

**REGIONAL UNIVERSITY
SYSTEM OF OKLAHOMA
AFFORDABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY
FRAMEWORK**





NORTHEASTERN
STATE UNIVERSITY



Northwestern
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY



Southeastern Oklahoma
State University

SWOSU
Southwestern Oklahoma State University



UNIVERSITY OF
Central Oklahoma

THE FRAMEWORK

I am excited to share the launch of the Regional University System of Oklahoma's Affordability and Transparency Framework. Cost should not be a barrier for Oklahomans seeking higher education opportunities. That is why affordability remains a cornerstone of the RUSO mission. We are dedicated to providing financial support and innovative solutions to keep higher education within reach for all Oklahomans while working to protect the invest of Oklahoma taxpayers. With this affordability framework, we remain deeply committed to upholding Oklahoma's values – integrity, community, and resilience.

The six RUSO universities are at the forefront of addressing workforce shortages by developing specialized programs that directly align with the needs of Oklahoma's evolving industries. Through strategic partnerships and tailored curricula, RUSO is preparing students to step into high-demand roles that drive economic growth in our state.

Additionally, RUSO is reaffirming our unwavering commitment to rural Oklahoma by expanding outreach and resources to ensure that students in underserved regions have access to high-quality education and support.

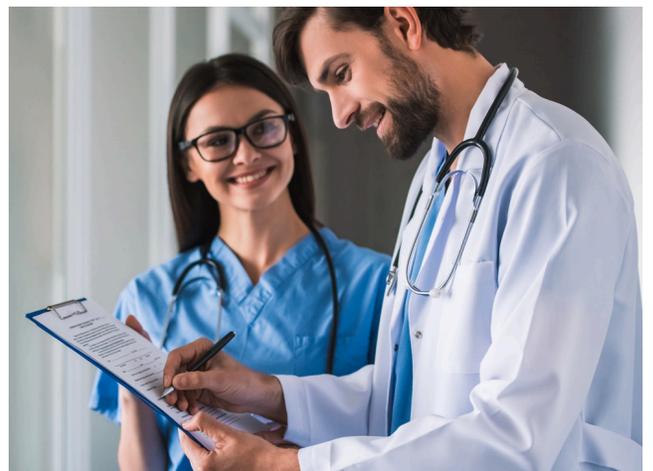
By fostering local talent and promoting community engagement, RUSO universities are contributing to the vitality and sustainability of rural areas across our state.

Warm regards,

Brandon Tatum

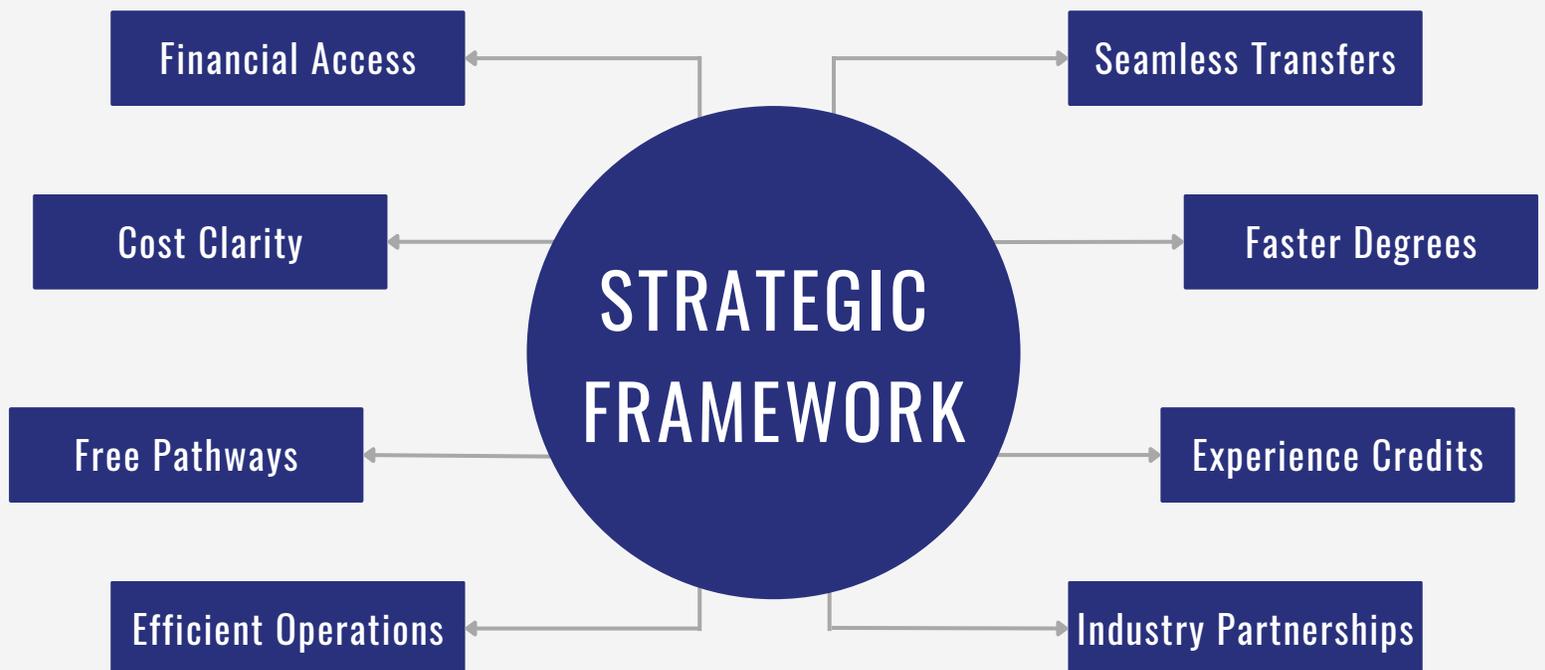


Dr. Brandon Tatum, CEO
Regional University System of Oklahoma



REGIONAL UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF OKLAHOMA

AFFORDABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY



- The RUSO Affordability and Transparency Framework can be organized into eight categories.
- Multiple affordability strategies may fall within each category.
- This framework has been created by the RUSO Board of Regents to ensure affordability and accessibility for students.

AFFORDABILITY & TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK

Higher education costs have become a significant barrier for many students and families, leading to increased student debt and limiting access to the transformative power of a college degree. As a steward of public higher education in Oklahoma, the Board of Regents for the Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO) is responsible for ensuring that the institutions it governs provide affordable, high-quality education to all students. Higher education affordability is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity in today's economic climate. The rising cost of a college education nationwide has placed immense pressure on students, particularly those from low and middle-income families, making higher education increasingly inaccessible.

The RUSO Affordability and Transparency Framework aims to address rising educational and institutional costs through several efficiency and cost recovery measures. This plan will address institutional needs to not only meet evolving student and Oklahoma workforce expectations, but also to maintain a safe and impactful educational environment.

The six universities within RUSO—Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Northwestern State University, East Central University, and the University of Central Oklahoma—must lead the way in creating innovative strategies to maintain and enhance affordability. Each university must develop a comprehensive three-year strategic plan detailing how it will address the challenge of rising tuition costs and ensure access to education for all Oklahomans.

This comprehensive plan will emphasize financial aid, transparency in pricing, innovative programs, and/or community partnerships. If a university determines it needs a modest increase, such increase request must be accompanied by a suite of strategies designed to ensure that higher education remains affordable for all students. These strategies will offset the three-year incremental increase and establish beneficial change for students.

OKLAHOMA TUITION COMPARISON

Comparing RUSO and Oklahoma Research Universities

Average Annual Cost of Attendance: In-state Student living on Campus Oklahoma's Research Universities

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA	\$29,052
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY	\$23,745

Average Annual Cost of Attendance: In-state Student living on Campus Regional University System

SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY	\$17,284
SOUTHWESTERN OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY	\$12,612
NORTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY	\$20,766
NORTHWESTERN OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY	\$15,372
EAST CENTRAL UNIVERSITY	\$15,886
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA	\$19,655

- On average, a RUSO student pays \$5,452.58 per semester.
- The total average debt for a RUSO university graduate is only \$17,724.50.

AFFORDABILITY & TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK

While RUSO institutions are currently more affordable than most four-year universities in Oklahoma, it is imperative that we continue to explore and implement strategies that keep costs in check and align with the economic realities of Oklahoma families.

Strategies for Maintaining Affordability

Managing fixed costs amid inflationary pressures can present significant challenges for universities. As costs for goods, services, and wages rise, it may become necessary to consider modest tuition increases to ensure financial sustainability. However, there are various strategies that institutions can implement to maintain overall affordability for students. By expanding need-based financial aid, offering flexible tuition payment plans, reducing administrative expenses, and promoting cost-saving measures such as open educational resources (OER), amongst other strategies, universities can mitigate the impact of inflation on students and families. By enhancing financial aid and support services, universities can signal their commitment to making education accessible, ensuring that the burden doesn't disproportionately fall on low-income students. These measures, when combined with careful financial management, can help ensure that higher education remains accessible without placing an undue burden on students.

The rest of this packet will contain the framework that provides the RUSO institutions with unique strategies to create their strategic plan. We recognize that each of our universities are different and need the autonomy to create their individualized strategic plan. Universities may find strategies outside of this framework that are appropriate for their institution.

AFFORDABILITY & TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK

The following are bold, key strategies that RUSO universities consider when developing their 2025-2028 affordability plans.



Need-Based Financial Aid

- Expand need-based aid programs to ensure that students from low- and middle-income families have access to the financial resources they need to complete their degrees.



Tuition Deduction or Reorganizing Tuition and Fees

- Strategically consider reducing tuition rates for certain areas, programs, or certifications. Decoupling tuition and fees can offer a university greater transparency and flexibility in its pricing structure, which can help students and families better understand the true cost of education. By separating these costs, universities can more clearly communicate what tuition covers—typically instruction and academic services—versus what fees cover, such as student activities, health services, or technology access. This approach allows students to make informed decisions about which services they actually need, potentially opting out of non-essential services to reduce their overall cost. Additionally, it can enable the university to adjust fees more precisely based on usage, ensuring that students are only paying for what they use, thereby enhancing affordability.



Tuition-Free and Reduced-Cost Programs

- Explore opportunities for tuition-free or reduced-cost programs for students who meet specific criteria, such as income level or residency.



Income-Share Agreements

- Consider implementing Income-Share Agreements, where students pay a percentage of their post-graduation income instead of upfront tuition, reducing financial stress during their college years.



Accelerated Degree Programs and Concurrent Enrollment

- Develop and promote accelerated degree programs that allow students to complete their degrees in less time, reducing overall costs. Consider reducing the number of credits required for certain degrees and offering tuition discounts for students who take more credits per semester. Furthermore, utilize and expand concurrent offerings to accelerate a student's path toward graduation.

AFFORDABILITY & TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK



Tuition Freeze

- Consider freezing tuition for a period of time. If you have a history of holding tuition flat, explain this approach in the plan.



Cut Operational Expenses and Eliminate Debt

- A university can enhance affordability by implementing strategic operational cuts that reduce unnecessary expenditures while preserving the quality of education. This could involve streamlining administrative functions through technology, consolidating departments with overlapping duties, and renegotiating contracts for services and supplies to secure better rates. Additionally, universities can optimize energy use across campuses, reduce travel costs by utilizing virtual meetings, and review course offerings to eliminate under-enrolled classes, all of which contribute to a leaner, more cost-effective operation.



Online and Hybrid Learning Options

- Expand online and hybrid course offerings to reduce costs associated with physical infrastructure and provide flexible learning options for students.



Community College Partnerships

- Strengthen partnerships with community colleges to create clear pathways for students to transfer and complete their degrees at a lower overall cost.



Prior Learning Assessment

- Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) evaluates and recognizes students' knowledge gained outside traditional classrooms, such as work experience, military service, or independent study. By incorporating PLA, universities can reduce the number of courses students must take, leading to lower tuition costs and faster degree completion. This approach promotes affordability and accessibility, enabling more students to achieve their educational goals without excessive financial burden.

AFFORDABILITY & TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK



Tuition Payment Plans

- Offer flexible, interest-free payment plans that allow students and families to pay tuition in installments rather than in one lump sum.



Open Educational Resources

- Encourage the use of Open Educational Resources and other cost-saving measures for textbooks and course materials to reduce the overall cost of education.



Merit-Based Scholarships

- Continue to offer and expand scholarships based on academic achievement, leadership, and community involvement to reduce the financial burden on high-achieving students.



Industry Partnerships

- Build partnerships with employers to help students with tuition reimbursement in key industries.



Additional Revenue Streams

- Identify strategic, innovative and new revenue streams for the university.

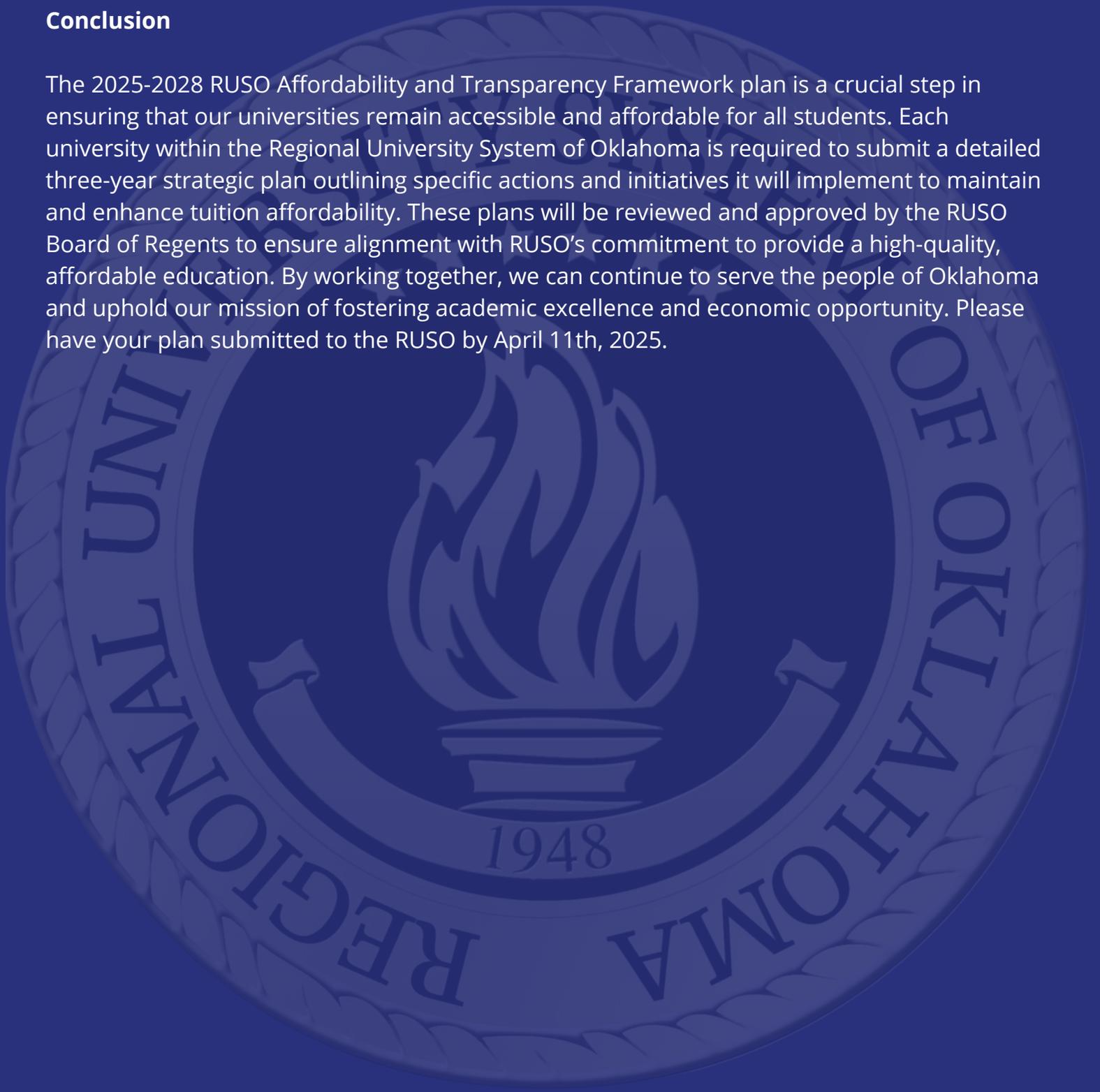
Universities may choose other creative ways to remain affordable when developing their three-year strategy.

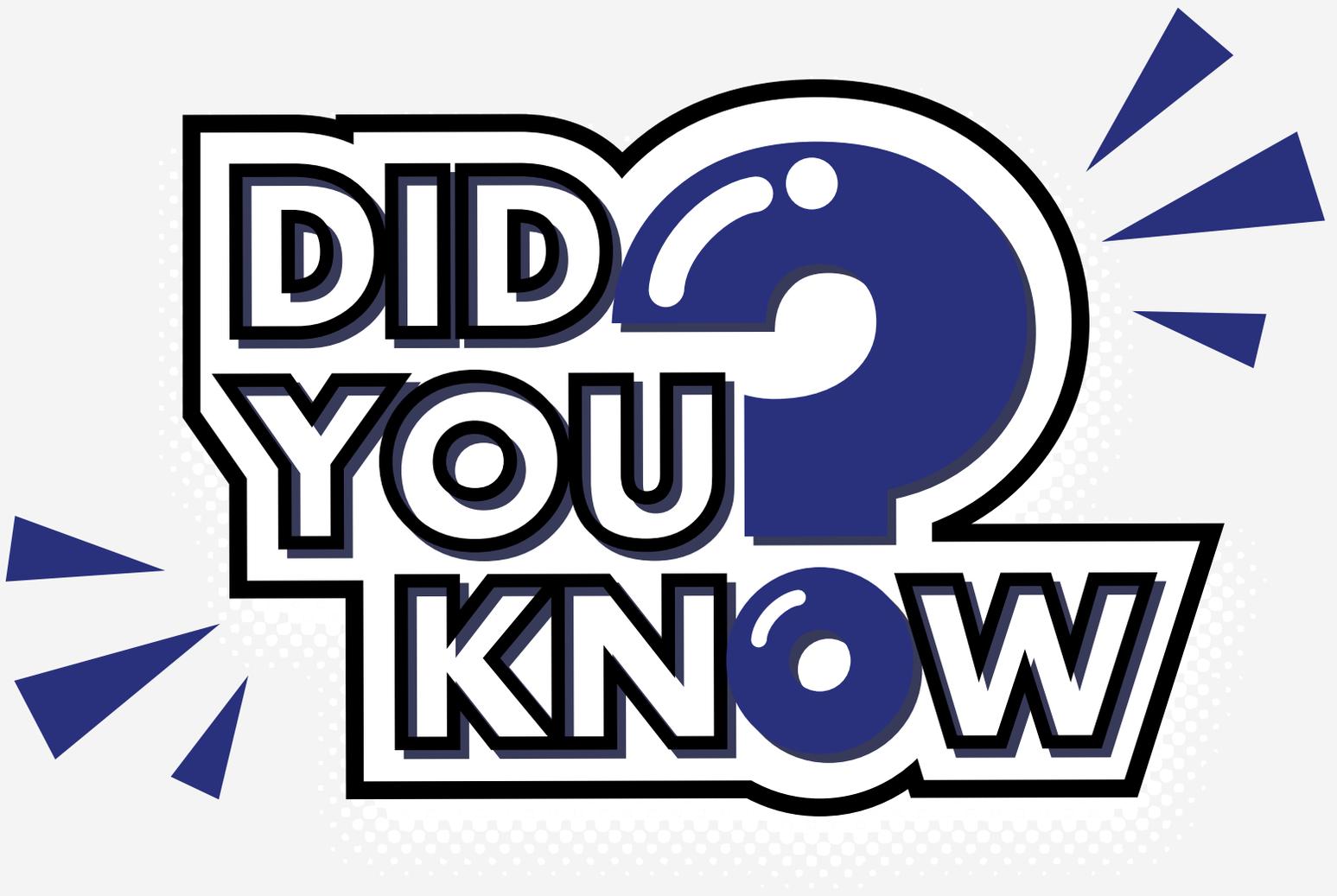
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AFFORDABILITY & TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK

Conclusion

The 2025-2028 RUSO Affordability and Transparency Framework plan is a crucial step in ensuring that our universities remain accessible and affordable for all students. Each university within the Regional University System of Oklahoma is required to submit a detailed three-year strategic plan outlining specific actions and initiatives it will implement to maintain and enhance tuition affordability. These plans will be reviewed and approved by the RUSO Board of Regents to ensure alignment with RUSO's commitment to provide a high-quality, affordable education. By working together, we can continue to serve the people of Oklahoma and uphold our mission of fostering academic excellence and economic opportunity. Please have your plan submitted to the RUSO by April 11th, 2025.

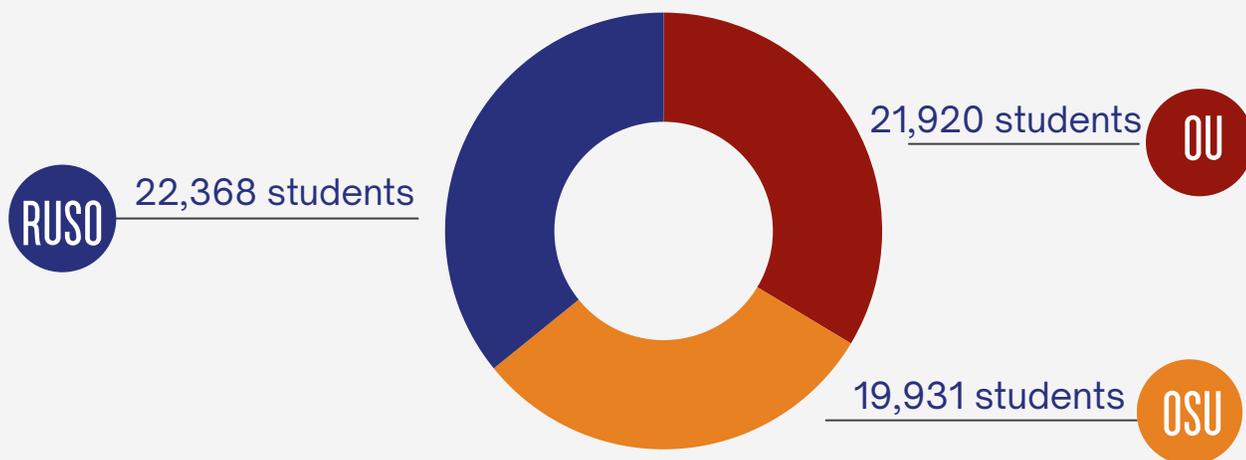




SAME SIZE \neq SAME BUDGET

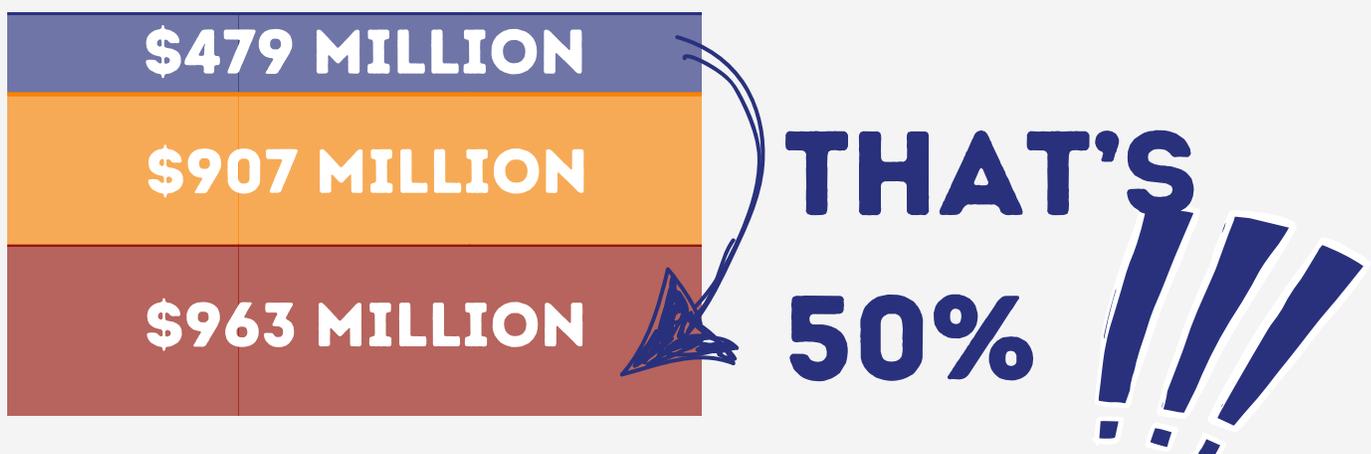
The four-year university system in Oklahoma is built as a three-tiered system that works alongside community colleges, career techs, and K-12 schools across the state. Regional and research universities work together to create a vibrant educational environment offering bachelor's and graduate degrees. According to the most current data, these university systems produced 14,000 graduates who stayed and worked in Oklahoma.

TOTAL UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT



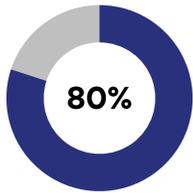
TOTAL BUDGET

THE TOTAL RUSO BUDGET IS 50% OF RESEARCH UNIVERISTIES
YET GRADUATE MORE TEACHERS AND NURSES

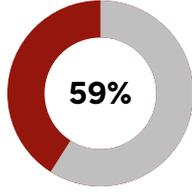


RUSO'S GRADUATES STAY IN OKLAHOMA

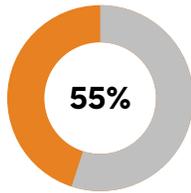
% OF GRADUATES IN OKLAHOMA



RUSO



OU



OSU

This is the percentage of graduates that stayed in Oklahoma after 5 years from graduation.



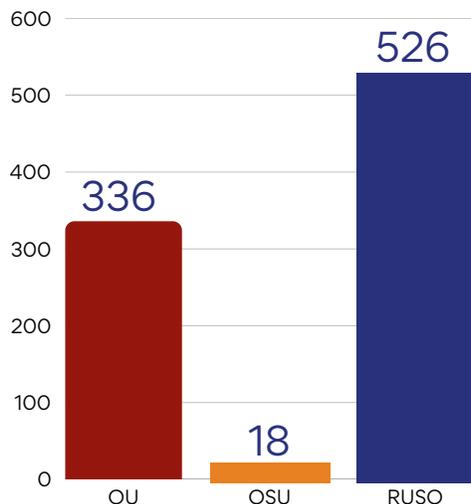
RUSO graduates raise their families in our state and are the lifeblood of our rural economies. They stay in Oklahoma and raise their families here. This is worth investing in.

-Dr. Brandon Tatum

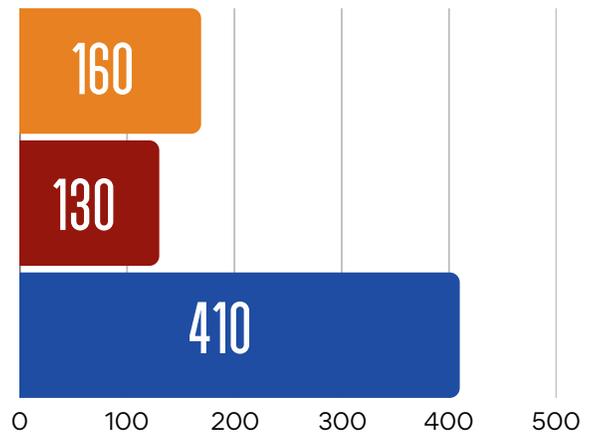
AS THE STATE'S LARGEST *WORKFORCE ENGINE* WITHIN TEACHING AND NURSING, **RUSO** IS **WORTH THE INVESTMENT** AND POISED TO MAKE A MAJOR IMPACT

NURSING GRADUATES 2023

RUSO PRODUCES MORE NURSES THAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES



TEACHER GRADUATES 2023



*Source: <https://okhighered.org/studies-reports/dashboards/>

**Source: OSHRE staff