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Why we engage

Ben Sells

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Why we engage

By Ben Sells

April 24, 2023

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at comm-mark@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206.

Contemporary higher education narratives can be negative, often deservedly so. Alternatively, Ouachita's story is positive – in large part because of our determination to engage.

We engage students. I tell prospective students, “If you don’t want us to know your name, don’t come to Ouachita.” We intend to be a campus where students are known, cultivating a tightly-knit community, believing the personal investment of our lives in students’ lives matters. This ethos helps explain why our four-year graduation rate is almost double the state’s average. Similarly, it explains why our career outcomes rate – the percentage of our grads employed or accepted to graduate school within six months of graduating – is 99% compared to the 84% national average.

We engage alumni. We recently hosted 30 young alumni to interact with more than 230 high school seniors. Already with impressive careers, the alumni were living examples of the value of a Ouachita education. We intend to be an alma mater that prioritizes inviting alumni to pray, advocate for our students and give of their time and talent.

We engage the world. Last year, students, faculty and staff volunteered 41,000 hours locally, nationally and globally. Remarkable. We intend to be a campus that kindles service and sacrifice. In part through the work of two campus centers named for former presidents – the Elrod Center for Family & Community and the Grant Center for International Education – Ouachita seeks to inspire reasoned engagement with the world.

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We engage in innovation. The number of new academic programs recently launched or in development is unparalleled for Ouachita. For undergraduate students, new programs include criminal justice, engineering and nursing. (The Bachelor of Science in general engineering degree is pending approval from Ouachita's accrediting

agency, the Higher Learning Commission.) For graduate students, new programs include applied behavior analysis, business administration, curriculum & instruction, dietetics/nutrition and exercise science.

Several others are developing. We intend to be a college that extends our Christian higher education mission to meet society's needs.

We engage the church. A refreshed worship studies major is growing, and Ouachita students are serving churches. We're exploring adding a creative degree program to allow students to earn a bachelor's degree in Christian studies and a Master of Divinity degree all within five years. We seek to faithfully serve the kingdom of Christ as we live out the university's vision of fostering "a love of God and a love of learning."

We engage the community. During the past four years, we acquired eight acres, removed 35 structures and facilitated a \$25 million investment that includes a pediatric healthcare provider for the region and a new apartment complex for students. The initiative – called Project Foresight – has transformed the southwest corner of campus. We intend to be a partner in revitalizing our community, which is experiencing an influx of more than \$70 million toward infrastructure, including key roads leading to Ouachita.

Of the United States' 5,000 colleges and universities, fewer than 200 remain that are committed to a Christ-centered identity like Ouachita. Our first institutional value is "faith" and reads: "We believe that life is lived most abundantly in response to the love of God through Jesus Christ." We believe and declare it with joy, gratitude and humility – and without apology or embarrassment.

Ouachita's progress is positive – and there's more to do. We're focused on extending our momentum and becoming better, which counters the higher education narrative. By God's grace, through our faculty and staff – along with your partnership – we intend to keep engaging for the sake of realizing Ouachita's mission in students' lives.



By Ben Sells, Ph.D., President