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OUACHITA
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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita's fall 2020 enrollment grows amid pandemic, highest since 2000



By Brooke Zimny

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For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.— Even amid the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ouachita Baptist University's fall 2020 enrollment has grown to 1,704, a 4% increase from fall 2019 and the highest headcount the university has seen since 2000. Newly released data also reflect a strong academic profile for incoming Ouachita freshmen as well as standout retention and graduation rates.

"As a Christian university, we genuinely believe every good gift comes from the Lord," said Dr. Ben Sells, Ouachita president. "We're thankful for our students and for the support of their families. In the midst of a pandemic, our already incredibly committed faculty and staff redoubled their efforts. Finally, we're grateful to alumni, friends and Arkansas Baptists who provide difference-making support."

The academic profile of this year's freshman cohort is one of the strongest in Ouachita history. Among incoming freshmen, the average ACT score is 24.8, the highest on record, matched by only one previous freshman class. The class' average high school grade point average (GPA) is 3.72, with more than a third achieving GPAs of 4.0 or higher. There also are 30 Arkansas Distinguished Governor's Scholars in the cohort. A notable 23% of the class are first-generation college students, the first in their families to pursue an undergraduate degree.

“It’s in Ouachita’s DNA to provide an excellent educational experience that challenges and encourages those at the top of their class and those for whom higher education is a new endeavor,” said Dr. Stan Poole, Ouachita’s vice president for academic affairs. “We are proud that our personal and intentional approach to higher education creates a welcoming and supportive environment.”

Ouachita’s most recent outcomes data also reflects this strength of support for students. At 81.4%, this year’s freshman to sophomore retention rate is the second highest at Ouachita since 2010; the most recent average for all four-year universities in the state is 68%, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). In addition, the 4-year graduation rate for Ouachita’s 2020 graduating class is 60.5%, the highest on record for the university and well surpassing the most recent state average of 32% published by NCES.

The 1,704 total enrollment includes 1,496 residential students learning in-person on Ouachita’s Arkadelphia campus, 168 online and concurrent students and 40 graduate students.

The more than 200 off-campus and graduate students reflect strategic, non-traditional academic initiatives rising at Ouachita in recent years. Such programs have included growing fully online degree offerings; launching a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program that includes two innovative RN-to-BSN tracks; establishing the first Master of Science degree in applied behavior analysis in the state; enrolling the first cohort in a post-baccalaureate dietetic internship program for students pursuing careers as registered dietitians; and expanding concurrent enrollment offerings at Christian high schools across the state and region.

“Even as we’ve given energy to these new and growing academic initiatives, the challenge of returning to on-campus instruction for our residential students has been a significant priority for Ouachita in recent months,” Sells said. “Students and parents told us that what makes Ouachita distinctive is the on-campus experience. Thus, we put forth a herculean effort and significant expense to safely return to in-person learning, which continues to be our priority.”

Ouachita Baptist University, a private liberal arts university in Arkadelphia, Ark., is in its 135th year as a Christ-centered learning community. Its seven academic schools include business, Christian studies, education, fine arts, humanities, natural sciences and social sciences. It is consistently ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Forbes*, *Niche.com* and others. For more information, visit www.obu.edu or call 800-DIAL-OBU.

