



We're Focused on Your Future!

Otero College
President's Report
January 2025
Kimberly Zant, Ed.D.

Transform the Student Experience



The Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) program at Otero held a pinning ceremony for its 10th graduating class on Monday, December 9, 2024, in the Rizzuto Banquet Room at Otero College. Five graduates were pinned. Students completed the Associates of Applied Science Degree in Medical Laboratory Technician.

The MLT program at Otero is designed to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform diagnostic tests and medical procedures in a laboratory setting. Students gain hands-on experience in areas such as hematology, transfusion medicine, microbiology, clinical chemistry, urinalysis, and molecular diagnostics. The data they provide is critical for physicians to diagnose and treat patients effectively.

The program consists of five semesters, with the first three semesters taking place at Otero's campus. The remaining two semesters include clinical rotations at affiliated medical facilities, where students can apply their skills in real-world settings.

Upon completion of the program, graduates earn an Associate of Applied Science degree and are eligible to sit for the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) national certification

exam, which is widely recognized in the medical field. Successful graduates are ready to join the workforce as trained Medical Laboratory Technicians, a role that is in high demand and plays a vital part in patient care.

The program, which began in 2013, has graduated 40 MLTs, and offers a pathway for further education. Graduates can continue their studies to earn a bachelor's degree and achieve a Medical Laboratory Science certification to advance in their careers.

The Otero MLT program ensures that students are well-prepared for a rewarding and essential role in healthcare.



Dean Rees, Choir Director at Otero College, sought outstanding arrangements for this semester's choir, renowned for its talented singers. He selected top pieces from his favorite musical distributor's "basic library," leading to the creation of the "Superb Songs of the Season" concert.

The concert took place on Monday, December 9, at 7:00 PM at the First Church of La Junta, located at 111 E. 20th Street, due to the remodeling of the college's Humanities Center.

The program featured beautiful arrangements, including "Do You Hear What I Hear?" with piano accompaniment by Mary Belew, and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," conducted by Donna Cannon, with Mr. Rees joining on piano. Other highlights included "O Little Town of Bethlehem" featuring violinist Jessica Bay, as well as a clever take on "Variations on Fa-La-La."

The concert also showcased classics like "What Child is This?", Leroy Anderson's "Sleigh Ride," and the nostalgic "Somewhere in My Memory." To round out the program, attendees enjoyed a gospel-inflected "Beautiful Star of Bethlehem," "Make Me an Instrument of Thy Peace," and the celebratory "Feliz Navidad," featuring percussionist Aavalajn Wiggins.

Small group performances enriched the evening, including a syncopated rendition of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and a mash-up of "Amen! Go Tell It On the Mountain." Dean Rees concluded the concert with a piano solo titled "A Jolly Jingle."



The Otero Law Enforcement Academy proudly graduated 28 students on December 10, 2024, officially welcoming them as officers. Congratulations to Class #53 on this significant achievement! This was the largest class to date to graduate from Otero's Law Enforcement Training Academy.

This graduation marks a pivotal moment in the lives of these new officers as they embark on their careers in law enforcement, committed to serving and protecting their communities.

Create Education without Barriers through Transformational Partnerships



Thanks to the funds provided through the AIM Grant, Otero College was able to purchase life-sized human limbs for muscle and bone studies. These incredible, biologically accurate models give Otero College Anatomy and Physiology students the opportunity to examine, study, and learn the skeletal/muscular systems found in human limbs.

Last academic year, the Biology Department requested funding to acquire a life-sized arm and leg from SynDaver (provider of medical-simulation equipment). These anatomically accurate models feature soft, movable synthetic muscles and bones, offering a significant improvement from traditional static models that require disassembly to examine deeper muscles and bone attachment sites.

The limbs were received in April 2024. In October, as Anatomy and Physiology students began the section of study relating to muscles and joints, they were able to employ the new models. Additionally, instructors can place pins in specific muscles to better assess students' abilities to identify muscles and their functions.

Service contracts have been acquired to ensure maintenance of the new limb models. Given the expected movement and handling associated with each model, there is a possibility of damage. The service contract will ensure that the models remain functional for the next five years.

According to faculty member Warren McClure, "Students are actively using the muscle models for hands on comparison with digital resources to help them better prepare for lab practicals. Students also say the ability to manipulate the muscles is helpful."

The *AIM (Accessing Innovative Measures) for Higher Retention* grant was awarded October 1, 2020. This five-year Title V grant is for \$2.9 million. The AIM grant is based on the assumption that improving Otero's low retention rates will lead to improved graduation and transfer rates, along with higher GPAs. Four program focus areas are incorporated in the grant including: building college readiness, mentoring and student support, expanding the student experience and professional development. Activities included are developing new orientation programs, providing mentoring options for students, developing service learning and research opportunities for students, and implementing professional development related to cultural relevance. To receive a Title V grant, institutions must be designated as an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution).



Announced by means of a personal letter to Dr. Kimberly Zant (President of Otero College) from Dr. Angie Paccione (Executive Director), Otero College, as of November 2024, has received the designation of a First Generation-Serving Institution. This letter, written on behalf of the

Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), expresses that this designation reflects the CDHE's commitment to "ensuring retention, success and career paths" and is based on annual enrollment.

To recognize Colorado's institutions of higher education that set a high standard for enrolling and supporting first generation students, CDHE created the First Generation-Serving Institution Designation. The First Generation-Serving Institution Designation acknowledges institutions whose average first generation undergraduate student population equals or exceeds the statewide average first generation undergraduate student population. Alternately, CDHE also recognizes institutions that have secured a First Scholars Network of Institutions designation from the Center for First Generation Student Success or a similarly rigorous independent third-party designation.

While enrollment of first-generation students is an important first step, it is equally important to ensure that first generation students receive the support they need to be successful in higher education. CDHE strives to elevate first generation student experiences and close equity gaps so that first generation students have similar outcomes (in retention and graduation rates) as their counterparts. In future years, CDHE will showcase additional postsecondary success measures with more data disaggregation so that the success of persistence and completion rates of first generation students (and other student populations) can be compared across Colorado institutions of higher education.

The First Generation-Serving Institution Designation aims to address barriers to educational equity through effective programs that use an intersectional approach to support every student in their career aspirations. CDHE's First Generation-Serving Institution Designation is based on years of equity work. The designation was created to work with existing resources on college campuses and offer a variety of options to ensure each student's needs are met! Learn more at: <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/first-gen>

Transform Our Own Workforce Experience

On Friday, January 17, the Otero College Foundation Board, Advisory Council, and dedicated staff members came together for the first of what is hoped to be many community mixers. The event, designed to foster connections between board members, advisory council members, and college employees, witnessed an impressive turnout of approximately 75 attendees, exceeding expectations.

Held in the Rattler's Den, the gathering featured lunch provided by the college's on-campus catering service, complete with fresh salads and hearty sandwiches. Participants enjoyed an hour and a half of networking, sharing experiences, and building professional relationships across various industries and within the local community.

The Foundation Board and Advisory Council aim to continue hosting such mixers in the future, facilitating dialogue and partnership opportunities that benefit both the college and the broader community.

On Monday, January 20th, Otero College supervisors gathered for a meal and training session focused on enhancing their leadership skills. Approximately 20 attendees engaged in a thorough discussion on the important topics of “How to Have Difficult Conversations” and accountability.

The training featured interactive activities that fostered collaboration and provided a platform for supervisors to share best practices. Participants exchanged valuable processes and templates for documentation, equipping them with practical tools to apply in their daily operations.

Otero College remains committed to providing valuable development opportunities for its staff, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration.
