


A Tribute to Academic All-Stars

BY SUSAN GROSSMAN

Students walking to class along Van Vleet (South) Oval no longer smell bus fumes or dodge cars as they make their way to the heart of campus. A new pedestrian walkway honoring outstanding scholastic achievement at the University of Oklahoma has replaced the commuter bus transfer stop that for many years traversed the east side of the oval creating a busy public vehicle thoroughfare. In its place is the newly unveiled Scholars Walk, designed to promote ongoing efforts to make the OU campus pedestrian-friendly and honor stars in the academic realm.

“Symbols are important, and one of the most important aspects of the Scholars Walk is to emphasize that the academic mission of the University comes first,” says OU President David Boren. “The walk adds enormously to the beauty of the South Oval, and it also enhances the environment and student safety.”

Several areas on campus pay tribute to professors, deans and athletes with statues, plaques and busts. Just a few blocks east of the oval is Heisman Park where large bronze statues honor the five OU winners of college football’s highest individual award. *continued*



The newly created Scholars Walk on South Oval pays homage to the accomplishments of OU students past and present while enhancing the campus' walkability.



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A large bronze seal is set into the pavement at the junction of the new Scholars Walk, which extends south to Lindsey Street, and the existing Brooks Pedestrian Mall, which runs from Elm Avenue on the west to Jenkins on the east.

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The Scholars Walk is designed to do the same with engraved pavers recognizing the names and class years of all OU undergraduate and graduate students who have received the most prestigious national and international academic scholarships since the University’s founding in 1890. These include the Rhodes, Fulbright, Goldwater, Truman, Luce, Udall, Marshall and Gates Cambridge scholarships.

Currently, more than 170 students are honored with pavers, but new pavers will be added each year as more students claim these prominent scholarships, says Brian Holderread, director of OU architectural and engineering services.

“This truly is a living, breathing Scholars Walk because we will be adding names and pavers as we go along,” says Holderread. “We were able to add 2014 scholarship winners this fall and will certainly review what is in place to make sure we have not missed anyone. But if we have, we will include those names in the next group of pavers that are produced.”

The walk connects to the existing Brooks Pedestrian Mall that extends from Elm Avenue on the west side of campus to Jenkins Avenue on the east side. At that junction a large bronze OU seal,



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OU recipients of the most prestigious national and international academic scholarships are honored with engraved pavers—170 to date—along the new Scholars Walk.

a gift from President David and Molly Shi Boren, is set into the pavement. Surrounding the seal are four bollards designed to direct walkers around the seal rather than across it.

“It is tradition not to walk on the seal of the University,” Holderread says. “We want to make sure that everyone—faculty, students, alumni and visitors—observe this important tradition and refrain from walking across the seal.”

The Inasmuch Foundation in Oklahoma City provided a \$500,000 lead gift for the \$3.5 million project. The bus and car traffic that used the former street has been routed to Asp Avenue, and a new turning circle has been added north of the Asp Avenue parking garage with a bus and shuttle drop-off area. A new commuter bus transfer station has been constructed east of Jenkins Avenue near Brandt Park (the OU Duck Pond).

The Scholars Walk project also will add at a later date two sculptures on the South Oval, recognizing a representative outstanding faculty member of the University’s first 50 years and another outstanding faculty member representing the last 50 years. The faculty members, which have not been announced, have been chosen by OU historian David Levy, David Ross Boyd

Professor Emeritus of History.

Although the walk is designed for pedestrian traffic, Holderread says the foundation of the walkway must meet road construction standards in order to accommodate emergency vehicles.

“There is not vehicular traffic planned for that area; however, we had to ensure that the roadway can support a vehicle up to 80,000 pounds,” he says. “If a fire truck needs to get to that part of campus, the roadway has to be able to withstand the weight—and it does.”

In addition to paying tribute to academic accomplishments and offering a walking-friendly environment, ultimately the Scholars Walk is designed for inspiration.

“It is our hope that this recognition of student achievement will inspire new generations of OU students to their own achievements,” says Boren. “It is inspirational as you walk to class and see all those scholarships that are available.”

With the expanse of the former road stretching from one end of the South Oval to the other, there certainly is room to grow. ■

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