

OBU

MAGAZINE

HOPE AND
PROMISE
IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

FROM THE PRESIDENT



DR. HEATH A. THOMAS

became OBU's 16th president Jan. 1, 2020, less than three months before the pandemic hit Oklahoma sending OBU's students and employees home in mid-March 2020 to finish out the semester remotely.

But OBU charged forward to bring students and employees back to campus for the fall semester to provide Christian liberal arts education on-campus throughout the past academic year. With roughly 90% of classes meeting in-person, the University followed safety protocols with face coverings, physical distancing, daily health screenings, regular COVID-19 testing, and online chapel services.

In June, OBU returned to normal operations for the summer and upcoming academic year with a mask-optional policy moving forward.

OBU Alumni and Friends,

Our Lord is doing great things among our students, faculty, and staff. Although we have all faced challenges over the past year, we continue to fulfill our grand purpose of transforming and equipping the next generation of future shapers to live all of life, all for Jesus.

During the past academic year, for both the fall and spring semesters, we were able to hold classes on campus and in person while maintaining physical distancing. This was a true gift from God and a great accomplishment by our students, faculty and staff. We had the privilege of celebrating 124 graduates during our winter commencement and 277 graduates during our spring commencement.

While families have been unsure what the future holds and are still uncertain about making the investment in Christian higher education, we remain committed to our Christ-centered, world-class, transformational education. Considering the environmental and economic uncertainties, OBU continues to steward our resources as we press forward with great purpose. We have refined our programs so we can meaningfully engage our communities. We are leveraging all we are to serve our Lord so that we might be a blessing to the world.

We hold fast to the truth of 2 Chron. 16:9: "For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him." OBU has consecrated itself to be "wholeheartedly devoted to him," trusting that God will show himself to be strong! We must never forget each of our challenges is met with great opportunity. We work diligently, pray earnestly, and devote ourselves to our God. We ask that God would grant us the courage, resources and strength to meet the needs of our day.

This we know: our churches, our communities, our nation and our world need leaders wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus in every sphere of life, equipped to make a difference there for God and for lasting good. We need God's wisdom to permeate our education. All of life, all for Jesus. OBU is committed to that task. We ask you to join with us as we shape our future together.

May God bless you, and may God continue to bless OBU.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heath A. Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

DR. HEATH A. THOMAS
OBU President

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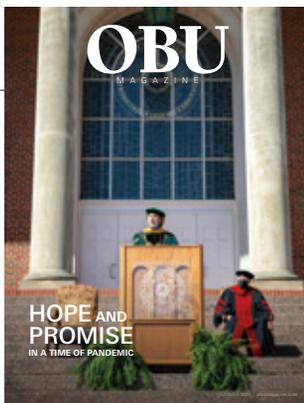
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OBU President Dr. Heath A. Thomas leads the University in educating the next generation of Future Shapers - all of life, all for Jesus. See story, page 3.

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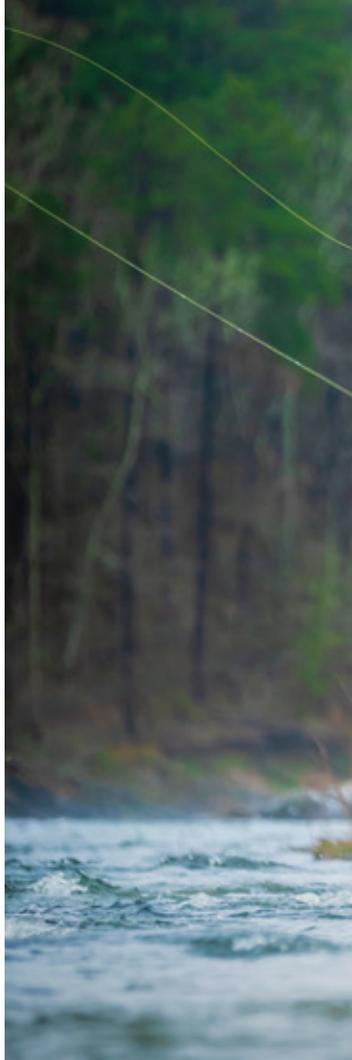
Humble. Driven. Joyful.

OBU President Dr. Heath A. Thomas draws inspiration from the University's purpose and joy from graduates who are changing our world.

There's a difference between education and wisdom.

Education is about attaining the knowledge, skills and aptitude in a specific field to effectively perform a job. This is good. But wisdom is about knowing why that job needs to be done in the first place and the human impact it can have on everyone it touches.

When Heath Thomas looks out into the world at what graduates of OBU are accomplishing, he sees God's wisdom guiding their lives and careers. That's when the joy fully kicks in.



“I see the opportunity to change our world through our graduates at OBU,” Thomas said. “The opportunity is there not only because of the distinctive mission of OBU, but because of the quality of our education. We want to facilitate gaining wisdom, not just education for a job. I am overjoyed to see what God is doing through our graduates around the world.”

In His Blood

The OBU presidency wasn’t something Thomas was seeking or had ever really considered for himself. He had been perfectly happy in his role as dean of OBU’s Hobbs College of Theology and Ministry. He loved the people, the place and the purpose.

And it makes sense.

Thomas grew up in a pastor’s home, the youngest of four boys. His mother was a homemaker and interior decorator and his father was a Baptist pastor who was also involved in leadership positions for various Christian non-profit endeavors providing aid to those in need.

It was his father’s faith and devotion to service that, Thomas says, influenced him and his brothers and was a major impact on his life. They spent family time together in the mountains of east Tennessee fly-fishing, enjoying the outdoors and learning from their father. The link between his father and mother’s devotion to serve others and the legacy of OBU has always been unmistakable.

“What motivated me was my love for OBU and my commitment to OBU’s mission and legacy,” Thomas said.

“We have to ask the question of our community, ‘how can we help shape our future – all of life, all for Jesus?’”

“It was really the opportunity to serve students and impact their lives for Christ. All of life. All for Jesus.”

So, when people around him who he knew and trusted encouraged him to pursue the presidency, he knew it was the right move.

Forged in the Fires of Academics

A graduate of OBU himself, not to mention having a brother who is also an OBU alumnus, Thomas understands well the power that an exceptional college experience can have. And it’s that exceptional OBU experience from which he draws upon now in his role as president.

“I’ve experienced world-class education,” he said. “This background along with exposure to leadership in churches and church life is a unique combination and skillset. I feel like that understanding, exposure and connections throughout the years have prepared me uniquely.”

But it isn’t just education for education’s sake. To achieve true growth, learning must be aligned with purpose and character and overcoming challenges, especially those that are unforeseen. And it was just this kind of purpose, character and unforeseen challenges that would present themselves to Thomas – just two months after becoming OBU’s president.

Leading Through a Pandemic

When COVID-19 hit and was elevated to the status of a pandemic, Thomas knew that he would be challenged in unprecedented ways.

He describes it as the “fire of decision making” that was abruptly upon him. The crisis was sudden. It was something nobody saw coming. And, in the



beginning, how the pandemic would ultimately unfold and the impact it would actually make was a complete unknown.

As he had done throughout his life, Thomas turned to prayer.

“In the midst of the COVID challenges, we were being put through the fire,” he said. “Our community rallied together to meet the challenges and we did. In the midst of it all, prayer has been my lifeblood. I’ve come to know the Lord and myself better: early morning, sleepless nights, all driven by a desperate need to hear from God.”

Thriving in a New World

Moving ahead under Thomas’ leadership, OBU is poised to reach even greater heights. Thomas is keenly focused on answering God’s call and continuing to transform lives, and the world, through his work at OBU.

But Thomas’ focus is on more than just enrollment numbers and bottom lines, although he knows those are necessary for OBU’s future. It’s about growth and multiplication. Building relationships and changing lives. Empowering students to live and work with wisdom.

Thomas enjoys fly-fishing with his family in Broken Bow just as his father did with him and his brothers when they were young in the mountains of Tennessee. He uses this time to pour into his children and is re-energized for the pressures of leadership.

And being faithful to Jesus as OBU fulfills its mission and purpose.

And he knows he’s not in it alone. He knows the OBU faculty and staff are poised to move the University forward.

“Our faculty and staff care deeply about our students and invest in their lives. They are truly world class,” he said. “I can’t build on OBU’s past accomplishments, but we can,” he said. “We have to ask the question of our community, ‘how can we help shape our future – all of life, all for Jesus?’”

Always Ask the Question

When asked what else it will take for OBU to successfully forge its path ahead under his leadership, Thomas is focused on the needs of the world.

“No matter what we’re doing, we always have to ask, how can we help the community?” he said. “What does our world need and how can we meet that need? The intellectual is not doing the work for oneself, but for the world around him.”

And in the end, he wants students to pursue answers, growth and wisdom through an experience reminiscent of his time as an OBU student.

“OBU taught me how to think and gave me the equipment to know how to discern truth from error,” he said. “OBU taught me how to think across disciplines and fields of study. It broadened my perspective in terms of my interests. It taught me how to identify problems and gave me the skillset to find the solutions. OBU built in my life discernment, wisdom and character. OBU put me on that path of scholarship bent in service of Christ and his church.”

Thomas believes God has called him to build, enhance and elevate that story in which God has placed him. And that’s what he wants for all students on Bison Hill.

“OBU’s degrees equip students with the technical knowledge to excel in the careers that God has called them to do,” Thomas said. “But it doesn’t stop there. It inculcates wisdom, discernment, critical thought and a commitment to Christ in all of life.” □

HOPE AND PROMISE

IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

Dr. Heath A. Thomas delivered this address during his Inauguration Ceremony in March 2021.



The Promise of Christian Higher Education

We come not to inaugurate a president; we come to celebrate a sustained promise made long ago. It is the great promise of Christian higher education.

I have hope today. I have hope for higher education. Higher education is, after all, a public good for the public square. Our communities need individuals who are equipped to add great value, depth of character, and service in our world. That, at root, is the promise of higher education.

OBU embodies that promise. But it does so with a distinctive and resonant note that governs our voice in the chorus of higher education. Ours is the promise of a distinctively Christian higher education.

Over 110 years ago, our forebears determined the great need of their day was distinctively Christian education that shaped the hearts and minds of the next generation so they might serve their communities, strengthen their churches, and lead in our world. As a result, The Baptist University of Oklahoma was founded in 1910.

Christ was the organizing principle that gave rise to our university on the eve of Oklahoma's statehood. Pastors, churches, and founders looked out

at the great possibilities of a new state, and in 1907, they stated:

"We are overwhelmed with the vast opportunities which are open to us as we are now on the very eve of statehood. All the responsibilities of government, moral and civil, will be thrown upon us as a state. [...] We all know that good citizenship is not a creature of accident, but the product of strenuous effort on the part of the children of God in planting the teaching of the lowly Nazarene in the hearts of all the people."¹

Our pioneers of the future invested in this university to equip, inspire and empower the next generation of men and women under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. These visionaries saw men and women equipped in "all the branches of advanced learning": literature, law, medicine, music, technology, theology, the various branches of science, fine arts, and various branches of professional and technical education.²

These future-shapers were forward-thinking prophets who recognized the uncompromising necessity for Christian education that would raise up the next generations of leaders for the glory of God and the good of the world.

OBU's voice in the chorus of higher education will ring out, but it will ring out with the organizing principle of Christ, and the promise of Christian higher education for the glory of Christ and the good of our world.

Christ, the Center

This makes good sense. After all, our university was birthed from the womb of the Church. Our origin is there, and our future still resides in the bosom of Christ's Church.

Some may perceive Christian education to be a kind of indoctrination, a diminution of robust education. I say no. We believe the centrality of Jesus in all of life opens up our perception

to the fullness of the created world. We believe Christ is the center, the great clue who opens up our world to us; as we follow the clue with all the strength we can muster, we find new ways, new roads, and deep wisdom. The love of Jesus drives us to love our neighbor. The love of Christ drives us to serve. The love of Christ compels us to go make a difference in the lives of others. The love of Christ compels us to better our world.

Our forebears believed this. They embraced the centrality of Christ enlivening the full capacity of human imagination, governance, hope, teaching, and virtue. Without the life that comes from Christ, the life-giving capacity of our education would fade to non-existence. Let me repeat the words of our forebears in 1907:

“We all know that good citizenship is not a creature of accident, but the product of strenuous effort on the part of the children of God in planting the teaching of the lowly Nazarene in the hearts of all the people.”³

The “lowly Nazarene” is Christ, and his teaching opens for us the entirety of the world. Moreover, the excellence of Christ drives us to unrivaled academic rigor, unparalleled flights of imagination and creativity, and uncompromising commitment to ethical responsibility for the good of our world.

Challenges and Hope

But what has this education to say to our world today? I believe much: Christian higher education is an invitation to hope, a beacon to inhabit the house of God’s wisdom. I look across this great expanse of faces, and I share with you the pain of the past year. I am reminded of a work of fiction set in another time of turbulence: Gabriel Garcia Marquez’ *Love in the Time of Cholera*. As in that great work, we seek love and connection in our time of pandemic.

OBU has not been immune to the ravages of the pandemic. We have been touched by the dark hand of sickness and death. And challenges lay before us.

But we hold to the hope of our anchor, who is Christ.

We look to the past and know our university has weathered storm before, and under Christ, bound in the unity of common purpose for the common good, we will weather this storm as well. I hold great hope for our university...indeed, for our world today.

That hope springs eternal, and the dark clouds that threaten need not crush us.

I am reminded of one of my teachers of hope while an English major at OBU, that great poet Emily Dickenson:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers - (314)

Emily Dickenson

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.⁴

Hope emerges in the darkest storm. And it springs eternal in those who will listen to its song. I have hope today. I ask you to join me in listening to the song of hope for OBU. Hope lay in the distinctive shape of our education: our world needs wise leaders with worthy skills.

Ours is a sacred task: to equip future shapers who will go into their world and, in the words of that Saint, Mother Teresa, “do something beautiful for God.” I would simply add this to her sage words: God has called us to do something beautiful for God...all of life, all for Jesus, in all the world.

I hold hope that we, as a university, can arise in the strength of God and meet the crying need of our world by making ample provision of embodied Christian education. As we do so, we commit to deliver on the promise of Christian higher education given by our forebears.

President Raley, the longest-serving president of OBU, embraced the hope amid the challenges of life. He saw the future of OBU and the promise that lay before us. He stated it boldly in 1938:

“We propose Christian education as the only hope for satisfactory integration of knowledge and spirit, technical skill, and social progress. [...] It is an operative principle of life, and it is centered in the philosophy of the Cross, both at Calvary and at Olivet.”

We have hope today. Embrace the promise. Our hope is in the center, Jesus Christ. Our hope as a university lay “centered in the philosophy of the Cross.” May it be so.

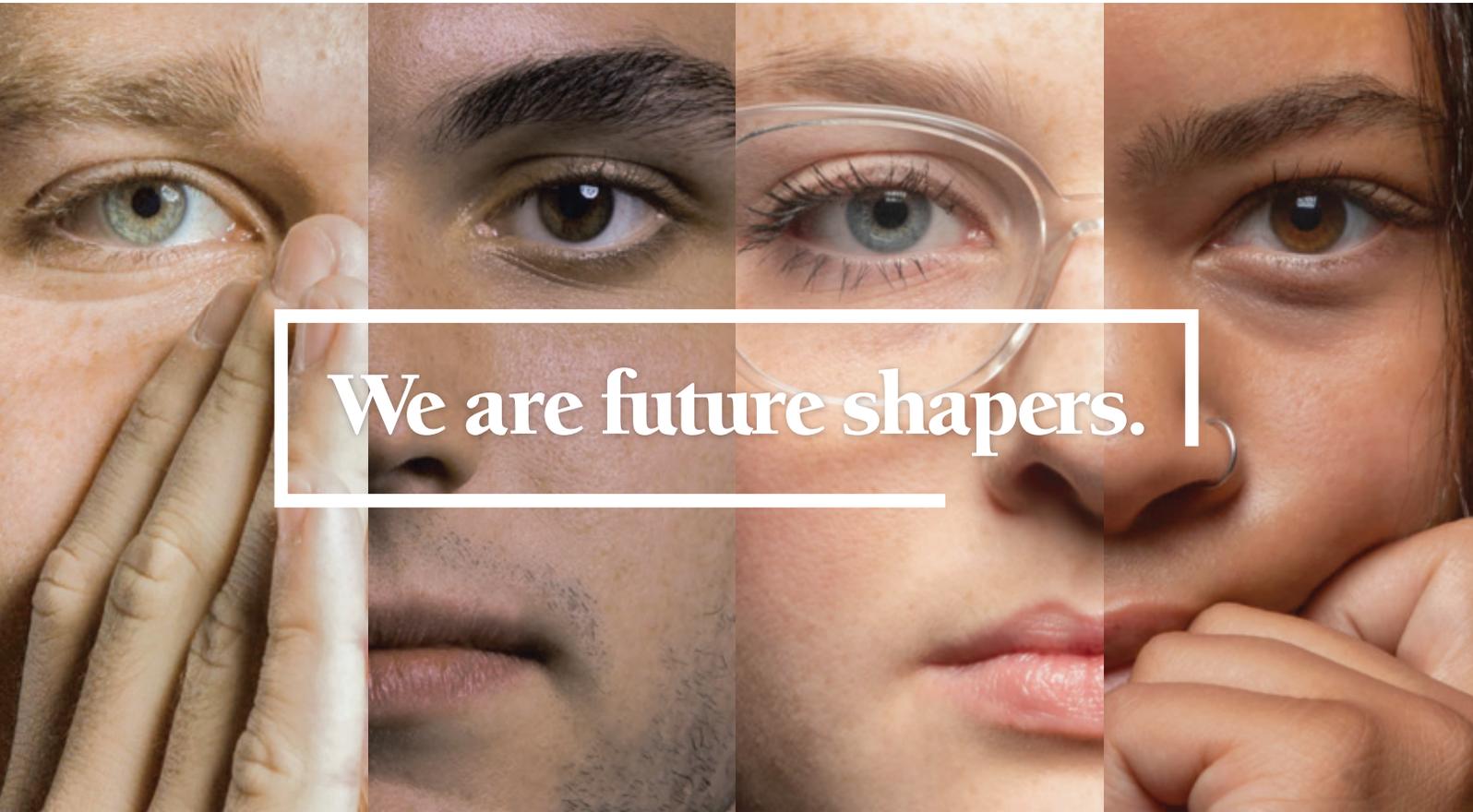
Amen.

¹ Convention annual, 1907, pp. 54-57, cited in Uncle Jimmy Owens, *Annals of O.B.U.* (Shawnee, OK: The Bison Press, 1956), 17.

² Uncle Jimmy Owens, *The Annals of O.B.U.* (Shawnee, OK: The Bison Press/Historical Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, 1956), p. 33.

³ Convention annual, 1907, pp. 54-57, cited in Uncle Jimmy Owens, *Annals of O.B.U.* (Shawnee, OK: The Bison Press, 1956), 17.

⁴ Emily Dickinson, “‘Hope’ is the Thing with Feathers” from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University press, 1951).



We are future shapers.

Redefining OBU's Brand for Today's Students and Tomorrow's World-Changers

“Who do we look to, to shape our world?

It will be people who know how to think with their heads and their hearts.

People who contribute with compassion, courage, confidence.

People who understand that faith is not the enemy of education, but its partner.”

From OBU's “We Are Future Shapers” TV ad

SEE AD HERE.



The Need

Defining a brand. It isn't something that is decided upon and created. Rather, it is something that, through diligence, research, introspection and examination, may be revealed, in order to best communicate the essence of a product or institution with its target audience.

In early spring 2020, OBU embarked on a mission to develop a fresh way to share our story with the world through reexamining and redefining our brand. The University's marketing and communications team led the charge, seeking the best way in which to distinguish this University from its peers, while conveying the power of an OBU education and the nature of the OBU experience to prospective students and the world at large.

The Foundation

Presenting OBU in a new, compellingly distinct, yet authentic manner required an examination of the university's founding mission. This endeavor takes one back to the beginning, to an annual meeting of Oklahoma Baptists over 110 years ago. It was here that OBU's founders determined the great need of their day was to provide a distinctively Christian higher education; one that would shape the hearts and minds of the next generation so they might serve their world, strengthen the church and lead our communities.

Those pioneers of the future invested in this new university to educate men and women under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. According to the OBU charter, university founders envisioned OBU students who would be equipped in "all the branches of advanced learning," including literature, law, medicine, music, technology, theology, science, fine arts, and various branches of professional and technical education.¹ These founders were forward-thinking visionaries who recognized the uncompromising necessity for Christian education that would raise up generations of leaders for the glory of God and the good of the world.

The great need for OBU, first conceived by these pioneers in the early years of the 20th century, remains just as compelling now as we venture forward in the 21st century. As in the days of our founding, the moment of OBU has come once again: we are called to equip leaders who rise to the challenges of their day, face adversity with courage and impact their world for the glory of Jesus Christ in every sphere of life.

The Process

Embracing our founding charter, we gathered additional information about the OBU experience through a series of discovery meetings with alumni, students, faculty and staff; surveys of prospective students and their parents; and competitor comparison and analysis.

From our research of OBU's history and the experiences of our students, employees, alumni and friends, we developed our brand promise:

Oklahoma Baptist University's faith-forward education prepares the hearts and minds of students so they can engage with purpose and live well in God's world.

We also verified through these discovery meetings and survey findings that we are in fact fulfilling our brand promise as we equip the next generation of future shapers who are prepared to transform the world around them with compassion, courage and confidence. We ascertained that yes, indeed, OBU's unapologetically, faith-forward approach to higher education exposes students to broad perspectives while guiding them in biblical traditions so they receive a transformative education rooted in Christ.

The Result

Out of this process came the "We Are Future Shapers" branding campaign. You may have seen it on our website, in the admissions viewbook, on banners around campus, or in an ad on TV or online. This campaign captures the essence of what it means to be a student at OBU, where high academic expectations are met with supportive faculty, who stand together with our students as they prepare them for the obstacles they'll face in future years. It demonstrates the compelling need students have for the kind of education found only at OBU, an education which helps them become not just book smart, not just business smart, but wise in their whole being, in their devotion to God and to others.

The "We Are Future Shapers" campaign demonstrates how OBU students are connected to each other, as well as to faculty and staff, in personal and lasting ways, all while being part of a much bigger calling. It powerfully communicates that the kind of personal, intellectual and spiritual transformation ignited at OBU continues for a lifetime as graduates use their individual gifts and skills answering the call to serve the world within their chosen fields as they shape the future for God and for good. □

¹ Uncle Jimmy Owens, *The Annals of O.B.U.* (Shawnee, OK: The Bison Press/Historical Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, 1956), p. 33.

Faithful Healer

The journey of one alumnus from OBU, to an elite graduate program, to the front lines of research on the hunt for a COVID-19 vaccine.

“... I just walk away from the lab every day grateful that I get to study creation and I get to understand the creative nature of God.”

“Transformation” is a powerful word, especially in higher education. But every now and then, someone comes along and reminds us that in truth, it’s much more than a word.

When Lucas Adams came to Oklahoma Baptist University in 2012, he wouldn’t have told anyone at the time that he was looking to be transformed. His credentials coming out of high school were impeccable, highlighted by recognition as a National Merit Finalist, an honor bestowed on just one percent of high school students nationwide.

Still, Adams simply wanted a college experience that would effectively prepare him for his next step in life, in a place where faith would permeate all aspects of teaching and learning.

“I had narrowed it down to a small handful of colleges, but none of them felt like home until I visited OBU,” he said. “There was just a closeness among the people that’s hard to describe, everyone seemed happy. I could tell it was a place where students were valued, and valued uniquely.”

An Atmosphere of Ambition

Among the many things that, to this day, stand out in his memory about his time at OBU is the

level of ambition, achievement and togetherness among students and faculty. It was this sense of community and support that set Adams on his path toward a future in medicine and medical research.

A faculty mentor helped connect him with an internship at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, an opportunity typically uncommon for students at the undergraduate level.

“That’s just one example of how invested OBU’s faculty are in their students,” he said. “Everything about the experience is designed for the good of the student. There are no barriers. My professor knew that I wanted to do research for my career and really fought for me to get that position in Oklahoma City. That kind of opportunity can only happen at a place where they *want* to know you.”

Adams’ exceptional academic work within OBU’s distinctively Christian setting, along with the experience he gained at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, were key ingredients to the next step on his path toward a future in research – the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

A Real, Powerful Impact

For the next two years, Adams lived, learned and worked in Washington D.C. conducting HIV research at the NIH. And it was there that he deepened his appreciation for two truths that would continue to guide his personal walk with God and his career in medicine.

One of those is the powerful, real-life impact that he knows his research can have on individuals, families and communities everywhere. The other

is the undeniable connection he sees between science and faith.

“In Scripture, Paul says that when you look at the heavens and see the stars dazzling and this expanse of space above you, that you are without excuse,” he said. “That you ought to be in awe and in reverence of what you see, recognizing the order that God has instilled within creation.”

And it was exactly that sense of awe that drew him into science from the very beginning.

The Science of God

In a world where too many believe that science runs counter to faith, Adams sees just the opposite. He sees a biological and physical world that’s been put together in an amazingly ordered fashion. He sees creativity and beauty. And he sees the nature of God’s imprint as a powerful force for positive change.

“For me, that’s always been one of my strongest personal convictions about the nature of God,” he said. “That He’s imprinted his own creativity and order on what He’s created. And there certainly is creativity, because when you study biology and you study viruses for instance, you find a lot of bizarre things. You find a lot of things that seem so very counterintuitive, but I just walk away from the lab every day grateful that I get to study creation and I get to understand the creative nature of God.”

This is the outlook he brought with him upon graduation from OBU and at the completion of his internship at the NIH. And he brought it to one of the most respected graduate institutions in the world – Washington University in St. Louis.



PHOTO CREDIT: COLIN MCCORNACK, MD-PHD STUDENT AT WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Adams was accepted into a dual M.D./Ph.D. program and was able to join the virology labs of renowned infectious disease experts Daved Fremont and Michael Diamond. With one vaccine candidate currently in clinical trials, they are now studying potential weaknesses in SARS-CoV-2 that could lead to improved vaccines or targeted treatments to combat emerging variants of concern.

Fighting for Our Future

Working on the front line of vaccine research in an effort to combat a global pandemic means many different things to Adams. He describes it as humbling, exhausting, inspiring and a little bizarre. Scientists aren’t typically looking for a stage or a spotlight. Nevertheless, the spotlight has found him.

“It’s bizarre to be working on something that my family and friends ask me about, all the time. People in science aren’t really used to that,” he said. “But it’s also humbling. There’s a sense of urgency. Everyone in the

lab has been working long hours, for months now. Everyone’s exhausted, but no one’s giving in.”

The promise of the current vaccines, he says, is exciting. The research he’s currently involved in could lead to second generation COVID-19 vaccines that might bring new advantages in areas such as effectiveness and ease of distribution, among others.

But amidst the uncertainty, it’s the transformation Adams experienced at OBU that continues to guide his work, with the power to transform the future for all of us.

“It’s important to me that the way I conduct science brings glory to God,” he said. “I treat the people around me with respect. To approach my work with humility, to approach my work recognizing that I will never know everything there is to know, but I can hope to understand some of the ways which God has designed the world around us and hopefully use that to help people.” □

Heart Wide Open

How the power of family and inspiration transformed OBU student Gavin Yoesting's academic and career path.

"It made me realize that what I really wanted to do is work with kids living with disabilities."

Inspiration comes in a lot of shapes and sizes. For Gavin Yoesting, it came early in life in the form of his younger brother Jace.

And it's something that continues to drive him even as he nears the end of his undergraduate years at OBU.

Coming out of high school, Yoesting wanted to find the right college with a good biochemistry program and strong preparation for a future that involved helping young people, perhaps as a pediatrician. Little did he know at the time how his path would evolve and come full circle with his brother and lifelong source of inspiration, Jace.

A Heartfelt Experience

While finding the right biochemistry program was a top priority for Yoesting, it wasn't the only one. He knew that there would be many college options that offered good programs in the sciences.

Equally important to him was something that wouldn't be as easy to quantify.

"I guess the simplest way to put it, I just wanted a really heartfelt experience," Yoesting says. "I wanted a place where I knew the people would be genuine and where my faith

would be embraced and immersed in the learning experience."

Having spent much of his childhood at his grandmother's home in Shawnee, he grew up seeing the many ways OBU was committed to the local community and vice versa. He remembers seeing OBU students mowing his grandmother's yard for her. And he recalls how invested community members were in the university and in the students.

Upon visiting OBU, he became even more drawn to the place and its people. He'd found his college home.

Uncommon Leadership

One thing that set Yoesting apart from many of his fellow students was the fact that he commuted to campus. Instead of living on campus, he made the 20-minute drive from his home in a nearby town.

At first, he said, it made the transition to college awkward. But that feeling didn't last long, something he credits to the caring, genuine and welcoming OBU community. "This is a place where faculty and staff invest completely in their students. It didn't take me long to see that firsthand."

It was that investment – OBU in its students, and students in the OBU culture – that opened new doors of opportunity for him. During high school, he was involved in "everything under the sun" in terms of extracurricular clubs and activities.

He brought that same passion to OBU and wasn't going to let the fact that he was a commuter student stand in his way.



Gavin and his younger brother Jace.

As a sophomore, he was elected to OBU's student senate. As a junior, he was appointed to the cabinet and oversaw all on-campus student events. And as a senior, he was elected president of OBU's Student Government Association – the first time ever a commuter student was elected to the top post.

But Yoesting wasn't trying to make history. He simply wanted to make a difference.

"My friends and I were always asking ourselves what we could do to make OBU even better, how we could invest more of ourselves into the school," he said. "I felt that serving in this kind of a role would be a great way to have a direct impact on the student experience. That's the kind of difference you can make at a smaller school like OBU."

Changing Paths

And it wasn't just about making OBU better. Yoesting was still committed to a future making other peoples' lives better. And while this is why he decided to major in biochemistry and prepare for a future in medicine, that would soon change.

The summer before his senior year, he was working for the state of Oklahoma at the J.D. McCarty Center in Norman, a facility dedicated to enriching the lives of children with disabilities. It was here that his life changed.

"I fell in love with those kids," he said. "I worked with kids who had a wide variety of developmental disabilities, from autism and Down syndrome to physical disabilities."

One child in particular stood out to him during his time working at

the McCarty Center. He was in a wheelchair and couldn't walk or use his arms. But he was a phenomenal artist, using his mouth to draw. And he was a large part of Yoesting's decision to change his major to psychology/pre-counseling.

"It was a God-sent experience," he said. "It made me realize that what I really wanted to do is work with kids living with disabilities."

"But he can smile"

The reason Yoesting was so moved by his experience with the kids at the McCarty Center is that their challenges in life touched home, literally.

His brother Jace lives with a developmental disability so rare that his is the only confirmed case in the world. Jace is confined to a wheelchair. He can't walk or talk. Yoesting has been at Jace's side for most of his life helping to provide him with care.

As a psychology/pre-counseling major, Yoesting now plans to earn a master's degree in marriage and family therapy with a long-term goal of helping developmentally disabled children and teens, as well as their families, work through the challenges they face.

"I have to give thanks to my journey at OBU for opening my eyes to what I really want to do in life," he said. "I've always been around young people who have special needs, and I just have a love for them, because of my brother. Jace can't walk and he can't talk, but he can smile. And that's really inspiring." □

A Shared Spirit

Whether on the football field or in the computer lab, OBU senior Chris Mehn lives out his faith through serving others.

“My goal in life is to serve. That’s what being a Christian is all about, reaching out and helping others in any way you can.”



obubison.com

At first glance, computer science and football don’t seem to have a lot in common. In fact, many would think the two are about as far apart as one could get on the spectrum of academic and athletic endeavors.

But if you look at it through the eyes of OBU senior Chris Mehn, football and computer science aren’t as diametrically opposed as it might appear. The way he sees it, they both share the same common, Christian spirit that he himself strives to personify every day – that of helping others.

Realizing Potential

A native of the Houston, Texas, area, Mehn knew that football would be a major part of his collegiate path. For him, it was just about finding the right school and a football program with potential waiting to be realized.

That’s what he found at OBU.

“I did have other offers, but there was just something about OBU that stood out for me,” he said. “I felt the program had the most potential, and on top of that it was a place where I could deepen my faith.”

And it was when he first arrived that he experienced firsthand the sense

of family, faith and focus on helping others within the community and culture. As a freshman Bison football player, he was paired with an upperclassman player who served as a peer mentor.

Enter, Isaiah Mallory.

As far as Mehn was concerned, Mallory was the “it” guy. He helped guide Mehn in his first few years – in the weight room, in the classroom, in his walk with Christ. And Mehn knew that, one day, he wanted to be the kind of mentor to someone else that Mallory was to him.

A Different Kind of Win

Early in his OBU experience, Mehn also discovered that winning wasn’t limited to the football field. As any computer science major can attest, few academic areas of study are more rigorous or challenging. For him, it was about embracing that challenge.

When he was in the eighth grade, Mehn took part in a program that evaluated students’ academic strengths and weaknesses and helped determine areas of study for which they might be best suited. He had always been drawn to computers, and his middle school evaluation confirmed that it was a good fit.

The challenge was on.

“It’s definitely a lot of work,” he said. “I’ve always liked working with computers. It can be difficult but the challenge is intriguing to me. I love being able to do coding and create something from scratch that in the end has the ability to solve a problem. Every time I complete a code, I consider that a big win.”



An Exercise in Selflessness

Mehn's experience as a football player and a computer science major represent a compelling intersection of faith, selflessness and the spirit of helping others.

As a running back on the Bison football team, he cherishes the way players go out into the Shawnee community to provide help and youth mentoring. One of the programs they offer, Bison Buddies, pairs players with elementary school students.

"I really feel blessed to be able to take part in that," he said. "It's all about bringing people together and helping each other."

As a student in the computer science program, he appreciates the education and preparation he's gaining that enables him to help

others resolve technical issues and problems they encounter with their computers.

"It feels good to be able to help people work through problems they're having. I like being that guy," he said.

In fact, Mehn has always had selflessness in his heart. In his hometown of Houston, he grew up spending time volunteering at local rescue centers and food banks. For him, it's simply part of being a Christian.

"My goal in life is to serve," he said. "That's what being a Christian is all about, reaching out and helping others in any way you can."

Winning at the Game of Life

As he envisions life after OBU, Mehn knows that the spirit of selflessness will always be a part of whatever it is

he's doing. It might be professional football, an endeavor he's definitely interested in pursuing. It might be raising a family and a career in computer science, putting his programming and coding skills to work. He even hopes to one day launch a youth academy offering programs in football and soccer, another sport he grew up playing.

"I believe God gave everyone special gifts for a reason," he said. "I've learned so much in my time at OBU about what it means to be a Christian, it's been nothing short of amazing. Moving ahead, I just want to be the best I can possibly be, no matter what I'm doing. I want to help younger guys on the football team in the same way Isaiah helped me. I want to continue giving back to our community. And I want to use my knowledge and skills in computer science to be a resource for others." □



Nursing Program Graduates Well Prepared for Their Futures



Dr. Robbie Henson, chair of the School of Nursing and Lawrence and Marion Harris Chair of Nursing, is a 1978 OBU alumna. She began teaching at OBU in 1991 as assistant professor of nursing and has led the nursing program since January 2020. She is pictured inside her office in the Jane E. and Nick K. Stavros Hall, home to the School of Nursing since its opening in 2016.

Q Why is the field of nursing so important?

A There are few moments in history where the importance of individuals who provide physical care and monitoring has been more visible than it is today. Nurses are on the front lines of daily and hourly health care of patients. They have both the individual level view and the systems level view in facilitating care delivery.

Why should students choose OBU to prepare for a career in nursing?

The nursing program at OBU has a 69-year history. We have a phenomenal record of producing graduates who are successful on the licensing exam on the first attempt, who are sought after by local and regional agencies, and whose careers make a significant impact on the world for good. We also promise every student who starts with us as a freshman will have a seat in the School of Nursing as a junior as long as they meet our admission requirements. So, no one is placed on a waiting list to start their professional program.

What will students learn from an OBU nursing education that they won't learn at other universities?

When people rave about our graduates and what excellent professionals they are, I can't help but attribute a significant portion of that quality to the Christian liberal arts courses that created the foundation for our work in the School of Nursing. OBU has incredibly well-developed general education courses which weave the liberal arts and a Christian worldview into deep, rich ways of thinking. We have the blessing of building the professional attributes upon this base. That makes a huge difference.

When students graduate with a nursing degree from OBU, what positions/careers in nursing are they prepared for?

Graduates of the School of Nursing are prepared for any job requiring a Registered Nurse license. This might be in an emergency department, labor and delivery, critical care, public health, home health, and more. Graduates will also be prepared to start graduate school to study to be a nurse practitioner, midwife, nurse educator, or nurse anesthetist.

How is COVID-19 impacting our nursing graduates as well as current nursing students?

The demands of COVID-19 have been unprecedented. We were affected with the move to online learning in spring 2020 as was every other university. We discovered new ways to educate and train virtually which will be valuable in the future and which were used with our students over the past year. During COVID, we prepared successful graduates who met the Oklahoma Board of Nursing and the national accreditation standards and who immediately entered high demand practice positions.

How does the technology in Stavros Hall give our students an advantage in the workplace?

Our state-of-the-art mid- and high-fidelity simulation labs are outstanding. We have the ability to create opportunities in the lab for deep learning experiences that may not be available to students in clinical settings. In addition to the labs themselves, we have nationally certified faculty running the labs, one of which is an international research fellow in simulation science. □

Henson Brings Bison Spirit and Decades of Experience as School of Nursing Chair

Dr. Robbie Henson is the chair of the School of Nursing, professor of nursing, and the Lawrence C. and Marion V. Harris Chair of Nursing. She earned a BSN at OBU and a Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Texas at Arlington. She then earned a Ph.D. in Nursing from the University of Colorado.

She previously served at the University of Texas-Arlington and the Tarrant County Hospital District as an undergraduate faculty/clinical nurse specialist. She also worked as an adjunct graduate nursing faculty member at Southern Nazarene University. Since joining the faculty at OBU in 1991, she has served as professor of nursing, team leader for the CCNE Accreditation visit to the OBU School of Nursing, graduate program coordinator, associate dean for academic programming and interim dean before assuming her leadership of the School of Nursing in January 2020.

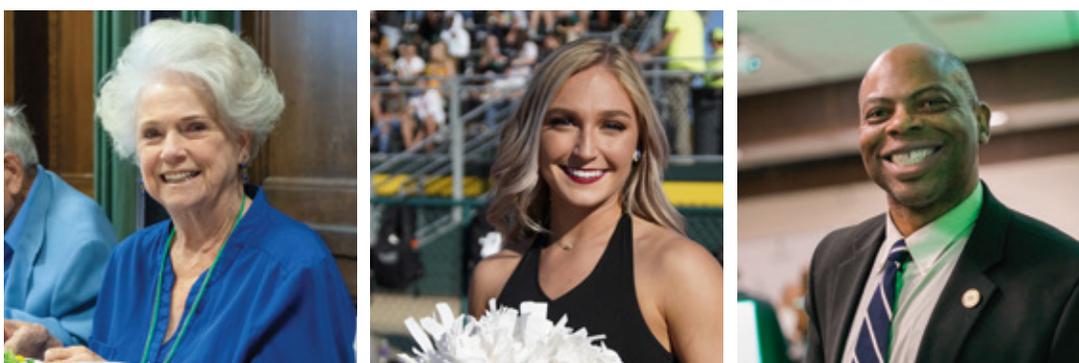
She has received numerous honors and awards throughout her career, including Oklahoma Nurse Educator of the Year by the Oklahoma Nurses' Association. She received OBU's Distinguished Teaching Award in 2020 and Promising Teacher Award in 1996. She was also selected as the Senior Class Outstanding Faculty Member for the College of Nursing at UT-Arlington and was a Piper Professor Award Nominee for Excellence in Teaching, also at UT-Arlington.

She has clinical experience in a wide range of specialties including adult medical-surgical, intensive care, home health, psychiatric-mental health and maternal-newborn nursing. She has received recognition from the National League of Nursing as a Certified Academic Nurse Educator.



HOME FOR the weekend

H O M E C O M I N G O N B I S O N H I L L



October 21-23

Congratulations to the following 2021 homecoming award recipients.

They will be recognized during harvest dinner, Friday, Oct. 22.

Alumni Achievement Award

Lou Thelen Kemp, '57
Pam Malloy, '74
Steven Whitaker, '86

Graduate of the Last Decade

Derek Royer, '11

Profile in Excellence

Chris Sudduth, '07
Mary Duffie, '62
Michele Henry, '91
Robert Carter, '91 & Carrie Carter, '93
Sam Garlow, '76
Scott Greenland, '03

Visit okbu.edu/theweekend to make sure we have your updated contact information and check back for schedule updates and details.



This October, OBU is hosting Homecoming in a new and exciting way. It's called **"The Weekend"** and you do NOT want to miss it! It's THE weekend to be on campus – to gather, to connect, to celebrate.

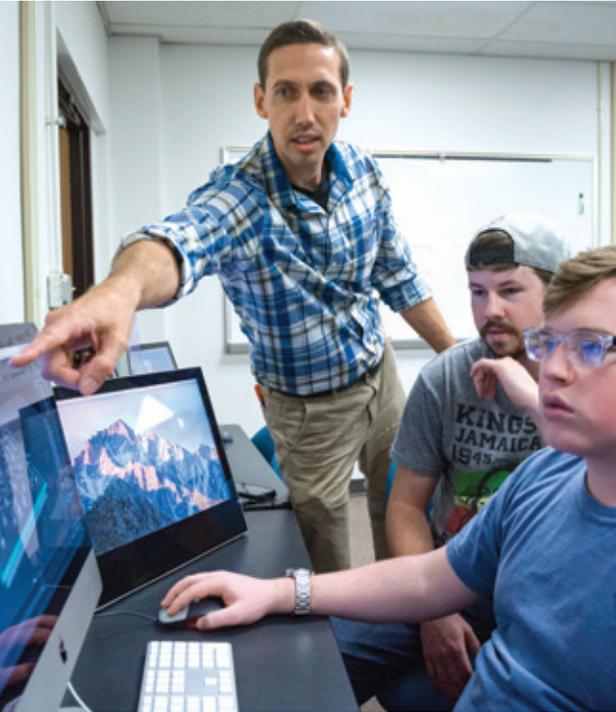
We'll have all of your favorites and traditions, including Harvest Court, Harvest Dinner, the Fine Arts Musical Gala, ice cream social and more. But we're adding in a LOT of exciting new events, including activities geared toward current students, prospective students, young alumni, their families and all OBU supporters!

Plans are in the works for new events such as an outdoor BBO/festival in the Oval featuring decade reunions, live music, lawn games, OBU art students and alumni selling their work, an Alumni Walk, tailgate, football game and more!

Do NOT miss The Weekend!
See you on Bison Hill!

ALUMNI | STUDENTS | FAMILIES | FRIENDS

The Right Path



Promising Teacher Benjamin Baxter's journey to OBU included China, Orlando and a very intriguing decision.

Few decisions in life are more impactful than the ones that involve a person's career path. Nobody knows this better than OBU faculty member Benjamin Baxter.

It was five years ago when Baxter, OBU's chair of the division of communication arts and assistant professor of animation and media production, found himself at a career crossroad. At the time, he was living in Orlando working in 3D modeling and animation.

Ready for a change, he'd been offered a position with one of the biggest and most well-known industry heavyweights in the world – Lockheed Martin, the aerospace, defense, information security and technology company.

At the same time, he'd seen a faculty job opening for a small, Baptist university in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

You couldn't find two more divergent career paths if you tried. For Baxter and his young family, there was a lot to consider.

"So, for Lockheed I would have been in the simulation division, working on the F-35 joint strike fighter," Baxter explained. "It was just a different world. I was working as a 3D environment artist in Orlando. I'd been doing that for nine or 10 years. Then on my interview at Lockheed I'm

seeing all these armed guards at the facility. For someone who's basically a working artist, that was eye opening."

As bizarre a lifestyle change as it would have been for Baxter, it also would have been a secure financial decision for him, his wife and their three young children.

But the opening for a faculty member at OBU intrigued him as well. To better understand why, it helps to learn a little about the personal background of Baxter himself.

A Familiar Feel

A big reason Baxter felt drawn to the opportunity at OBU, is because it reminded him of his own college experience. As an undergraduate, he attended a small, private Baptist university very similar to OBU's setting and culture.

"It was just such a phenomenal experience," Baxter recalled of his undergraduate years. "Small classes, strong sense of faith, people were so connected. And that's exactly what I felt about OBU. I just felt like I really understood the mission and values of this place."

In fact, for a time when he was a college student, he had moments where he thought about how much he would love to teach at such a place. "I was always told, 'hey you'd probably be really good at teaching,'" he said.

But teaching wouldn't be in his immediate future. At least, not in the U.S. Instead, after graduating and earning his degree in graphic design, Baxter spent two years in China teaching English as part of the International Mission Board.

Spending time in such an unknown environment doing positive work helping others was an impactful experience. During his time in China, Baxter also was able to expand his interest in photography. When his two years of service were up, he was ready to return to the U.S. and re-focus on his future.

Living A Dream

Baxter continued his education at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, where he earned a master's degree in animation. From there, he took the position in Orlando working in 3D environmental design.

For the next decade, he would establish himself with an excellent reputation as a working artist, putting his talents and education to work. As a husband and a father, Baxter wanted to be the best provider he could for his young family.

This is what led him to start exploring new opportunities, and to that career crossroad.

"I knew that the Lockheed position would be a pretty drastic lifestyle change just because of the type of setting, all the security, all the government work and things that come along with that," he said.

When he reached out to OBU about the faculty opening and sent his application materials, he got a call back the very same day. That sent a clear message – literally, and figuratively.

Choosing His Path

In the end, as appealing as a high-paying career with an industry leader like Lockheed Martin

seemed, Baxter knew where he belonged.

"I felt supported from the day I first arrived here, by my fellow faculty members and the entire community," Baxter said. "And the campus is beautiful."

Baxter appreciates the interconnectedness he feels across campus, and across disciplines. He believes the experience for students is enriched by the way faculty from different areas of study share ideas and thoughts, bringing a fresh and valuable perspective.

And he enjoys finding ways to integrate faith into the learning experience, which he admits can be tricky when it comes to the arts.

"But, for example, if we're talking about photography, one way we approach it is that the imagery being captured is God's beauty, God's creation," he said. "And so, for example, with a portrait, you

need to understand that God has created this person, and you're trying to capture and bring out their beauty."

Making His Mark

More than anything, Baxter enjoys the work he gets to do with OBU students. And, clearly, his enthusiasm is having an impact. In 2020, he was

"The students bring so much energy, it's contagious."

recognized with the Promising Teacher Award, a distinction presented to a junior faculty member who has demonstrated outstanding potential as a teacher.

But if you ask Baxter, he says that other members of the OBU community are just as responsible for him receiving the award as he is.

"I've just been given so much support in my time here. The community has really put me in a great position to succeed and have the best possible impact on our students," he said. "The students just bring so much energy, it's contagious. They make it so much fun to be here. I love the potential they bring and the growth they experience. When they're here, it's like they're standing on a dock looking out to sea and you see the enthusiasm and hope in their faces. It's inspiring." □



When God Calls... You Must Answer

by Hannah (West) Velasquez, Class of 2020

Hannah (West) Velasquez is a May 2020 graduate with a degree in communication studies and a minor in women's ministry. She worked for two years on the University's marketing and communications team. Note: The locations of her travels are redacted due to safety issues.

THE SUMMER BEFORE I FIRST ATTENDED OBU, I met a woman who owned a bakery. I was not and still am not a baker, but I was interested in what she was doing. This wasn't a regular bakery though. She owned a shop overseas that rescued women out of human trafficking and gave them a job, helping them rebuild their lives. After hearing her story and talking to her, I just knew it...I had to go there. I did not know when or how, but I knew God was calling my heart to this country and these people.

When I was 17, I surrendered to the call to be a missionary. I didn't really know what that meant but gained somewhat of an understanding through women I knew growing up who had served overseas. All along, I felt God was going to not only send me overseas, but also call me to give Him my education.

During my freshman year at OBU, I was a struggling nursing major who really thought that was the

educational path God wanted me to take. It was so hard. I have so much respect for nurses and have been blessed to continue friendships with professors and peers who have stayed in the profession, but I knew it wasn't for me. I could feel in my soul the deep call God was giving me to go. So, at 18 years old, I signed up to go on an OBU GO (Global Outreach) Trip overseas the next year. I knew I could hear God's voice telling me to 'Go,' but I did not know how much it would change my life.

I took the summer to pray and really ponder my education. When I returned to campus, I was 19, thought I knew it all, and changed my major to communication studies. In January 2018, I went overseas for the first time. That trip became the cornerstone for my ministry and my calling. I did not know what to expect and I quite frankly was terrified, yet all the while I could still hear God telling me to go.

When I returned from overseas and began the spring semester of my sophomore year, I added a women's ministry minor. As a result, I walked into the women's ministry class taught by Dr. Joy Turner, professor of Christian ministry and director of global mobilization, and met my mentor and professor all in one day.

Looking back on my trip, I remember saying, "My people are out there, but I'm not sure if they're here." That is when God started working on my heart and growing my passion for that place, causing me to sign up for a second trip there in January 2019. During this trip, I absolutely fell in love with the people and the place. I wanted to drop out of school and stay there forever, but I could still hear the small voice in the back of my head telling me that I needed to continue my education.

I returned to OBU in February 2019 and quietly began researching seminary. After realizing that dropping out and moving overseas was not the plan God had for me, I finally surrendered my education completely to Him and took the next steps to attend seminary. A commitment to attend seminary is challenging for women to make, whether that is due to fear of feeling out of place or lack of knowledge about what seminary has to offer for women. I, however, decided to jump in feet first and discover all that God could do in my life because of my education at OBU and future education at seminary.

I have not known many women who went to seminary, and I want to be an example for young girls and other women who feel like they should pursue Christian theological education. Pursuing Christian higher education and studying theology and ministry allows us to gain more knowledge about many things that should be extremely important to us. We learn how to read and study God's Word better and even how to be a better member of our local church.

It's funny how quickly God closes certain doors and opens new ones. In the wake of my fourth and final GO Trip with OBU, I found myself in the literal middle of the COVID-19 outbreak. I was exactly 18 days into a 21-day trip when we heard the term "coronavirus" for the first time. We didn't know what it was...we were just trying to be flexible and work on a farm every day.

During my final semester of college, I was engaged to be married in May and planning to move to North Carolina with my husband in July. I was thousands of miles away from the country that had stolen my heart and was planning to lead OBU's GO trip in January 2021 along with my new husband. Praying all along

"I could hear God's voice telling me to 'Go,' but I did not know how much it would change my life."

that God would send me back to my country and my people, but God had other plans for us.

When OBU decided to close in-person classes for the remainder of the spring semester, I was distraught. How could I have my fairy-tale wedding in my college town if I wasn't going to be living there for the next few months? How would I move across the country and find a job if I couldn't visit? I didn't know the answer to either of these questions, but a verse kept coming to mind that had been recited to me dozens of times by a missionary mentor during the months leading up to my final OBU trip: "He who calls you is faithful; He will do it." 1 Thessalonians 5:24 (CSB).

My husband, Jay, and I have since moved back to his hometown of Fort Worth, Texas. He is currently the youth pastor at our church, the church he grew up in, and is teaching middle and high school Bible. I am currently serving at our church as the director of communications.

I am also making the 16-year-old me proud by working on my Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary online while Jay pursues an M. Div. at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. We are currently serving the Lord through the local church and just returned from our first mission trip with our youth group in June 2021. Our plan is to pursue a career with the International Mission Board one day, but for now we are serving the Lord by sharing the Gospel in our own backyard in Fort Worth, Texas.

I do not have all the answers, but I find hope in the fact that He called me, and He is faithful. He will do it. □

Blessed to Serve on Bison Hill

FROM THE DESK
OF TIM RASNIC

As I reflect on my first seven months serving as the University's vice president for advancement, I feel blessed. Blessed to serve at such a special place as OBU, where faith and learning are integrated every day to educate the next generation of Future Shapers. Blessed to have met so many of our wonderful alumni, hearing story after story of how their time on Bison Hill shaped them into the people they are today. Blessed by the countless stories from friends of the University about the ways in which OBU has touched their lives. Blessed to witness how the generosity of OBU supporters impacts our students every day, making a difference in their lives now and in the future.

OBU is truly a remarkable place. It's a place where our faculty members are leading experts in their fields, whether in science, education, theology, music or various other disciplines. It's a place where our staff members use their skills and experience to serve our students, alumni, community and each other. It's a place where some of the most amazing students in the world learn, grow,



worship and develop into the next generation of leaders. It's also a place where generous donors and supporters give to ensure that the world-class, distinctively Christian liberal arts education on Bison Hill will endure for generations to come.

Since beginning my role in December 2020, I have personally connected with many of these generous donors. I have heard countless stories about how this special place has touched their lives in powerful and amazing ways, and how they, in turn, desire to touch the lives of current and future students. It is a beautiful thing to witness when God uses a generous heart to do His work through providing resource and opportunity to others, using those gifts to fulfill his plan while helping OBU fulfill our mission of transforming lives through academic excellence, integration of faith and knowledge, engaging a diverse world, and living out the calling of God in Christ.

I pray that as you read this edition of OBU Magazine, you will see the power of an OBU education come to life. You will see how OBU's challenging, rigorous liberal arts curriculum continues to develop mature, critical thinkers who are impacting their world now and into the future. And you will see how alumni, donors and University supporters are critical to making all of this happen.

Over the coming weeks and months, we have many exciting opportunities to once again gather as alumni, friends and supporters of OBU. We hope you will all make plans to join us on campus Oct. 21-23 for our Homecoming celebration, themed, "The Weekend." While we are keeping many of the most popular traditional homecoming events, we are also adding in some new activities with more opportunities for alumni of all ages and their families to connect with each other while enjoying a weekend on Bison Hill. You'll find more

information about this here in the magazine. We invite you also to join us on campus for events throughout the year, including theatre performances, concerts and sporting events, or at one of our Bison Connections networking events. We are also planning activities at various locations around Oklahoma and Texas over

the coming year. Stay tuned for more exciting details.

It is truly a joy and privilege to be a member of the OBU family and to lead our advancement and alumni team. The warmth and kindness extended to me thus far has been humbling and gratifying. The OBU family is a treasure, a

special, amazing group of people who love this University and love each other in the process. If we have met already, I am blessed to know you. If we have not, I look forward to the day where we might meet and where you can share your story of how OBU has impacted your life. □

Rasnic Brings Decades of Experience to OBU

Tim Rasnic began his duties as vice president for university advancement in December 2020. His primary responsibilities include overseeing development and alumni relations, coordinating the development team in raising funds for the university, and securing financial support for the university.

Rasnic previously enjoyed an extensive career at the University of Oklahoma in alumni and development positions including director of development for regional campaigns and university libraries. He also served as director of planned giving in the university's office of development and as the director of development for OU's Price College of Business.

Rasnic grew up in Navajo, Oklahoma, located in the southwest corner of the state near Altus. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in public affairs and administration from the University of Oklahoma and soon thereafter began his professional career with the OU Alumni Association.

He was honored to be selected as a member of Leadership Oklahoma's Class XII and served the state's premier leadership program as vice president for youth programs and as a member of the board of directors. He was one of three LOK alumni who founded and created the Youth Leadership Oklahoma program along with LOK's executive director. He is also a graduate of Leadership Norman and Leadership Oklahoma City and is a member of the Oklahoma City Rotary Club.

Rasnic has enjoyed meeting many OBU alumni, seeking to connect them to the University's mission in meaningful and personal ways.

"It is vitally important for our university to connect with our alumni and to ask for their support and engagement, especially as we enter this new era with President Thomas and an incredibly dedicated group of administrators, faculty and staff who have a desire to make the OBU experience a positive one for current and future students. We also want to continue that positive

experience with our dedicated alumni and find ways for them to maintain involvement no matter how close or far they live from Bison Hill."

He has likewise been touched by working with many donors and University supporters, who make so much of the life-changing work on Bison Hill possible.

"One of the most rewarding things about leading the advancement team is seeing someone who is passionate about OBU, who makes a gift, and who then sees the incredible impact their gift makes, whether on a student, program or faculty member. To me, it starts with someone who has a generous spirit and is able to give. Everybody on campus at OBU has different roles to help make OBU successful. But here in advancement, that's our primary responsibility and there's a lot of joy associated with that. It is really awesome to see." □

Women of Vision Donates Benches, Tables, Umbrellas

The Women of Vision giving circle at OBU recently donated new outdoor furniture to the campus to provide students with more places to study, eat and socialize outdoors in the fresh air while enjoying the beautiful spaces around Bison Hill. The group met in fall 2020, selecting this as their annual project. In total, they raised \$53,000 toward the effort.

The new furniture has been installed in multiple locations,

including two groups of benches and chairs on the plaza in front of Thurmond Hall; multiple tables, benches and umbrellas on the patio just east of the Geiger Center; and additional tables, benches and umbrellas on the west landing of the Geiger Center facing Raley Chapel. Existing furniture from the GC's east patio is being directed to other areas of campus, further expanding the amount of outdoor seating available. The umbrellas

feature solar-powered LED lights, allowing them to be useful and well-lit even after dark.

Women of Vision exists to encourage women to be philanthropic leaders and to maximize the impact of their giving. Through the giving circle, individual contributions are united and magnified through a collective voice supporting the university. Gifts collected from each member are pooled, and together, the members decide how the money should be directed on Bison Hill.

This offers a unique opportunity to join other women who desire to create a valuable financial source to support, promote, sustain and enhance the university's mission. Membership is open to alumnae, employees, students and friends. Visit okbu.edu/wov or contact University Advancement at 405.585.5412 or development@okbu.edu. □



Bison Connections Returns to In-Person Gatherings

Bison Connections, a popular event where alumni, business leaders, members of the community and friends of OBU gather for a meal, fellowship and networking, is returning to in-person events this September.

The first event will take place Sept. 9 in Tulsa at 6:30 p.m. and the second will take place in Oklahoma City Sept. 30 at 11:30 a.m. Both will feature meals, a keynote speaker and updates from OBU President Dr. Heath A. Thomas.

Bison Connections began in

2016 and has hosted 16 lunch events in Oklahoma City and two webinars during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Sept. 9 event will be the first held in the Tulsa area.

Jim Hively, director of development at OBU, organizes Bison Connections.

"Bison Connections is a great platform for our alumni to connect and network," Hively said.

"You will enjoy gathering with classmates, faculty and staff, and hearing updates from Bison Hill."

Bison Connections began

through a joint effort by the Paul Dickinson School of Business, graduate programs, and the advancement and alumni relations office at OBU. The goal of these events is to engage with Oklahoma City metro and Tulsa area businesses, churches and organizations by providing quality speakers and content that would encourage and equip them to have ethical, positive and productive workplaces.

Contact University Advancement at 405.585.5412 or development@okbu.edu for more information. □



Jackson Named Scholarship Recipient

Lily Jackson, a rising senior from Oklahoma City, was named the first recipient of the A.O. and Mildred Pauline Hurt McKinney Endowed Scholarship in early 2021 during her junior year. The scholarship was established through a generous estate gift from A.O. and Mildred McKinney.

Recipients of the McKinney Endowed Scholarship are selected during their junior year based on academic success, strong commitment to the field of family science, propensity for success, and clear vision for the need to help families once they begin their careers. The scholarship endowment currently pays for one recipient at a time. However, once the scholarship reaches full maturity, it will award a two-year, full tuition scholarship to two students at a time.

The McKinney Endowed Scholarship marks a milestone in the development of OBU's family science program. Emerging out of the work conducted in disciplines such as psychology and home economics, the family science

discipline prepares students to engage a world of diverse family types and to help them build skills to flourish in the 21st century. OBU family science majors learn how to strengthen and enrich the families with whom they will work.

"I am incredibly aware of the Lord's abundant provision as I accept this scholarship," she said. "Every day I get to sit next to students who are deserving of this scholarship. So, being selected truly means a lot. I am grateful beyond words and am thankful that others will be able to experience this scholarship in the future."

She is also excited that this scholarship highlights the field of family science, a field that touches and impacts so many people in powerful ways.

"It is critically important that we know how families work and how we can help them grow to be healthier and stronger. It is of

utmost importance that we study, research, educate and care in ways that encourage the flourishing of the family," she said.

A double major in family science and communication studies, Jackson plans to graduate in May 2022 and pursue her master's degree in marriage and family therapy. In addition to her work in the classroom, she is involved in many activities and organizations around Bison Hill. She has served the past two years as a resident advisor in Kerr Residence Center and is the co-chair of Refuge Women's Bible Study. She is also a member of the Association of Family Service Professionals (AFSP) and a member of Omicron Delta Kappa honor society. She has also previously participated in the Bisonette Glee Club and Global Outreach trips. She is an active member of Frontline Church in Shawnee. □

Alumni Event Hosted in Nashville



The OBU Alumni Association held a special event during the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Nashville. Around 240 alumni and friends of the University attended the event, sharing food, fellowship and fond memories of Bison Hill.

The event was co-sponsored by WatersEdge and Oklahoma Baptists.



ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



BEAUTY OF THE JOURNEY

From the tennis courts on Bison Hill to military assignments around the world, OBU prepared alumnus Jim Adams for an extraordinary life.

We hear people talk about the word “journey” a lot these days. It can be a powerful way to express anything from a learning experience abroad, to intellectual enlightenment, to one’s walk with Christ.

Few people, however, personify the notion of “journey” and a life well lived in a way quite like OBU alumnus Jim Adams.

The mentorship that began on a tennis court on Bison Hill only to grow throughout all aspects of his OBU experience would later take him around the world in service to his country and in his dedication to help others live better lives through medicine.

Opportunities Abound

As an OBU freshman, Adams formed an early relationship with the Bison tennis coach, Paul Duffield, whom he affectionately referred to as “Duff.”

Duff accepted Adams as a walk-on to the men’s tennis team and invited him to stay with the Duffield family the summer after his freshman year. That summer, Adams gained more coaching, leading him significantly improve his tennis game.

“I assisted in teaching tennis classes, plus he made sure I played many tournaments in the Oklahoma tennis circuit throughout the summer to give me experience and develop my game,” Adams said. “Additionally, I was always available to play with the Shawnee High School players throughout the summer. Whenever someone needed a tennis game, they just called Duff and I was always available. It was one of the most fun summers of my life. Duff and his wife were so accommodating and generous.”

Beyond the tennis courts, Adams found plenty of other faculty

mentors across the OBU campus during his time on Bison Hill. Professors who were flexible and allowed him to make up assignments and labs missed due to his tennis schedule, even though it created more work for them. And others who challenged Adams to ponder life’s biggest and most vexing questions.

“While at OBU, Dr. Jim Hurley gave me the gift, not only of his teaching, but also of his time and attention, continuously asking and discussing those important questions, the ones that he is well known for asking, the ones that require thought, self-knowledge and growth: ‘Who are you?’ ‘Why are you here?’ ‘How will you contribute to your fellow man?’ and ‘What difference will your existence make to others?’”

A Tumultuous Time

When Adams graduated in 1971, the war in Vietnam was fully engaged. He enlisted in the Army

“While at OBU, Dr. Jim Hurley gave me the gift, not only of his teaching, but also of his time and attention ...”

in October of that year, fully expecting to be assigned to combat operations in Vietnam. But during basic training, his platoon went to a chapel orientation, at which the chaplain encouraged anyone desiring to become a chaplain's assistant to stay after orientation for a short interview. Adams decided to stay, and after an on-the-spot audition, served as chaplain's assistant and played the organ at chapel services for the remainder of basic training.

Instead of the battlefields of Vietnam, Adams received orders to report to Fort Hamilton, New York, for training as a Protestant chaplain's assistant.

“I was ultimately assigned to work at the Eighth Army Religious Retreat Center in Seoul, a very nice, relaxing location where soldiers and U.S. government civilians working in Korea came for week-long religious retreats.”

Finding Love

While in Korea attending a fellow chaplain assistant's wedding, Adams met and fell in love with a Peace Corps volunteer named Wrene Garthoff. About six months later they were married in Chonju, South Korea, where she was working as a physical therapist. Together, he and his new wife embarked on a military life and adventures that would take them around the world.

After completing his training as a clinical laboratory officer at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 1978, he was assigned to a U.S. Army hospital in Vicenza, Italy. That was followed by later assignments at medical centers in El Paso, Texas, and Honolulu, Hawaii.

In 1984, Adams earned a graduate degree from the Medical College of Virginia, where he recalls a conversation during the interview process that made him once again appreciate everything OBU did for him. He was asked by the interviewer about a ‘D’ that he had earned as an undergraduate.

“I was preparing for a question about how I got the ‘D’ when the interviewer followed up with, ‘Did you deserve it?’” Adams recalled. “I replied, ‘Yes.’ After a long pause, the interviewer smiled a bit and said, ‘I wouldn’t worry about it too much. I got a ‘D’ in English literature when I was an undergraduate, too. It’s good to know you went to a school that gave you a ‘D’ when you deserved it. It makes the A’s and B’s worth more.”

New Beginnings

Adams retired from the Army as a lieutenant colonel in 1992. As a civilian, he moved on to positions as administrative director at a variety of clinical laboratories across the country.

While at Children's Medical Center in Dallas in 2005, Adams met the chief chaplain and Dr. Hurley's influence showed itself once again when the two bonded over an existential author that Hurley had introduced Adams to in college.

“That was the beginning of a long and productive friendship with him,” Adams said “We collaborated on book studies for the lab staff, including Peter Senge's ‘The Fifth Discipline.’ Jim Hurley's influence and encouragement added immeasurably to the depth and enjoyment of my career and life. One of my favorite Nietzsche quotes that Dr. Hurley liked is, ‘A student repays a teacher poorly who always remains the student.’ Dr. Hurley wanted each of his students to become a person from whom he could learn. That was the best way to repay and honor him.”

Adams retired a second time in 2017 and now lives in Corpus Christi, Texas, with his family. He and Wrene have been married for 48 years. Their son Matthew and daughter Jill both played tennis in high school and now have kids of their own, and their granddaughter is currently learning to play tennis as well. □

ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



LIFE FULL CIRCLE

Once the recipient of extraordinary mentorship, OBU alumnus Michael "Hawkeye" Pierce now serves as mentor and inspiration for tomorrow's world changers.

When powerful moments in life come full circle, they can move and inspire us in unexpected ways. And in the process, they can transform the futures of countless others along the way.

No one is more aware of this truth than OBU alumnus Michael Pierce. All of his life, music has held a special place in Pierce's heart. When he was five years old, he started along his musical path in life by singing in the beginner choir at his church, which was led by then OBU professor Jim Brown.

Little did Pierce know that this wasn't the last time his path would cross with that of Professor Brown.

His Other Passion

In addition to music, Pierce's other passion in life has always been science. So, when he was looking at what college would be the best fit for him, he wanted a place that would foster his love for both.

He ultimately chose OBU for the quality of its science and music programs, and for the family-like atmosphere within the campus community. Pierce saw OBU as the ideal place to pursue music and sort out his career goals.

It was at OBU where he was given the nickname "Hawkeye," named for Hawkeye Pierce, a character on the popular TV show "M.A.S.H." And it was at OBU where he would come full circle and be brought back together with his childhood choir director, Professor Brown.

"I was great friends with Jim Brown, then a professor of music at OBU," he said, "since he had been the minister of music at my church in Midwest City."

At the same time, the experience at OBU would introduce Pierce to a number of other faculty mentors who would impact his life and career.

A Well-Balanced Journey

As his OBU experience unfolded, Pierce was able to stay in touch with both his artistic and scientific interests. One of his fondest memories from Bison Hill happened during his senior year, when he was able to perform in a talent show with two of his favorite people.

"I performed 'Will the Circle Be Unbroken' with my father, a former gospel quartet singer, as part of an SGA talent show," he said.

"Jim Brown and I were Masters of Ceremonies, but the twist was that he was a ventriloquist and I was his dummy, who he dragged out of a trunk to begin the show."

And on the scientific front, Pierce was able to focus his studies with the help of another faculty mentor, Professor John Mills. He earned a position in Professor Mills' research lab, which was funded by a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

“Many faculty at OBU mean so much to me and had such a fundamental impact on my life and career.”

Even beyond his pursuits in music and the sciences, Pierce found faculty mentors across campus who had a significant impact on his learning experience and life.

“Many faculty at OBU mean so much to me and had such a fundamental impact on my life and career,” he said. “Dr. Jim Hurley was a close friend and inspired us all by his sincerity, deep insights into life and love for his students.”

Tragedy Brings Clarity

Throughout Pierce’s OBU experience he continued with his research pursuits alongside Professor Mills. After graduating, he was accepted to Johns Hopkins University for graduate studies, and from there went to the University of California-Berkeley, after receiving a postdoctoral fellowship from the NIH.

Following his time at UC Berkeley, Pierce accepted a position at the

University of Miami’s esteemed School of Medicine. It was during his move to Miami that tragedy struck, when Pierce’s father was unexpectedly diagnosed with metastatic mesothelioma. He passed away three months later.

“Mainly because of this life-changing experience, I focused my career on the discovery of cancer markers,” Pierce said. “It took me many years to piece together that the smoking pipe filters he used for 40 years contained asbestos. So, obviously, our ignorance of the causes of cancer allowed this product to be marketed and claim to be healthful by filtering tobacco smoke.”

A decade later, Pierce moved to the University of Georgia (UGA). Since many of the cancer markers he had found were made of glycans, the University of Georgia would position him to collaborate with other scientists whose research also focused on glycans.

Life Full Circle

Today, Pierce serves as director of the UGA Cancer Center, distinguished research professor of biochemistry and Mudter family professor of cancer research.

“We have developed an antibody that recognizes pancreatic cancer and are now collaborating with scientists at the University of Pennsylvania to develop CAR-T cells that can find and kill pancreatic cancer when injected into a patient.”

And as important as his academic and research work is to those living

with cancer, Pierce is equally driven to serve as the same kind of mentor to young students as he benefited from during his student years at OBU.

In fact, he considers the impact he makes on young people who will one day change the world as the most rewarding aspect of his work.

“The challenge for a teacher is to give something to each student, irrespective of the level or capabilities of that student,” Pierce said. “Many times, that gift translates into helping the student gain an insight into her or his own talents and abilities. That experience translates directly from the teachers at OBU I learned from and their willingness to challenge and expect the best from their students.”

Away from work, Pierce cherishes spending time with his wife Stephanie, their two sons, and two grandchildren. Stephanie earned a Master of Fine Arts from Manhattan School of Music in New York and was the hired soloist in several choirs in which Michael performed, including locations such as Miami and Athens.

“My greatest memories have been singing the Requiem Masses by Bach, Brahms, Mozart, Rutter and Poulenc, all of which helped me heal from the deaths of my father and mother,” he said. “An added inspiration was that Stephanie was the soprano soloist for these works, with me singing bass in the choir.” □

ALUMNI **GOLD** AWARD

(GRADUATE OF THE LAST DECADE)



FAITH FORWARD

Giving back to OBU students is a key aspect to the success in life that 2009 alumnus Peter Wilson has achieved.

When Peter Wilson stepped up to the podium and looked into the audience at OBU's Spring Business Forum, he knew that his purpose on that day was about more than giving a presentation or a speech. There was more to it than that.

To the business students who were looking up to him, Wilson knew he represented possibility. Hope. A bright and successful future. And he knew it, because he himself had been sitting in that very same seat barely 10 years earlier.

"Getting to be an encouragement as students start their careers has been an honor and a full-circle experience," he said.

Going All In

Even though Wilson will attest that there isn't anything radical about him or his career, he did make a

very bold move just a few years after graduating from OBU in 2009 with a bachelor's degree in finance and marketing.

He had relocated to California after accepting a full-time position with the company where he had interned as an OBU student. It was an important learning experience, in more ways than one. Not only was it a sign of just how powerful internships could be in terms of future employment, Wilson also learned from his time working there that what he really wanted was to be a part of a smaller company where he could help build it up and be involved in all aspects of its growth.

So, he reconnected with a mentor who had spoken at the Spring Business Forum when Wilson was a student, Kent Humphreys. The two discussed possible opportunities

and Humphreys introduced Wilson to the leadership at PTLA Real Estate Group.

An independent company that acquires and manages multi-family real estate on the West Coast, PTLA was just the kind of operation that Wilson was looking for. So, in a move that would likely be questioned by any business professor, Wilson offered to work at PTLA for free doing market research.

Bold Move Pays Off

PTLA accepted Wilson's offer and after a year asked him to join on a full-time basis, with pay.

The company raises money from high net-worth investors and purchases properties that are expected to pay cash flow and provide appreciation in the future. And it didn't take long for Wilson

to make his presence known. After starting as an analyst, he moved up the ladder to vice president and chief operating officer.

Now in his 10th year with PTLA, Wilson currently serves as the company's president. Under his leadership, PTLA has doubled its annual transaction volume, more than doubled the number of units under PTLA, and acquired two management companies.

With more than 80 employees and nearly \$1 billion in real estate across the West Coast, Wilson oversees everything from strategy, business development and client relations to acquisitions, dispositions and financing.

Growing, With Heart

As president of a successful company, Wilson understands the need to balance growth with quality and a culture where members of the team are fulfilled and valued.

"There is the desire to always push growth," he said. "But it is important to keep focused on what is most important and keep the team's work/life balance a top priority."

It's here that Wilson draws upon his OBU experience.

In addition to preparing him to analyze problems, develop solutions and excel in areas such as presenting, communication,

networking and leadership, OBU offered him much more. He was part of a community in which people valued and inspired one another. Where life dreams and career goals were supported and nurtured.

It came from his fondest memories from Bison Hill such as Welcome Week, intramurals, Kerr Christmas, Spring Affair, GO Week and listening to live jazz in the Black Box with friends on Friday nights. These are the experiences that fostered in him the belief that being able to connect on a human level and leading as a Christian was as important as anything.

A Different Kind of Gold

So, it was little surprise that, in 2019, Wilson received OBU's Graduate of the Last Decade (GOLD) Award. The GOLD Award is presented to a recent OBU graduate who has demonstrated outstanding achievement and brought pride and honor to the University.

"I'm humbled and honored by the recognition," Wilson said. "I hope I was selected because I'm an example of someone working hard to live out my beliefs, to act with integrity in my community and to pursue excellence in my field."

Part of his example is the way he constantly looks to give back to the OBU community that gave so

"Getting to be an encouragement as students start their careers has been an honor and a full-circle experience."

much to him. So, when he isn't working or doing his other favorite pastimes – spending time with his wife and three kids, going to church together, getting together with friends and duck hunting with his dog Whiskey – he's looking for ways to mentor young people interested in business.

In addition to speaking at OBU's Spring Business Forum, he also seeks out OBU students for internships at PTLA.

"I know that I greatly benefited from the mentorship of those who took time to invest in me during my college years," he said. "And it's important for me to do the same for others." □

Awards Presented During Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting



OBU presented the J.M. Carroll Award to Dr. Hance Dilbeck during the Annual Meeting in Nashville. Dilbeck, an OBU alumnus, currently serves as the president-elect for GuideStone Financial Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. Dilbeck served until June 2021 as executive-treasurer of Oklahoma Baptists, a

position he began in 2018. OBU President Dr. Heath A. Thomas presented the award. Given in recognition of outstanding denominational service in the state of Oklahoma, the award is named for Dr. J.M. Carroll, who served as OBU's first president, helping establish the foundation upon which OBU's tradition of excellence has been built.



OBU presented the Herschel H. Hobbs Award for Distinguished Denominational Service to Dr. David Manner during the Annual Meeting. Manner is an OBU alumnus and serves as the executive director for the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists (KNCSB). OBU President Dr. Heath A. Thomas presented the

award to Manner. The award is named to honor the noteworthy Southern Baptist denominational service of Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs, a prolific author, preacher and radio program host. Hobbs was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City from 1949-72, and is also the namesake of OBU's Herschel H. Hobbs School of Theology and Ministry.

Alumni Notes are available
only in the print version.

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Tom Terry Recognized for Decades of Community Involvement



The city of Shawnee recognized **Tom Terry**, OBU vice president for business affairs emeritus and former university archivist, with a special surprise recognition celebration June 26. The event included the reading of the proclamation for Tom Terry Week in Shawnee, June 28 to July 3, while also announcing the newly named Tom Terry Park at Main and Broadway in downtown Shawnee. The recognition celebration honored Terry for his many years of service to Shawnee and his contributions to the community at large, particularly in his efforts to beautify the Shawnee community in many ways.

The official proclamation noted his distinguished career at OBU, where he served as treasurer and controller, vice president for business affairs and interim president, as well as the various awards bestowed upon him on Bison Hill, including the Distinguished Service Award, Meritorious Service Award and an honorary doctorate.

The proclamation likewise recognized him for his service in the Shawnee community in numerous roles and organizations, including Shawnee Lions Club, Shawnee Campfire Youth, Shawnee United Way, Pioneer Library Board and Pottawatomie County Historical Society, as well as serving as a long-time trustee of Shawnee Regional Hospital. Terry was also recognized for his devotion to University Baptist Church, where he has served as deacon, Sunday school teacher, choir member and primary caretaker of the landscaping and grounds. Although July 3 marked his 91st birthday, Terry continues to serve his church, his community and OBU.

The proclamation, read by Shawnee Mayor Ed Bolt, concluded with special thanks for Terry's investment in the beautification of Shawnee, including his service as president of the Multi-County Master Gardener Association.



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SEE PAGES 18-19 FOR DETAILS.