

## Serving Stakeholders at a Small Regional University

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**T**he Southeastern Oklahoma State University Honors Program serves a unique role in a small, rural setting such as Durant, Oklahoma. The honors program has a traditional mission in a university that offers a non-traditional setting and history within the context of higher education. The program thus offers special rewards to its students and to the university.

Southeastern, founded in 1909 as a teachers' training college, is a public, regional university with an enrollment of 4,000 students. Although the university is located in a small community (population: 17,000) just north of the Red River, it is uniquely positioned 90 miles north of the bustling Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and 151 miles south of Oklahoma City. The university is also located in the region of The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Dating back to its founding, Southeastern is known for its academic programs in teacher education but more recently has received national recognition for excellence in its aviation sciences and occupational safety and health degree programs.

In educating its students, Southeastern faces numerous challenges. For instance, 85% of the school's students receive financial aid; 41% of the most recent graduating seniors were first-generation college graduates; and 30% of the total enrollment is Native American. The university attracts the majority of its students from the geographic service region in southeastern Oklahoma, but it is also home to international students and students from neighboring states such as Texas. In addition to its main campus in Durant, Southeastern has a branch campus in Idabel, Oklahoma, and delivers various academic programs at seven additional sites, including two in north Texas.

The Southeastern Honors Program was built on the foundation created by the Parsons Scholars Program, which dates back to 1978 when it was endowed by a 1928 Southeastern graduate. Today, the honors program is committed to the ongoing growth and development of a culturally diverse and academically talented group of honors students. With a focus on educational excellence as well as cultural and technological literacy, the honors program challenges high-caliber students with special talents and outstanding academic abilities to develop local and global awareness and achieve their full potential.

Our honors program is much like a learning laboratory where we implement new teaching ideas and strategies and then share with others. We have recently developed a new honors curriculum, which includes the City as Text™ approach as well as a team-teaching format. In turn, our honors director and professors have disseminated this information at various conferences as well as at the Southeastern Faculty Symposium, which is held each year prior to the beginning of the fall semester. Our students are also very visible in and outside our area, making presentations at regional and national conferences that not only broaden their education but expand the reach of the university through meaningful engagement and recognition.

Although the Southeastern Honors Program is relatively young, it has produced numerous success stories. Two prime examples are Cordell Adams and Sharla Frost, both of whom have been recognized as distinguished alumni by the university. Adams, who graduated in 1982, is an ophthalmologist in Dallas, Texas, with a subspecialty in glaucoma. An East Texas native, he is also an accomplished novelist. Frost, a 1984 graduate of Southeastern, is a partner in the Tucker Ellis Law Firm's mass tort and product liability practice group, based in Houston, Texas. Originally from Frogville in Choctaw County, Oklahoma, Frost is a renowned national trial lawyer who defends clients in high-risk cases in state and federal courts across the country. Both of

these honors alumni have returned to campus in recent years as commencement speakers.

Many other honors graduates from Southeastern have made their mark in the fields of public service, education, business, academia, law, medicine, medical research, accounting, finance, banking, writing/editing, information technology, psychology, occupational safety & health, and the military. Several of these alumni have returned to the university to serve in key positions in information technology, the learning center, advising and outreach, the library, and disability services.

The honors program at Southeastern enriches the overall experience of all its stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, and community. In addition, the program continues to play a valuable role in producing future leaders.

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