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10-28-2021

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Recommended Citation

Halbert, Mandy; Lawson, Felley; and Ouachita News Bureau, "Ouachita expands part-time campus police force" (2021). *Press Releases*. 873.

https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/press_releases/873

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For immediate release

Ouachita expands part-time campus police force

By Mandy Halbert and Felley Lawson

October 28, 2021

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Ouachita Baptist University's Office of Campus Safety & Emergency Management has expanded its part-time police force to include members of the Ouachita community committed to building positive relationships with students and serving in a manner consistent with the Christ-centered principles of the university.

The new officers are graduates of Ouachita's law enforcement training course, developed by Jeff Crow, director of Safety & Emergency Management at Ouachita, and certified by the Arkansas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Training. They are Ouachita graduates Cori Gooseberry, Devin Price and Quantel Williams; current student Hayden Reedy, a senior communications & media/communications studies major from Plano, Texas; and Tim Wooten, whose wife, father and brother are Ouachita alums. Gooseberry and Williams are also resident directors at Ouachita.

Retired police officer David Howerton completed the training course, as well. After moving with his family to Arkadelphia from Rockwall, Texas, Howerton wanted to find a way to serve his new community. He took the training course as a step toward satisfying requirements for certification that would allow him to join the Ouachita campus police force. Howerton's son Chase is a junior kinesiology/exercise science major at Ouachita.

“We believe these Ouachita connections will facilitate greater acceptance and approachability by students,” Crow said, adding that with this first cohort of officers, “We were able to achieve a higher level of diversity that was lacking, and now we have a staff that is more representative of our entire university community.”

Crow has decades of law enforcement experience, having previously served as director of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, as a trooper and sergeant with the Arkansas State Police and as a law enforcement management instructor with the University of Arkansas Criminal Justice Institute. He also is a former corporal in the U.S. Marine Corps and a retired sergeant major with the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. Crow is certified as a professional law enforcement instructor and law enforcement firearms instructor, and may expand Ouachita’s training program to be available to officers who serve off campus, as well.

A graduate of John Brown University in Siloam Springs, where he received a bachelor’s degree in organizational management, Crow earned a Master of Public Administration degree from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. He currently is teaching an undergraduate course, Crime & Deviance, on Ouachita’s campus and has been a key resource as the university explores adding a criminal justice major to its academic offerings.

In January 2020, Crow approached Dr. Ben R. Sells, Ouachita’s president, and Dr. Wesley Kluck, university physician and vice president for student services, with his idea for a program to identify and train part-time police officers within the Office of Campus Safety & Emergency Management. Sells and Kluck supported Crow’s proposal, which was then approved by Ouachita’s Administrative Council and Board of Trustees. The process of selecting, vetting and training the first group of officer candidates began soon after.

“We believe our officers should not only protect and serve the university community well, but also model selfless service for our students,” Crow said. “We wanted to ensure our new officers understood the nuances of policing in a university setting and possessed the virtues we strive for within our department: vigilance, humility, empathy and discernment. This compelled us to be very strategic and intentional in our search for candidates.”

The program requires 120-160 hours of online and classroom instruction, as well as learning practical skills including how to conduct a traffic stop, employ defensive tactics and handle firearms safely. Training was conducted by Crow and Lt. Brandon Tollett, a Ouachita police officer. The program’s first graduates completed training in Spring 2021 and were recognized in May during a ceremony on campus.

“The quality of the program combined with the quality of the students, with both under the leadership of Ouachita’s excellent police trainers, is what made this a perfect fit for our university,” Kluck said. “I look forward to the future and possible expansion of this certification process.”

Williams said he decided to complete the police officer training program because, “I want to protect and serve all faculty, staff, students and visitors who come on campus.”

He added, “All of us that went through the police training love Ouachita and have built connections amongst colleagues and students. We hope that we can enhance our campus through good community policing by developing relationships and partnerships to help everyone thrive.

“The Office of Campus Safety and Emergency Management is here to provide excellent customer service to students,” he noted. “We want to interact positively with all community members and leave a lasting impression. I genuinely believe that is how we build relationships and cultivate trust amongst our students.”

Crow agreed.

“Now more than ever, it is essential for not only our police department, but agencies around the state and nation, to be intentional in the establishment of great relationships with our respective communities,” he said. “If our department is going to serve our students well, we must develop relationships that transcend historical conceptions of police service which can often be viewed as adversarial or coercive.

“We want everyone on Ouachita’s campus, especially our students, to view our department as a resource with the purpose to provide a safe and secure environment in which to learn, worship, work and play.”

Lead photo: Quantel Williams is commissioned during a May 2021 ceremony honoring graduates of Ouachita's first law enforcement training course. Photo by Dr. Wesley Kluck.