

Campus Update

Brandon Whitten Institute celebrates grand opening

The Brandon Whitten Institute for Addiction and Recovery at East Central University celebrated the grand opening of its new location on the corner of S. Central Ave. and E. Main St. on Sept. 2.

The event also marked the 15th anniversary of the Institute's founding. Notable attendees included Co-Founder Reggie Whitten and Rachelle Whitten, Hannah Whitten, ECU President Wendell Godwin, and President Emeritus and Co-Founder John Hargrave, among others.

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The Whittens visited campus to celebrate the grand opening of the new Brandon Whitten Institute location.

Educators' Hall of Fame induction

The Gene and Evelyn Keefer Educators' Hall of Fame induction ceremony recently took place on campus with two ECU alumni being honored.

Rita R. Volturo and the late S. Wayne Maxwell were both recognized for their distinguished careers in education over the decades.

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ECU Foundation awards record-setting scholarship support

The ECU Foundation has awarded more than \$850,000 in scholarships for the Fall 2025 semester, marking a historic high for any fall semester in the Foundation's history. This unprecedented level of support reflects a nearly \$300,000 increase compared to Fall 2024, when \$569,500 in scholarships was awarded. Currently, the Foundation manages 382 scholarships, up from 369 in the 2023-24 academic year. Every academic department is represented among the recipients.

Homecoming closing in!

The 2025 ECU Homecoming theme, "Ringmaster Roary's Big Top Bash" has been announced.

Homecoming festivities will take place Friday Oct. 17 and Saturday, Oct. 18

Registration is currently open for the annual Homecoming parade, 5K run, Golden Tiger Brunch, volunteer opportunities and more.

Visit ecok.edu/alumni/homecoming for more information.

INSTITUTE

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“On behalf of the Brandon Whitten Institute, we want to say thank you to everyone who joined us for the grand opening of our new building and the celebration of our 15th anniversary,” said Executive Director of the Brandon Whitten Institute, Holli Witherington. “A special thank you to President Wendell Godwin, President Emeritus and Founder John Hargrave, and Founder Reggie Whitten for sharing their words, vision, and ongoing support of our mission.”

Witherington also expressed appreciation for the Institute’s dedicated staff and the former employees who returned to take part in the milestone.



ECU’s Academic Success Center continues free support services

The Academic Success Center offers comprehensive services for undergraduate students through The Tutoring Zone and Writing Center.

The Tutoring Zone assists in a range of classes including math, science, language, history, business, political science and more. The Writing Center consultants offer assistance during each stage of the writing process, including help getting started, revising drafts and adding final touches.

The ASC began offering Supplemental Instruction, a specialized type of group tutoring where tutors serve as session leaders, during the Spring 2024 semester. During Supplemental Instruction sessions, the SI leaders use a variety of learning strategies to help students fully understand the material.

During the 24-25 academic year, 34% of students who attended SI earned an “A” in the course they were studying for, and 37% earned a “B.”

Employee Spotlight



Dr. Mara Sukholuts kaya

Dr. Sukholuts kaya serves as the Director of Global Education and professor for the Department of English and Languages.

She currently teaches courses in Global Literature and a variety of language classes, such as, Russian, Spanish, and French. She is a founder and President of the Central Association of Russian Teachers of America (CARTA) and she also oversees a wide range of Study Abroad opportunities for students across campus, among much more.

Her research interests include Russian Language Pedagogy and Russian Culture. Dr. Sukholuts kaya holds an Honorary Doctorate in Linguistics and International Communications from National M. Dragomanov Pedagogical University, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Dr. Mark Walling, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, said, “Dr. Mara Sukholuts kaya is an outstanding instructor of languages. One reason for her sustained excellence is her awareness of the importance of culture and history to the study of any language. She has been tireless in her efforts to provide travel opportunities for her students. She has enriched the lives of many students.”



HALL OF FAME

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The Educators Hall of Fame was established with the sponsorship of Janice Diamond and Paul Keefer, the children of Gene and Evelyn Keefer, to recognize ECU-prepared educators at any level who have made a significant contribution to the field of education. For more information, visit ecok.edu/news.

Commemorating a National Tragedy



The ECU Honors Program hosted a lecture titled, “Commemorating a National Tragedy: Monuments, Memorials, and Public Remembrance,” with Dr. Jennifer McMahon, who spoke on the nature of memory, both individual and collective, the ways in which memory can be elicited, and the various reasons we should remember tragic events.

The lecture offered an opportunity to commemorate the lives lost on Sept. 11 while drawing on her academic background in ethics and the philosophy of art to reflect more broadly on the role of art in public life.

ECU prepares to celebrate 20 years since Gorbachev visit



On Oct. 25, 2005, East Central University was visited by a historic guest speaker in former president of the Soviet Union and global political leader, Mikhail Gorbachev.

Under the leadership of ECU professor and Director of Global Education, Dr. Mara Sukholutskaya, the ECU and Ada

communities came together in a monumental effort to facilitate and fund the visit of one of the most prominent global figures of the era.



Photos provided by Richard Barron from Ada News

Raising more than \$100,000 from a wide network of donors across ECU and the City of Ada was only one of many challenges. Sukholutskaya formed a committee of dedicated professionals to assist with raising the funds as well as prepare the logistics, such as accommodations and a level of security that was unheard of at ECU, or in Ada, at the time.

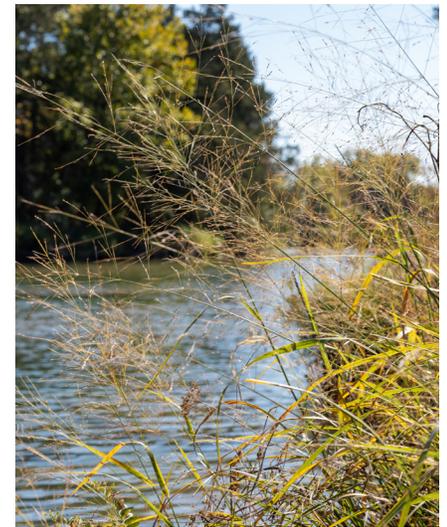
In honor of the 20-year anniversary of this momentous moment in ECU and Oklahoma history, an event is scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 30, 2025 in the Estep Multimedia Center inside the Bill S. Cole University at 6:30 p.m. with a reception to follow.

Events across campus and beyond



Hundreds gathered for the annual Step Out of the Darkness prayer march organized by the Brandon Whitten Institute and the Pontotoc County Drug Free Coalition.

The march began at the Pontotoc County Court House and continued down Main Street to ECU.



Oka' Camp returned to the Blue River with Dr. Christine Pappas. This event is sponsored by the Oka' Institute at ECU, Grow Ada, the Chickasaw Nation Office of Cultural Tourism, and the Water Resource Policy and Management master of science degree at ECU.



Tigerpalooza 2025

Thirteen High Schools, ranging from 3A to 5A competed in the 2025 Tigerpalooza event, which saw hundreds in attendance at the Koi Ishto Stadium. The schools included were Ada, Antlers, Ardmore, Davis, Duncan, Durant, Elgin, Fairview, Hugo, Kingston, Lawton, Prague and Wewoka. ECU's Pride of Tigerland also performed.



Fresh Check Day, organized by the ECU Student Counseling Service Center, is a mental health check-in that featured interactive booths, free food, prizes and more.

The event was a collaboration between ECU Housing & Residence Life, CAB & the Office of Campus Involvement, ECU Career Center, ECU Student Resource Coordinator, ECU SGA, Ada PD, and the Chickasaw Nation.



The annual Faculty Showcase took place with nine members of ECU's Performing Arts Department contributing to the event in the Ataloo Theatre. The program included a blend of classical and contemporary works from composers such as George Frideric Händel, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Launy Grøndahl, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and more.

Events across campus and beyond cont.



The annual Grounded Chalk Art Festival returned with 47 entries and 175 elementary, middle/high school and ECU students included.



ECU Honors Program Sorting Hat Ceremony

First year Honors Program students were sorted into their respective houses.

ECU Showtime presents, “Fearing the Legend of Sleepy Hollow”



ECU Showtime presented “Fearing the Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in the Ataloo Theatre with an estimated 700 attendees over the 3-night event.

The musical, performed primarily by students, was written and directed by ECU’s Vickie Reifsnider and included musical arrangements by Rudy Lupinski and lyrics by Reifsnider and Darice Strickland.



The editors for the 69th edition of ECU’s literary journal, “Originals,” were announced at the annual Originals Open-Mic. Sarah Christensen, Jayde Landreth and Megan Moss will be the Originals 2025 editors.



The 2025-26 Go Global and ECU Study Abroad Fair featured a number of students who have participated in the program sharing their experience of traveling to, and studying at, universities across the globe.

ECU Retiree Brunch



Renovations across campus



The Stadium Apartments on campus have received major renovations and are being prepared for a grand reopening.



Taff Dining and Hospitality ribbon cutting ceremony

The Ada Area Chamber of Commerce attended the ribbon cutting ceremony alongside President Wendell Godwin and other ECU leadership.

Significant progress made on the Dan Hays STEM Center throughout the Fall semester



Upcoming Events

- Oct. 2
- Midterm Study Bag Giveaway, 10 a.m.
 - ECU ASC's Midterm Survival Guide, 4 p.m.
 - Homecoming Court Nominee Meeting, 5 p.m.
 - Super Smash Bros. Tournament, 6 p.m.
 - Rothbaum Lecture, 7 p.m.

- Oct. 4
- Soccer vs. SWOSU, 2 p.m.

- Oct. 7
- Cinderella Confidential, 10 a.m.
 - ECU Accounting Career Night, 5:30 p.m.

- Oct. 8
- FA25 Term A Ends
 - Senior Day
 - ECU Majors Fair, 12 p.m.
 - Major Exploration, 1:45 p.m.
 - Soccer vs. SNU, 2 p.m.

- Oct. 9-10
- Fall Break

- Oct. 11
- STEMPact Ada, 10 a.m.
 - Soccer vs. OBU, 11 a.m.
 - Football vs. ATU, 2 p.m.

- Oct. 13-15
- Brandon Whitten Institute Mental Health Conference

- Oct. 13
- 2nd 8-Week Courses begin
 - FA25 Term B Begins
 - Lucky Tiger Bingo, 7 p.m.

- Oct. 14-16
- Roary's Gameday Gear Up, 3 p.m.

- Oct. 14
- Volleyball vs. Cameron, 6 p.m.
 - Domestic Violence Awareness Month event, 6 p.m.

Student Editorial: Finding community in and out of the classroom

By Zachariah Hobia, ECU Student

I came to ECU in the Fall of 2024, which would mark about one year since I've been here. A few jobs here and there and my subsequent abandoning of them, the nightly thoughts about what I want to do with my life, and a bit of ambition had me applied, admitted, and sat in my first class on the Monday of that autumn semester (Fundamentals of Human Communication with Professor Vickie Reifsnider at 10 a.m., if I remember correctly – great class!)

It was a good Monday, it was good to be in the classroom again. I like to learn and it was nice to be around a community of people who were around my age, although older folks are a great time too. And the latter, especially, was the thing I was looking for: community. University is a great place to learn, but if someone is determined enough – the Library of Alexandria is just a tap away.

What I was really looking for was a community, and ECU provided it in different ways. Different interests. Business or sports could be the topic for some people I'd talk to. Science or Art. Different identities, different languages. Yet, for me, I knew there was something that I was more interested in than anything and wanted a

community for more than anything: English. Literature. Poetry.

I'd like to be clear on what I mean by English, since I recognize it's not exactly obvious by the name. By English, I mean not only the arrangement of certain words in a certain way to produce something grammatically correct. "I am not a dog. I am a person." This is English, yes, but it's not very interesting. It's like an egg with no salt, no pepper, no nothing – just straight yolk and egg whites. It gets the job done, but it is what can be done with this egg that I am interested in. I am interested in what can be done with the English language, which I have found within poetry.

And with this interest, I found that community on that Tuesday. The moment I walked into Dr. Joshua Grasso's Shakespeare class.

To note on the actual learning – we of course would read Shakespeare, give our own ideas about some parts in the plays, and read some of Good Will's sonnets. But I really want to emphasize that what we were primarily interested in was not just the technical aspects of English, but Shakespeare's power in which he wielded it to create something beautiful.

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/creeps in this petty pace from day to day" Tomorrow creeps, like your shadow hiding from the streetlight, in a petty pace, like its ashamed or weak, from day to day – eternity. To study English is to study the possibilities of the English language, or really, of any language. Ancient Greece and Rome have come and gone, but the Iliad and the Aeneid still beat their dactylic hexameter hearts today.

Grasso was, and is, an immense expressor and professor of these possibilities, and helped show me why Shakespeare keeps showing up. Yet it was also through his class that I started to get a sense of the English community here at ECU, including the First Monday Open Mic that is frequented by poets from across the state.

But even in the Horace Mann halls, I can personally feel it. The professors ready to help any student, the passing students talking with a smile about philosophy, mutterings of words in a foreign language, speaking of Shakespeare and Jane Austen and Pushkin, and the free-book shelf. Language dancing in old halls. In a walk of that long hallway, I have felt a community breathe.

I dislike generalizing, but if I were to describe the English community, it'd be words and phrases such as tight-knit, vocal, and people who generally are interested in the beautiful things in life.

Whether in my classes or in departmental events, the vibe I feel is one of a mutual understanding and kinship of our belief in expression. Which is, of course, tied into language itself. I can't fully define it, especially since I don't want to talk about people too directly, but all I can personally say is that I feel very at home here, and perhaps you may too, regardless if your degree is in English or in some other discipline. But don't listen to only me.

Fellow English major Sarah Christensen had the following to say: "I think the English community at ECU is really special because it's a group of people who value critical thinking, freedom of expression, and literature overall. In my time in the English community here I have felt empowered to discover my own opinions and through my classes have learned how to eloquently express them. The people in this program are exceedingly diverse in their opinions and that often creates meaningful discussions both in and out of class."

Christensen continued, "As I pursue my chosen career of being an English teacher, I value the environment of the ECU's English department. The passion each professor has for their subject is truly inspiring and a perfect example of how I wish to run my future classroom. With the passion of the professors being so strong it overflows onto my students.

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I enjoy attending my classes and engaging with the class discussions that involve the entire class and all the different opinions within.”

Christensen’s an eloquent person, so I’m glad I asked her, and I want to note her emphasize on discussion. English, as I also noted above, is an expressive discipline.

If you have nothing to say, you have to find it. And when you have to find something to say, perhaps you find something you were missing.

There are also some non-degree students taking English classes. I asked one of them, a great friend of mine, Eli Grasso, why he takes English classes while being a Molecular Biology student.

He said, “I take classes in English even though I’m a science major because I enjoy being able to explore a world of language and ideas that can be very freely debated. In science, every claim has to be backed up with an abundance of evidence, and there is no room for the subjective experience. That means good results, but also that the soul longs for things to contemplate, ruminate upon, and debate freely. Language is an antidote to the absurdity of the world, and subjectivity is an antidote to the necessary but stifling sterility of the scientific process.”

I’m starting to think people who take English classes are eloquent, a pretty crazy assertion, I know. Something I want to note within Eli’s quote is that of subjectivity

and language’s role within it. Language’s ability to capture the subjective is one of its great abilities, I think, and perhaps the greatest writers were able to capture the parts of the subjective that are within all of us. So that when I read the ambition of Macbeth, I may see a mirror, my own eyes staring back at me – in another soul, another time.

That’s a general overview of the vibe of the community. We have community events such as book readings, The Scissortail Creative Writing Festival, the Originals literary journal (to which any student should submit, don’t need to be an English major), open-mics, and things of that nature. And of course, I’m sure just asking one of us, faculty or student, could get you pointed in the right

direction.

That is the community of the English and Languages department at ECU. Yet we are not isolationist, noting Eli’s tendency to take classes outside of his major’s field. No knowledge is an island, no community is truly separate from another. Einstein played violin too.

All of us here at the university, for instance, are a community of those involved in higher education. All of us together make up the different organs of thought and knowledge, and our great community is a community of a love of learning. May we chase, even though we may never reach, a reality where the community that loves learning to be equivalent to the community of all of humanity.

EVENTS SCHEDULE

RINGMASTER ROARY'S BIG TOP BASH

Homecoming 2025

Friday Oct. 17th

- 7:30 AM Golf Tournament - Oak Hills Golf & Country Club (7:30 AM Registration, 8:00 AM Start)
- 6:30 PM Alumni Gala (6:30 PM Registration, 7:00 PM Start)

Saturday Oct. 18th

- 7:30 AM 5K - Wintersmith Park (7:30 AM Registration, 8:00 AM Start)
- 9:00 AM Golden Tiger Brunch
- 9:00 AM Men’s Basketball Pancake Breakfast - The Perfect Blend
- 11:00 AM Parade
- 12:00 PM Big Top Bash
- 3:00 PM Kick-off! ECU vs. OBU
- 6:30 PM After Game Mixer (6:30 PM Registration, 7:00 PM Start)

alumni@ecok.edu 580-559-5651 www.ecok.edu/2025HC

Vietnam (IS NOT): 50

Free & Open to the Public
ALL-DAY EVENT
9:30 A.M. - 8:00 P.M.
OCTOBER 23, 2025
Raymond J. Estep
Multimedia Center

Join us for Musical Performances, a Film Screening, Food Truck, Faculty Lectures, and Door Prizes!

Featured Guest: Vu Tran
Reading @ 7:00 P.M.

Vu Tran is a Vietnamese refugee who was born in Saigon and raised in Tulsa. He is the author of the novel *Dragonfish* and is now the Director of Undergraduate Studies in Creative Writing at the University of Chicago.

Scan for Full Schedule

Hosted by: **ECU** Honors Program

Sponsored by the **Ross-Osborne Family Foundation**