the years brought with it the physical tolls every facility encounters.

In need of repair and renovation, a new vision emerged for the historic brick building. As Dr. Chris Mathews, dean of the Warren M. Angell College of Fine Arts, considered the needs of current and future music students, he began to see not only the potential that improved space held for music majors, but also the myriad possibilities for students within the entirety of the College of Fine Arts.

When the renovations officially began in late August 2017, Mathews shared his vision for the reshaping of the landmark building to serve as a space where



# Ford Hall

A Gathering Place for the Arts

After decades of service to music students on Bison Hill, a renovation brings new life and purpose to this iconic campus landmark





students from throughout the Warren M. Angell College of Fine Arts will hone their skills as musicians, artists, debaters and actors in a creative, collaborative and inspiring environment.

With this new purpose came a new name, and “Ford Hall” opened for use for the spring 2018 semester. The renovations include a new foyer, modernized practice rooms, a recording studio, art studios, a piano pedagogy lab, an art and animation lab and the Bison Glee Club’s rehearsal room. Pianos in Ford Hall were replaced with Steinway-designed Bostons.

During the dedication ceremony, Mathews built upon his vision for the College of Fine Arts and for this remarkable new home for its students.

“All of these exciting and inviting spaces were developed for our students, so that they might imagine, work, grow, collaborate and thrive; that they may be transformed while also serving as tools of transformation; both artists and artwork, crafted by the very Creator of all things.”

**“IMAGINE THE YOUNG MEN AND  
WOMEN WHO WILL PRACTICE, PAINT,  
ACT, DESIGN, DEBATE, COMPOSE,  
CREATE AND COLLABORATE INSIDE  
FORD HALL. MEN AND WOMEN  
REPRESENTING THE FULL GAMUT OF  
THE WARREN M. ANGELL COLLEGE OF  
FINE ARTS; STUDENTS WHO ARE WITH  
US TODAY, THEIR CHILDREN, AND  
EVEN THEIR GRANDCHILDREN.”**

DR. CHRIS MATHEWS

# 21 FACTS about 21 SPORTS

In athletics, history is important. Bison and Lady Bison mantle the legacy of those who have come before them, continuing to excel in competition and marking their stamp in time. Take a moment and enjoy the road travelled thus far.

**LACROSSE** is the only NCAA Division II program, men's or women's, in Arkansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico or Texas. They led the NCAA in forced turnovers per game, averaging 12.93 in 2017.



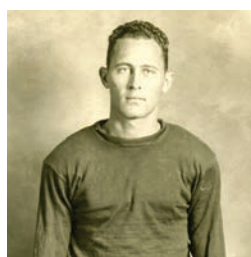
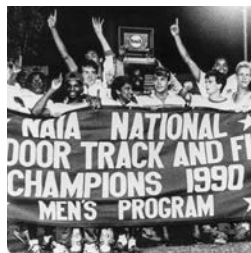
**MEN'S BASKETBALL** was the first OBU national championship winning program in 1966 under coach Bob Bass. The program won another in 2010 under coach Doug Tolin.

**WOMEN'S BASKETBALL** coach Casi Bays is the third coach to reach 100 career wins in OBU Women's Basketball (reached against Kansas Christian College). John McCullough and Scott Norris also have triple-digit win totals.



**WOMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD** has been crowned national champions 11 times with seven indoor and four outdoor national titles.

**MEN'S TRACK AND FIELD** ended a 24-year national championship drought for OBU athletics in 1990 with a championship win under coach Terry Collins and has since added six national titles under Coach Ford Mastin.



**FOOTBALL** player Bob Mastin (grandfather of Ford Mastin) holds the school record with the most passes intercepted in a game: three in 1933 against the University of Arkansas.

**MEN'S SWIMMING AND DIVING'S** David Lambert set the NCAA Division II record for the 2017-18 season in the 50 freestyle.



**WOMEN'S SOCCER** was the unbeaten regular season champion in the GAC in 2017, the first since 2012 to accomplish this.

**WOMEN'S SWIMMING** had three national championships in four years at the NAIA level.



**MEN'S SOCCER** tied the GAC record of eight goals in a game against SNU during the 2017 season.





**BONUS** - Ford Mastin has won 18 national championships (men & women's) in 22 years of coaching.

**MEN'S TENNIS** won the NCCAA championship in 2017.



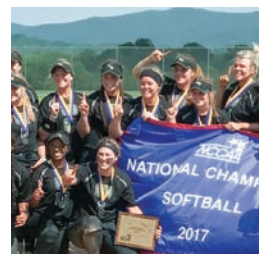
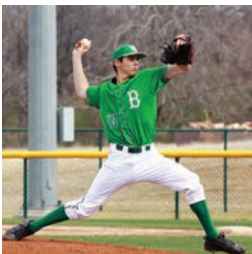
**WOMEN'S TENNIS** won their first-ever national championship in 2017 and played in its first NCAA Tournament in 2018.



**CHEER** and dance became competitive teams in athletics in 2015. In its first two years as a program, OBU Cheer finished in the top three in the nation at college nationals.



**BASEBALL** has seen 44 players go pro, including Julian Merryweather, who was added to the Cleveland Indians' 40-man roster before undergoing Tommy John surgery. Taylor Hearn is playing at the AA level in the Pittsburgh Pirates system.

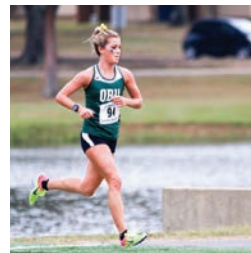
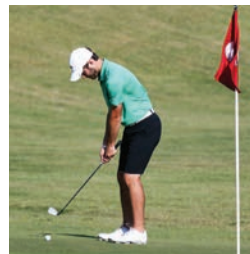


**SOFTBALL** won their first national championship in 2017 at the NCCAA Championships after four trips to the NAIA national postseason.



**MEN'S CROSS-COUNTRY** finished 18th in its first trip to an NCAA regional meet.

**MEN'S GOLF** had its best season with a 10th place finish at the NAIA Championships in 2014.



**WOMEN'S CROSS-COUNTRY** was the first team in OBU's history to reach NCAA national finals, placing 20th. Abby Hoover and Sydney Lawrence became OBU's first two NCAA all-Americans.



**POM**, originally created as a student group, has grown into a competitive pom and dance team, competing in the national collegiate dance championship the past two years.

**WOMEN'S GOLF** finished in the top five 13 times in the past two-and-a-half years.

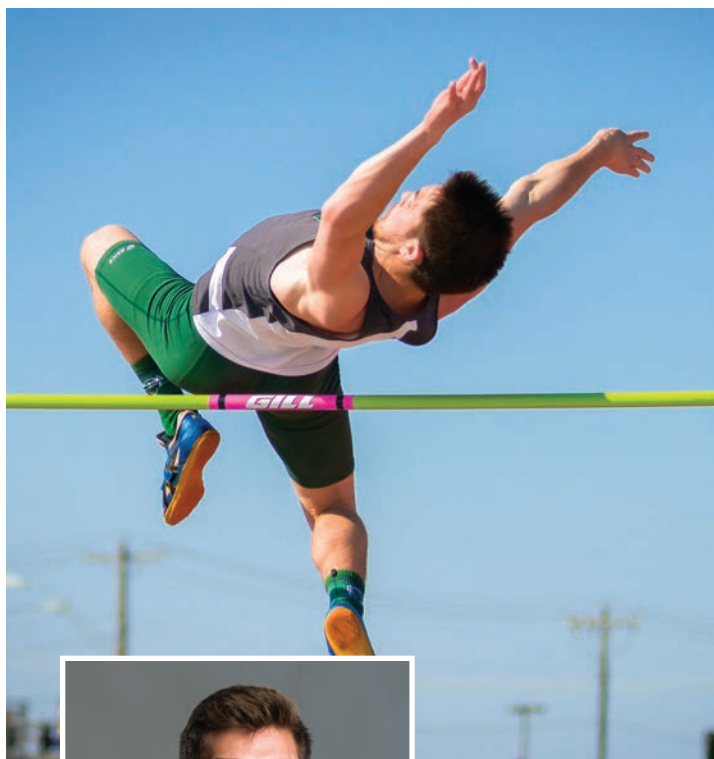


**VOLLEYBALL** won 53 consecutive Sooner Athletic Conference matches, a streak that ended in 2014.



obubison.com

# Dual Sport Athlete Rises Early to Meet the Challenge



**Hayden Ashley**  
*Student Athlete*

**5:45 A.M. IT'S DARK OUTSIDE.** The sun will soon advance upward in the eastern horizon, but not yet. Families will soon awaken to ready themselves for school days, work responsibilities, chores and other activities, but not this early. College students will soon...well, probably not very soon...get up and start off to class. In fact, most won't awaken for at least two more hours or perhaps much longer, on those cherished days when class comes later.

For most on a college campus, not much is happening at 5:45 a.m. unless you're a student athlete, who by necessity must make the time to excel both in a sport and in the classroom.

And so it is for sophomore Hayden Ashley, a two-sport student athlete at OBU who is a wide receiver, punter and kicker on the Bison football team and a decathlete on the track team. He is also an accounting major, hailing from Tulsa, Oklahoma. On most days, he does in fact rise by 5:45 a.m., awakened at this early hour by a phone call from his father.



"I like waking up early to get more work done," he said, "especially to study accounting or 'civ.' I have also found myself studying sometimes 10 to 15 hours on the weekend and 30 to 35 hours throughout the week. Studying every morning and on the weekends has helped me tremendously in balancing both academic and athletic commitments."

Being a student athlete can be overwhelming at times. That's why Ashley strategically plans out his time. Even with the demanding schedule, he thinks it is all worthwhile.

"Being a student athlete is great," he said. "The community in sports is unlike anything else. We are all working hard together to be at our absolute best and to perform well for football games or track meets. Working hard together every day creates a very tight bond and lasting memories."

With his older sister, Hannah, graduating from OBU in 2015, Hayden knew this was the place for him.

"I chose to attend Oklahoma Baptist University because I was not only given the opportunity to play both football and track, but I was given the opportunity to obtain an education from a Christian liberal arts university. I knew that OBU was a university that focused on Christ being at the center of everything," Ashley said.

As if football, track and academics wasn't enough, he is also involved in the Student Government Association, attending weekly meetings to help make campus a better place for all students.

He has found that one of the biggest upsides to attending OBU is the personal attention he receives from professors and coaches.

"The absolute best part of being a student athlete at OBU is that I am mentored by great coaches and teachers that fully invest in our lives to help us grow spiritually, athletically and intellectually," he said. "They want the best for us and push us to be the best we can, and that is what I enjoy most about being a student athlete."

Ashley credits his professors and coaches at OBU for significantly impacting his life and enriching his time on Bison Hill. He respects the way his coaches have all pushed him to be his best, while also encouraging him along the way. He also admires the way they remain

grounded in their faith and instilling Christian values on both the football and track teams.

He acknowledges that many of his professors and other OBU employees have invested personally in him during his first two years on campus, helping him grow in his faith and grow academically.

"The coaches and professors really are what make OBU special," he said. "They want the absolute best for each and every one of us and do whatever they can to help us."

Just as those morning wake up calls from his father help keep him on track with his studies and commitments, he is grateful for the support his parents have given him through the years.

"My mother and father have both supported me so much. Athletics have been a huge part of my life and they have sacrificed a dear amount to enable me to do what I love. Both my parents often make long commutes to track meets and football games to support and encourage me and have been to nearly every one of my athletic events. They really mean a lot to me."

When away from Bison Hill, Ashley enjoys snowboarding, fishing and watching "Fixer Upper" on HGTV with his family, although, he admittedly doesn't have much time these days to pursue those interests. He is also involved in coaching youth athletes on a club track team in Tulsa called Personal Best Athletics. He enjoys being able to invest in children the same way professors and coaches have invested in him.

With such a busy schedule and so many priorities to balance, Ashley does have one OBU memory that stands out above the rest.

"Competing at the 2017 NCCAA Indoor National Championships in Houghton, New York, with the track team was very special. What made this meet so special was the OBU spirit, support and energy that was alive in the facility. We were all in support of each other and showed selfless love. The heart and emotion that was poured into this meet is why that experience was so meaningful. The support for one another, I feel, is the reason why both the women's and men's teams won [national championships]. The whole trip was a lasting memory that has been very special to me."



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## A Ministry of Music and Teaching

*Dr. Dan Hodges, '53, was born into ministry. The seventh child of a Baptist pastor, the church has always been near and dear to him. So, too, has Oklahoma Baptist University.*

Hodges and five of his siblings attended OBU and his father was a trustee from the 1920s to the 1950s. His father, Jesse, attended Oklahoma Baptist College in Blackwell, setting the example for his children on the value of Baptist higher education. He also has fond memories of attending an OBU football game in 1940, when he was still a child, just before the university shuttered the program for the next seven decades. So, when it came time to attend a university, he never considered going anywhere else.

He came to Bison Hill in 1948, originally majoring in government. After two years, he changed his major to music and thrived in its study. He was greatly affected by Dean Warren M. Angell, the director of the Bison Glee Club and dean of the College of Fine Arts, who was his model for choral directing. He also was deeply impacted by Louis Cunningham, his voice teacher, who was his model for voice instruction and later his colleague.

It was during his time at OBU that Hodges met his wife. In 1949, the Bison Glee Club performed at the Southern Baptist Convention in Oklahoma City. While there, Hodges met a young lady named **June (Terrell), ex '51**, who changed his life forever. She was performing in a trio with a group from out of state. The two met at a local

restaurant when they all went out to eat together.

That fall, June came to OBU as a student. They began dating and were married in 1951 while both were still students. He still grins at the fact that he became known as the first member of the Bison Glee Club to take his wife on tour, as June was part of the Glee Club as one of the Little Sisters. He loved his time in the Club, and spent time serving both as the group's president and student director.

Following their time at OBU, they entered the ministry together and served the Lord in churches in Oklahoma, North Carolina and Texas. Those first 16 years away from Bison Hill were spent in church music and youth ministry, continuing education and raising three children. The superior quality of the education received at OBU propelled Hodges to the top of his profession, as many churches sought out OBU graduates to serve in their churches. His years on campus instilled within him a passion for music, faith and service. During his ministry years, Hodges earned a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

In 1969, Hodges was hired at OBU as a music professor and taught voice, music theory, humanities and many other classes. He spent the next three decades teaching students, while his wife served for 30

years as the secretary and administrative assistant to the OBU president. While on faculty at OBU, he earned a Ph.D. in Music from the University of Oklahoma.

Hodges recalled the most rewarding part of his job was to see his students, choir members and young people succeed. He always enjoyed having students come back to visit over the years and has been blessed by the many lifelong friendships from the churches he served and the students he taught.

Hodges still calls Shawnee home. He and June built their lives in the community, living there the better part of five decades before her passing in 2015 after 64 years of marriage. They spent many years serving as active members of First Baptist Church of Shawnee, where he directed a senior adult choir for 21 years and June directed the children's choir for 42 years. During their lives, they spent time in 24 countries and spent a good amount of time traveling with the Singing Churchmen and Singing Churchwomen of Oklahoma. Yet, no matter the distance spanned, Bison Hill was never far from their hearts.

"Other than 16 years in church work, the rest of my life has been associated with OBU," he said. "It's very near and dear to me, and it has been all these years. I love OBU and will continue to love it." ■



# Answering the Call to Lead

*Using the lessons he learned on Bison Hill, Michael Wood, '03, oversees the spiritual direction of almost 6,000 church attendees stretching across three separate locations.*



Currently the lead pastor of First West in Monroe, Louisiana, Wood values his time on Bison Hill because of the impact it made on his life.

“Much of who I am today is built on the foundation of my four years at OBU,” he said. “The relationships I built with professors and friends, serving in a local church, and meeting my wife are just a few of the many significant aspects of my OBU years.”

From the first moment Wood laid eyes on OBU's campus, he knew it was where he belonged.

“I came to Shawnee with my cousin who coached baseball because one of his players was trying out at St. Gregory's,” he said. “He took me through OBU's campus and began telling me about the school. I was hooked from that moment on. There was never any question that OBU was where I would attend.”

During his time at OBU, Wood quickly discovered how much his professors cared for not only his education but also his relationship with Christ. Wood especially admired both Dr. Bobby Kelly, Ruth Dickinson professor of religion, and Dr. Tom Wilks, professor emeritus of religious education, for their commitment to his spiritual growth.

“It was evident that these men cared about me as a person,” he said. “They pushed me to grow in my faith and helped nurture a deeper understanding of God's Word and life in the ministry.”

After graduating in 2003, Wood and his wife, Abby, ex. '02, spent a short time in Tulsa before moving to Plano, Texas. While there, he served on staff as a minister to ninth and 10th-grade students at Prestonwood Baptist Church and attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 2009, Wood and his family moved to First West, a church in West Monroe, Louisiana, to serve as the student pastor. After five years in the student pastor role, he was called from more than 100 candidates to serve as the lead pastor.

At the age of 33, Wood is one of the youngest lead pastors in the church's history, and his transition marks the first time a lead pastor has been promoted from within the church's staff.

Now responsible for the overall leadership of three separate campuses and their almost 6,000 attendees, Wood often relies on the lessons and skills he learned on Bison Hill to better serve his congregation.

“There's no doubt that receiving a Christian liberal arts education prepared me for my future,” he said. “I probably didn't appreciate it as much at the time

but having such a well-rounded education has given me the ability to connect with people from all walks of life. I am a better pastor because of my time at OBU.”

Though he has been leading his multi-campus congregation for more than three years, Wood remembers a time when such leadership was overwhelming.

“The greatest challenge in leading a church like First West is having to trust and delegate the ministry to your staff and lay leadership,” he said. “Thankfully, we have a great staff team and lay leadership, but it can often be tough not to be highly involved in every ministry opportunity.”

As part of his leadership over the First West campuses, Wood oversees hundreds of paid and volunteer staff serving the church in various ways. Serving as a leader to such a widespread congregation has required him to balance the historical roots of the church with the vision of its future. Each week, he encounters new challenges to produce sound biblical content and effective leadership.

Though his work is not without its difficulties, Wood is happy to find himself in a place where he can use the skills he has learned to serve the kingdom of God.

“Nothing compares to seeing the Spirit at work,” he said.



## From Bison Hill to the Big Apple

*OBU Alumni Chris Cragin-Day, '99, and Steve Day, '98, met, fell in love and honed their craft on Bison Hill, laying the foundation for career success in New York City and across the nation.*

When Chris Cragin came to Bison Hill as a student, she was already home. She was a fourth generation Bison, with green and gold running through her veins. Her sister, Kim, also attended OBU and her father, Dr. John Cragin, is professor of social entrepreneurship and international business. Her mother, Becky, worked for many years as the University's comptroller.

For Steve Day, the path was a bit different. He wanted to attend a Christian college and liked what he saw from OBU's theatre department.

As fate would have it, the two co-starred in the play, "As You Like It," on campus, with Chris playing Rosalind and Steve portraying Orlando. They were both theater majors and soon began dating. The rest is history.

Fast forward 20 years after Steve's graduation and 19 years after Chris's, and they are both enjoying wild success in their career fields. Steve founded ideaMachine Studio and Whiteboard Animation Studio and the two production studios have won multiple Telly Awards and achieved national recognition. Whiteboard is a pioneer in videos where hands draw images on a whiteboard, while ideaMachine develops explainer videos. They have animated for Trader Joe's, NBC Universal, Starbucks, the United Nations,

Marvel Studios, ESPN and more. Their work has aired on "The Today Show" and premiered at Comic Con. Other notable projects include illustrating on NBC live for presidential debates, introducing the Globe Life Stadium for the Texas Rangers, creating animations to court top-talent for the Houston Rockets, and introducing the Trinity Wars for DC comics.

Chris also is enjoying tremendous success as a playwright, librettist and screenwriter. Her plays and musicals have been produced in New York City and around the country, including Oklahoma City and Tulsa. She was one of 12 playwrights selected for the prestigious Emerging Writers Group at The Public Theatre in 2008. She is the co-founder and artistic director of Firebone Theatre, which produces faith-based plays. She teaches writing and theater at The King's College in Manhattan.

Their time on Bison Hill prepared them well for their careers and laid the foundation for the successes they have since enjoyed.

"We both had many opportunities to act, direct, stage manage and design shows at OBU, and those opportunities taught us to problem solve, collaborate and do scary things," Chris said. "Steve began his marketing career by marketing the plays we did there. It's also where he began

building his skills in graphic design. Both marketing and graphic design are a big part of his business now."

They recounted some specific professors who impacted them significantly and who helped build the necessary skills for success in their careers.

"Both Don Sandley and Marion Castleberry, the two successive theater department heads, invested greatly in our artistic growth, and we are thankful to them for that," Chris said. "I was also greatly influenced by Dr. Carolyn Cole."

After their time at OBU, they worked for Burning Coal Theater in North Carolina, both as actors and theater technicians. From there, they went to Baylor University where Castleberry was then running the graduate theater program and where Chris earned a Master of Fine Arts in Theater.

"While in grad school at Baylor, we did an internship with Carolyn Rossi Copeland, a Broadway producer in New York City," Chris said. "At the end of that internship, she offered us both jobs, so we moved to New York City to work with her."

Now, Steve owns and runs his animation studio in Brooklyn, while Chris works as a professional playwright and as an assistant professor of English and theater



at The King's College, where she has served on faculty since 2011.

Along with their successes, the duo also faces challenges in their work.

"Steve now does the work of a small-business owner and has all of the challenges that come along with any small business," Chris said. "Many of his challenges have come from the speed at which his company has grown, so those are good challenges. My work as a playwright has also seen great success, but every project is different from the ones before and requires new skills, new tools, new approaches. I enjoy that aspect of the work, though. My work as a professor also includes the challenges of helping young artists navigate what it means to be a theater professional in New York."

In the course of running both WhiteboardAnimation and ideaMachine studio, Steve has been a featured guest with the BBC, the History Channel, NPR's Money Matters and ESPN. The studios have won 21 Telly awards, and he has directed animation campaigns for Gluten-free Cheerios, Mobil Oils' 90th anniversary, the ESPN ESPY awards, and the Elmo Xbox game. He has won a Drama League fellowship and he is a Lincoln Center directing lab member. He has worked with artists such as Uzo Aduba (Emmy Winner as "Crazy Eyes" from "Orange is the New Black"), Joanna Gleason (Three-time Tony Award nominee.), Keir Dullea (Golden Globe winner for "2001: A Space Odyssey"), Tom Green and Geoff Johns (DC Comics Chief Creative Officer).

While Steve's drawings and animations brought the company into existence, he began his career directing for the theater, where his productions won an NYJT award and nomination, a Drama League fellowship, and a membership with the Lincoln Center directing lab. He also directed and developed "Son of a Gun," a National Music Theatre Conference winner.

Steve has found that the studio's success is owed in part to its rigid hiring, accepting only the best talent. The studio receives 300 applicants per position, and they make it a practice to hire top-notch artists that have worked for Cartoon Network, Marvel Studios, Hornet Inc., Nickelodeon and more.

In their studio commercial, he emphasizes this idea. "The real secret to our success is the incredible talent found in New York City," he said. "Our artists don't live for profit, they live to make great art."

He credits his time on Bison Hill with helping him build a successful company.

"My animation studio is built on collaboration," he said. "The company is made up of so many talented artists and creators, together we are far more than the sum of their parts. I learned the value of collaboration, and how to empower creative people to be their best, at OBU. Those lessons are the heart of my business today."

He hopes to reinvent the animation and explainer video business with the personal style he received from his training in the OBU Theatre program.

"Dr. Castleberry taught me how to understand stories and the way that audiences perceive those stories," he said. "That knowledge is huge for companies."

Chris's success has been equally impressive, and her play, "Martin Luther on Trial," commissioned by and developed with Max McLean, was presented in New York by Fellowship of the Performing Arts. It enjoyed an off-Broadway run in 2017, a national tour in 2017, and has another national tour coming up this summer.

Other recent New York productions of her work include "The Selfish Giant," a musical adaptation of Oscar Wilde's fairy tale co-written with Michael Castillejos; "Son of a Gun," co-written with Don and Lori Chaffer; and "Emily," produced by

Firebone Theatre. "Son of a Gun" received much acclaim and was a finalist for the Richard Rogers Award. Her musical, "The Unusual Tale of Mary and Joseph's Baby," co-written with Don Chaffer, played in the 2016 NYC Fringe, had a Midwest tour by River and Rail Theater in 2017, and has another tour in the works for 2018.

Chris's work has been presented by Burning Coal Theater, The Civilians, The Public, Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, No Passport Theater, Fellowship for the Performing Arts, Acacia Theater, the Keller Theater, Art Within Theater, Firebone Theatre, New Jersey One-Minute Play Festival, the Southeastern Theater Conference, Baylor University, Azusa Pacific University and Gardner-Webb University. Chris has received commissions from Pacific Theater, Fellowship of the Performing Arts, Spark and Echo Arts, and ArtWithin.

Even as their careers have flourished and as they have achieved success beyond their wildest dreams, the two still think fondly and often of their time on Bison Hill. One of their favorite OBU memories is when their theater group held a weekly Bible study at a secret spot in Craig-Dorland Theater inside Shawnee Hall. They made many cherished memories praying together there with their good friends, forging their faith and developing into the artists they are today.

Steve offered some valuable advice to current and future students on Bison Hill.

"OBU is an environment where you truly can get back what you put in to your time as a student. Make the most of it, stay as involved as you can and build lasting relationships. I built lifelong relationships that I value as much as anything. Even now, from my office in New York, I stay in touch with friends from OBU."

Along with their career success, the Days have been blessed with two children, their daughter Kansas and their foster son Noah.



## A Product of Two Worlds

*Elizabeth Bird, '98, has always been aware of the influence of two different worlds on her life: Keetoowah Cherokee and Southern Baptist.*

Growing up in a home that valued both Christianity and her Keetoowah Cherokee heritage, Elizabeth Bird was always a driven woman. She knew from a young age that if she earned good grades in school, she could go anywhere she wanted for college, and that's exactly what she did. In 1991, she became the first female student from Tahlequah and the first Keetoowah Cherokee to graduate from the University of Notre Dame. A few years later, she began taking classes at OBU, graduating with her second bachelor's degree in 1998. But she wasn't finished with school just yet. In 2007, she graduated from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity.

Bird had many reasons for wanting to study. "My first degree was for my people," she said. "My second degree was for me. I wanted to prove to myself that my brain could still study. And my third degree was for God. I went to prepare to do His service better, to be a better Sunday school teacher."

Growing up with a matrilineal matriarchal heritage, Bird values respect and equality for women. She explained that in her childhood, this was biblically modeled through the strong nature of the women in her family. As the head of the house, the man made the decisions, but women

support their husbands, give their opinions and pray for the family every day, she said.

"I've always been aware that I live in a family that is a subculture in the U.S.," she said. "In school, I always knew where I came from and focused on my studies to be the best steward. I can't break from either culture, but my Christianity comes first. As a result, I understand equality. I am equal to everyone else in the kingdom of God."

Bird began taking classes through OBU in 1995 because she wanted to challenge herself. During her time on Bison Hill, Dr. Monroe Palmer made a great impact on her.

"Dr. Palmer had a loving warmth about him," she said. "He was fun, gentle and had a sense of humor. I remember that there were not many women in my religion classes, in fact there were only about six. I got into a discussion with another student about the math in the story of Gideon and his army. I had just studied the story and remembered all of the different numbers, but the other student didn't believe me. He eventually came around and admitted that I was right, and that I knew what I was talking about when it came to the Bible. What stood out the most to me was that even

though we disrupted class, Dr. Palmer just let us go about it. He let me defend myself and my knowledge. He understood that I needed to show that I was an equal."

Since graduating, Bird has served as the self-governance coordinator for the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, an adjunct professor in the OBU School of Christian Studies and the Native American director for the Notre Dame Alumni Association board of directors.

Bird currently works as the customer service coordinator for Oklahoma City Galaxy Home Recreation. She says that she is learning new skills that she has never had the opportunity to learn before.

"God is currently giving me experiences to bolster executive work," she said. "I feel like He has something big coming up for me in the future and I must be ready."

She volunteers with the city of Tahlequah and uses her seminary experience as the education director at her church. Her hobbies include reading the Bible and adventure stories, cross-stitch, knitting on a loom, needle point and having lunch with a group of ladies who all volunteer in Tahlequah. ■



# Remaining Joyful Through the Trials of Life

*Jeff De Vries, '93, humbly ministers behind the scenes in television production. One frame at a time, he hopes to relay the love of Christ to the surrounding community.*



During his time on Bison Hill, De Vries claims to have been a “relative unknown.” Fast forward 25 years to present day, and the OBU telecommunications graduate has claimed several national awards and regional Emmy’s for his work on “Primary Focus,” a nationally syndicated, Christian newsmagazine show.

Despite continuing to receive awards for his directing and producing for the Chicago-based Total Living Network, De Vries still claims to be a “relative unknown.”

“I feel awkward focusing on my successes because it’s not the way I was raised,” De Vries said. “I am merely a servant who is glad to be a part of what God is doing, and He deserves all the credit.”

From a young age, De Vries passionately wanted to become a missionary. Having traveled to Germany twice as an exchange student in high school, he had planned on preparing for foreign missions and studying the German language so he could eventually plant churches overseas. He decided to attend OBU to follow that plan.

“It is difficult to imagine what life would have been like had I not gone to OBU,” he said. “College years are foundational years, and for me, they were transitional years.”

The summer before his sophomore year, De Vries developed a severe skin condition that greatly affected his ability to participate in school. He would break out in hives, shake uncontrollably and experience terrible pain. The doctors and specialists were unsure how to treat him.

“After wrestling with God, I rested in the fact that if God could solve my biggest problem of eternal salvation, He could handle my current problem,” he said.

The doctor found a solution to help mask the issues he experienced, enabling him to return to school. Though the skin condition continued to affect him during his sophomore year, he was able to find his stride when he changed his major to telecommunications during his junior year.

Thanks to his telecommunications professors Dr. Roger Hadley and Dr. David Byland he and students like him were able to use equipment early on in their college careers, De Vries said.

“I got to learn all the positions on a TV crew at OBU, from studio production to field shooting, from writing and producing to editing and on-camera reporting,” he said. “My professors simulated real career level expectations and they were great mentors from both creative and technical standpoints.”

Though he changed his major, he never lost his heart for missions, continuing his education at Moody Bible Institute where he earned a Graduate Studies Program certificate.

Since 2004, De Vries has worked in a variety of roles for the Total Living Network, the most recent as the director of community relations.

“I have had to re-invent my career about every five years since graduating. OBU was the perfect training for me,” he said. “The role in the community is what I love most. With a heart for ministry and skills for media, I have been able to partner with leaders and ministries in the area across several groups and nationalities.”

In co-producing the TLN show “Faith Chicago,” De Vries and his team highlight the good news happening in Chicagoland, dealing with issues facing the area and exposing Christians to other believers with different backgrounds. The National Religious Broadcasters recently awarded “Faith Chicago” as 2018’s Television Program of the Year.

In his free time, De Vries loves spending time with his family most. He and his wife, Aurora, have two sons, Matthew “Buddy” and Charlie. He can also be found playing bass in his bluegrass Gospel band, “Just Over Yonder.”

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