

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Press Releases

Office of Communication and Marketing

3-12-2021

Progress in a pandemic (Closing Thoughts)

Ben Sells

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/press_releases



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Organizational Communication Commons](#), and the [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#)



For immediate release

Progress in a pandemic (Closing Thoughts)

By Ben R. Sells

March 12, 2021

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

In the midst of a pandemic, Ouachita's progress makes us an encouraging outlier in higher education. While total university enrollment in the country continues to decrease, Ouachita increases – our highest in 20 years. We're also graduating students at our highest level in history plus a placement rate of 97%.

We're preparing students to serve in additional ways, including in health professions that are all the more important in today's world. Our new Bachelor of Science in Nursing program seeks to meet the national shortage, and our M.S. degree in applied behavior analysis – the first option of its kind in the state – provides therapy for autism, which affects one in 50 children.

Credit goes to incredibly capable and committed faculty and staff who made us ready for classes in a once-in-a-century pandemic. We benefit from distinctive students and parents who partner with us, including a stellar freshman class. Ouachita is more racially diverse in students and employees than any time in its history – even as there is more to do. We've been helped by the generosity of alumni, friends and Arkansas Baptists – giving more in the last four years than any four-year period in our history, even when we stopped asking last spring.

All of this in a pandemic.

Ouachita is rising, but it's not enough. We must continually be found faithful to our Christian purpose. And, we are. The preceding measures, while encouraging, are means to something more: the realization

of the university's vision and mission in students' lives. We desire for them to advance in their love of God and love of learning marked by intellectual and spiritual growth, lives of meaningful work and reasoned engagement with the world.

"DECADES FROM NOW, I WONDER WHAT TODAY'S STUDENTS WILL REMEMBER ABOUT THIS YEAR."

Dr. Ben Sells

The most important indicator is each student's life, in relationship with Jesus Christ; it's students becoming the person God intended them to be – here, and in the years to come. To give us some insight, we administered a survey to May 2020 graduates designed exclusively for and completed by 43 of the country's leading Christian colleges. Our seniors scored above average on 13 of 18 spiritual attributes.

For all that's summarized here and illustrated in [this special edition of the Circle](#), we give thanks to the Lord.

Living and learning with students in a pandemic revealed to me a Ouachita characteristic in a fresh way: *At Ouachita, we're serious about learning and our Christian faith, but we don't take ourselves too seriously.*

This crystalized for me while hosting a little surprise party every 10 days last semester to celebrate progress toward the goal of 100 days on campus. I stood by the Tiger statue and handed out treats while watching our students smile and laugh and enjoy the moments. Together. In a pandemic. Moments of levity like these were important. Even more so this year than others.

Decades from now, I wonder what today's students will remember about this year. I trust they'll remember and value the intellectual and spiritual growth that occurred. The career preparation, too. The friendships, for sure. Perhaps Ouachita's momentum. I also hope they'll remember how we attempted, with your help, to share our lives with them in these unprecedented times – and that it becomes a precedent for how they share their lives with others.



Ben R. Sells, PhD
[*@OuachitaPrez*](#)