

Campus Update

ECU commencement packs Koi Ishto Stadium

ADA, Okla. – East Central University's Koi Ishto Stadium was packed to capacity for the Spring 2026 Commencement ceremony May 15 where ECU alumnus, Brad Calip, addressed an eager and excited crowd of graduates.

The 2026 ceremony was the first to take place at the Koi Ishto Stadium since 2021.

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Students travel across country to close out semester



SEE STUDENTS, PAGE 8

ECU Distinguished Alumni honored at Evening of Honors and Recognition ceremony

SEE DISTINGUISHED, PAGE 4

ECU's inaugural doctoral program graduates celebrated at Hooding Ceremony



The inaugural graduating class for East Central University's Doctorate of Education in Rural Education program was honored the night before the 2026 Spring Commencement. SEE CEREMONY PAGE 2

The 2026 George Nigh Award winner named

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CEREMONY

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Five students were recognized at ECU's first doctoral program Hooding Ceremony this spring, marking a significant milestone for the Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) in Rural Education.

Tamara (Beth) Bean earned both her bachelor's in Elementary Education and master's degree in Education Administration from Southeastern Oklahoma State University and currently serves as the Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Durant Independent School District.

Bean believes that pursuing her Doctor of Rural Education has directly strengthened the way she leads, serves and advocates for the students and families of rural southeastern Oklahoma, specifically Durant.

Melissa Ferguson earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in education at Southeastern Oklahoma State University and currently serves as Superintendent of Coleman Public Schools in Coleman, Okla. With nearly 30 years in public education, she has served as a teacher, instructional leader, and administrator.

Ferguson was drawn to ECU's doctoral program through professional connections and its strong emphasis on rural education. Her dissertation, *The New 3 Rs: Recruitment and Retention in Rural Education*, reflects her passion for supporting rural districts in attracting and retaining high-quality educators.

In August, Dr. Ferguson will begin serving as an Associate Professor in the Educational Leadership Department at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, while continuing to serve the students and staff of Coleman Public Schools as superintendent.

Alison Fowler earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Southeastern Oklahoma State University in 2018 and earned her Master of Arts in School Counseling in 2022 and her Educational Leadership certificate in 2023, both from ECU. She currently serves as an elementary school counselor at Quinton Public Schools.

Fowler plans to use the knowledge and experience gained through the Rural Education Doctoral Program to help prepare and mentor future educators.

In the fall, she will transition to be the Director of Counseling, Assessment, and Career Pathways in the same

district she currently works in.

Gregory Lovelis earned both his bachelor's degree from ECU in 2004 and his master's degree from ECU in 2007, both in education.

A career educator, Lovelis has served the Stonewall and McLish school district since 2004 and currently serves as the superintendent of Stonewall Public Schools.

Lovelis learned about the program directly from Dr. Jerry Mihelic, Dean for the College of Education and Psychology.

Makaayla Wood earned her bachelor's degree from ECU in 2019 and her master's degree in Educational Leadership from ECU in 2024. She currently teaches fourth grade math and science at Krebs Public Schools.

Wood pursued her interest in the program after reading about its launch on social media.



A Water Resource Policy & Management hooding ceremony for graduates took place the day of commencement



Spring 2026 Stonecipher School of Business awards banquet



College of Health and Science Award Ceremony



Pi Sigma Alpha Induction



For more award ceremony photos, visit

ecutigerpics.pixieset.com

2026 Evening of Honors and Recognition



2026 ECU Distinguished Alumni
Margaret Barton, Class of 1968



2026 ECU Distinguished Alumni
Brad Calip, Class of 1987 & 1993



2026 ECU Distinguished Alumni
Donald Orr, Class of 1973



2026 ECU Distinguished Alumni
Mike Cantrell, Class of 1972



2026 ECU Distinguished Service
Timmy Young, Class of 1988 &
2006



2026 ECU Distinguished Alumni
Steve Johnson, Class of 1991



ECU Distinguished Former Faculty
Dr. Nicholas Cheper

Celebrating Spring 2026 Commencement!



Charlie Rogers was named the recipient of the 2026 George Nigh Award. An honor presented annually to ECU's top graduating senior.



For Spring 2026 Commencement photos, visit

Spring 2026 Honors Commencement Ceremony



For Spring 2026 Honors Commencement photos, visit ecutigerpics.pixieset.com/spring2026honorsgraduation/



Department of History Scholarship Awards Presentation



Department of English and Language Scholarship Awards Presentation

A first of its kind Master's Thesis Defense took place on campus



The university's first Biological Science master's defense took place days before the Spring Commencement ceremony when Caden Elizalde presented his thesis in the Estep Multimedia Center



Roary's Athletic Awards Banquet

The ECU Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), in partnership with the ECU Athletic Department, hosted the annual Roary Awards Banquet on the evening of May 4 at the Chickasaw Business and Conference Center. ECU student-athletes arrived dressed to impress, making their way down the signature orange carpet before enjoying an evening dedicated to celebrating the accomplishments and memorable moments of the 2025–26 athletic

season.

Speakers at the event included ECU Athletic Director Matt Cole, ECU President Wendell Godwin and SAAC President Lindsey Mauppin.

The banquet highlighted the success of ECU Athletics through the presentation of 78 awards, recognizing student-athletes, teams, coaches, and faculty and staff members. For a list of all awardees, visit ecutigers.com/archives.

ECU Athletics Announces Promotion of Floyd Ross to Director of Strength & Conditioning

Ross has been a member of the ECU strength & conditioning staff since 2021 and most recently served as Interim Director of Strength & Conditioning, managing daily operations, leading training sessions, and maintaining continuity across ECU's athletic performance programs.

Prior to the interim role,

Ross served as Assistant Director of Strength & Conditioning beginning in November 2025, overseeing multiple NCAA Division II programs and designing sport-specific plans focused on performance, injury reduction, and movement efficiency. He has also served as ECU's Head Powerlifting Coach since August 2024, coaching more than 15

athletes while leading recruitment and team culture development.

Ross joined the staff as a Student Assistant (2021–2024) before becoming a Graduate Assistant Strength & Conditioning Coach in 2024, working with football, baseball, and softball athletes and leading onboarding for

nine teams.

Ross is a USAPL Level 1 Coach and an ECU graduate, earning a Master's in Sports Administration (2025) and a B.S. in Kinesiology (2024).

Community members commend ECU athletes for service to community

ECU student-athletes and coaches were recognized by community members who reached out to the university for their ongoing mentorship and service at Willard Elementary, where their involvement has made a meaningful difference in the lives of students.

ECU's Native American Student Association attends Gathering of Nations Powwow

Seven members of ECU's Native American Student Association, along with faculty and staff sponsors, attended the final Gathering of Nations Powwow, titled The Last Dance, at the New Mexico Expo in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Student participants in the trip included students Bethany Baggerly, Mena Cedartree, Kala Furr, Adelyn Hernandez, Taloa Lewis, Olivia Terry and Miss Native American ECU Gabrielle Nucosee., who experienced the honor of taking part in the first Grand Entry of the final Gathering of Nations Powwow, along with dozens of princesses, drumgroups, dancers, veterans, elders,



From left to right; Bethany Baggerly, Olivia Terry, Kala Furr, Adalyn Hernandez, Mena Cedartree and Taloa Lewis

dignitaries and performers.

The group also engaged in cultural exploration throughout the event, touring the powwow grounds, visiting vendors representing tribes from

across the nation, and attending performances at Stage 49.

Their trip also included visits to Old Town Albuquerque, the Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway

and Petroglyph National Monument, offering opportunities to learn about regional history, Indigenous traditions and cultural heritage.

Students travel to Washington D.C.

Nine students in the ECU Department of Politics, Law, Society traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the DC Internship Experience 2026.

The trip was largely supported by the Harris Travel Fund, a fund created by former ECU History professor Dr. James Harris. Additional funds were added by President Wendell Godwin

and the President's Circle.

The students involved are members of Pi Sigma Alpha National Honor Society and have majors in Political Science, Legal Studies, and Water Resource Policy and Management.

Students toured many sites in Washington, D.C., including monuments, the US Capitol, Smithsonian Museums, US Supreme

Court, Arlington Cemetery and the Library of Congress. Rep. Tom Cole and Sen. James Lankford also took time to meet with the group and answer questions about the current state of politics.

A session in the World Bank's GeoLab demonstrated how mapping and data can be used to drive policy and investment around the world. The group also met

met with the Pakistani Ambassador to the US Rizwan Saeed Sheikh at the Embassy of Pakistan.

Due to ECU's close connection with Oklahoma Indian Legal Services, the group met with the funder of legal aid in the US, Legal Services Corporation including its director, Ron Flagg.

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Washington

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One objective of the trip was to expose ECU students to possible career opportunities. Students were able to meet with ECU alumni who were working in DC. ECU students talked to many Capitol Hill staffers who offered career advice and provided applications for jobs and internships.

The trip concluded with the Pi Sigma Alpha National Research Conference at

American University which featured top research from political science students across the country. ECU Legal Studies student Abigail Shropshire was selected to present her research at the conference. and Dr. Jacintha Webster, ECU's Pre-Law Advisor, chaired a panel on how to gain entrance to law school. Dr. Pappas and Dr. Khan also chaired panels at the conference on different topics in political science.



Students earn honors at CARTA conference



Students in the ECU Russian Studies Program participated in the Central Association of Russian Teachers of America (CARTA) conference in Austin, Texas.

Broden Haley received the Best Student Paper Award. Rafael Charqueno received a gold medal for his poetry recitation of "A Crow and a Fox." John Kelso received

a gold medal for his recitation of "Babi Yar" and also earned a special prize "For the Best Presentation of Yevtushenko's Poetry." Madison Hawkins received a silver medal for her recitation of "Snowfall."

Jesse Barker, Zoe Grooms, Paige Kris, Isabella Gaston, and Olivia Hunley were also in attendance.

Students visit Joan Kirkpatrick Animal Hospital

ECU's Comparative Vertebrate Anatomy class toured the Oklahoma City Zoo's Joan Kirkpatrick Animal Hospital in May, gaining firsthand insight into zoological medicine and veterinary careers.

Students learned about animal health screenings, in-house diagnostics, and species-specific health concerns from veterinary technician Stephanie Johnson. They also met with Dr. Taylor Novak, who discussed zoo nutrition, behavioral enrichment, and career advice for graduate study.

Dr. Daniela Yuschenkoff showcased the hospital's advanced medical equipment and explained veterinary procedures, pregnancy monitoring, and the Zoo's conservation efforts. The visit provided students with a valuable behind-the-scenes look at animal care and wildlife conservation.

Jose Montalva of ECU's Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences thanked the zoo staff for making the experience possible.

ECU's Sigma Tau Delta visits Killing the Negative exhibit in Tulsa

By Eli Grasso, ECU Student

ADA, Okla. – On May 1, I took part in a trip to Tulsa organized by East Central University's chapter of the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society.

I had a great experience, as did the other students that went on the trip. Faculty in the English Department have organized several trips during the 2025-26 school year, the last one also being a trip to Tulsa. That trip involved seeing the Greenwood Rising History Center and the Woody Guthrie Center, whereas the focal point of this experience, planned by Dr. Jeaneen Canfield, was the Philbrook Museum's Killing the Negative exhibit.

This trip goes hand-in-hand with Dr. Canfield's class, ENG-4983-01: (Re)Imaging the West.

In class, we learned about Roy Strycker, who was tasked during the Great Depression with leading a group of photographers in their efforts to document the lives of Americans in the rural parts of the country. These photographers included many prominent names, like Dorothea Lange, who would produce the iconic photo of Florence Owens Thompson known as Migrant Mother. While many of the photographs taken by this team have

become iconic, Strycker arbitrarily decided that others were not worthy of publication. He punched holes in the photographic negatives that he rejected, thereby "killing" them.

Many decades later, artist Joel Daniel Phillips found these killed negatives and recreated several as large charcoal drawings and paintings. In a collaborative effort, he worked with poets, including ECU's own Dr. Ken Hada, to create a book that contained both his art and poems inspired by them. Killing the Negative was the result.

In March of 2025, I had the pleasure of listening to Joel Daniel Phillips, Dr. Quraysh Ali Lansana, Dr. Candace G. Wiley, and Dr. Ken Hada talk about the project and recite their poetry here on campus. That panel made me very excited to see Phillips's actual art in-person, framed alongside their corresponding poems. I was immediately taken by surprise at how large and intricate the framed pieces are. Each one has an amazing story to tell, and each one was given a new voice by the poetry that accompanied them. We were fortunate to have both Dr. Hada and Dr. Lansana (an associate professor at the University of Tulsa) with us in the exhibit. Both powerfully recited



Portrait featured in the Killing the Negative exhibit at the Philbrook Museum. Dr. Nicholas Cheper

their poems and discussed their work on the project, giving us opportunities to ask questions.

I felt very fortunate to have the chance to hear from both, as did my fellow

students. I have a better appreciation for a part of our nation's history that Oklahoma struggled through - in fact, several of the drawings are based on photographs taken in this state. The experience also reminded me of the artistry and creativity that we have access to in Oklahoma and on the ECU campus.

After being guided through the exhibit, our group was then let loose to explore the museum. We saw everything from paintings from the Italian Renaissance to Native American traditional art to modern

sculpture. We were also able to meander through the museum's gardens and take some photos together to commemorate our time there. I have made some of my best friends in the English Department, and this outing made me feel closer with all of them. It would not have been possible without ECU's support, Dr. Canfield, Dr. Hada, Dr. Lansana, and Elizabeth Ross, who provided the funds for the trip and came to Tulsa along with us.

Tome, this trip demonstrated the importance of experiential learning and travel with other students and faculty, even if it only takes place two hours from campus. I look forward to more adventures sponsored by Sigma Tau Delta and the English Department!