

# *Endowing the* **FUTURE**

*OU celebrates a three-decade partnership with the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education that produced 500 endowed chairs and professorships.*

BY LAUREN EMERSON

**A**nyone who has spent time at the University of Oklahoma has seen the effects of endowed chairs and professorships, even if they don't know it. Thousands have learned from holders of endowed positions or benefited from research projects funded by these endowments. In fact, the impact of chairs and professorships can be seen everywhere on OU's three campuses.

Chairs and professorships are the highest academic honor that can be bestowed upon faculty members and, through endowments, each chair or professorship generates annual funds their holder can put toward scholarly work.

More than 500 chairs and professorships have been established at OU since its first endowed position—the Merrick Chair in Western American History—was established in 1959. From 1960 to 1988, only 34 endowed faculty positions were created at OU. This number would grow exponentially, thanks to one major factor: the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Endowed Chairs Program.

“Attracting and retaining the brightest and most innovative faculty is essential to elevating our position as a leading public

research university,” says OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. “Endowed chairs and professorships play a pivotal role in bringing these exceptional scholars to OU and providing them with the best resources to drive their research forward. We are profoundly grateful to the State Regents for championing these endowments for over three decades, leaving an impact that will stand the test of time.”

The Oklahoma State Legislature established the State Regents' matching program in 1988 with the goal of bolstering the cultural, business and scientific development of the state by attracting talented teachers from around the world to Oklahoma colleges and universities. When a private donor established a chair or professorship at a state university, a mirrored, 1:1 matching endowment was created at the state. The holder of a chair or professorship can access the annual distributions from both funds, effectively doubling available resources.

At OU, an endowed chair has required an initial donation of \$500,000 to \$1 million, while an endowed professorship has been funded from \$250,000 to \$500,000.

The first position to be matched was the Earl Sneed Professorship of Law, established in 1989 during OU's Centennial Campaign. The matching program gained traction during the Reach for Excellence Campaign from 1995 to 2000, when donors gave \$82 million to create some 150 positions, and another 184 endowments followed.

The state matching program came to a close earlier this year after providing more than \$328 million in funding to OU alone.

Such funds have both a perpetual and immediate impact. Endowment-generated annual distributions can be put toward anything recipients require for their work, such as purchasing new research equipment or visiting an international conference to speak with other leaders in their fields.

Chairs and professorships are high honors, not just because of the stature they represent, but because of the opportunities that arise from increased resources, says André-Denis Wright, senior vice president and provost for the Norman campus.

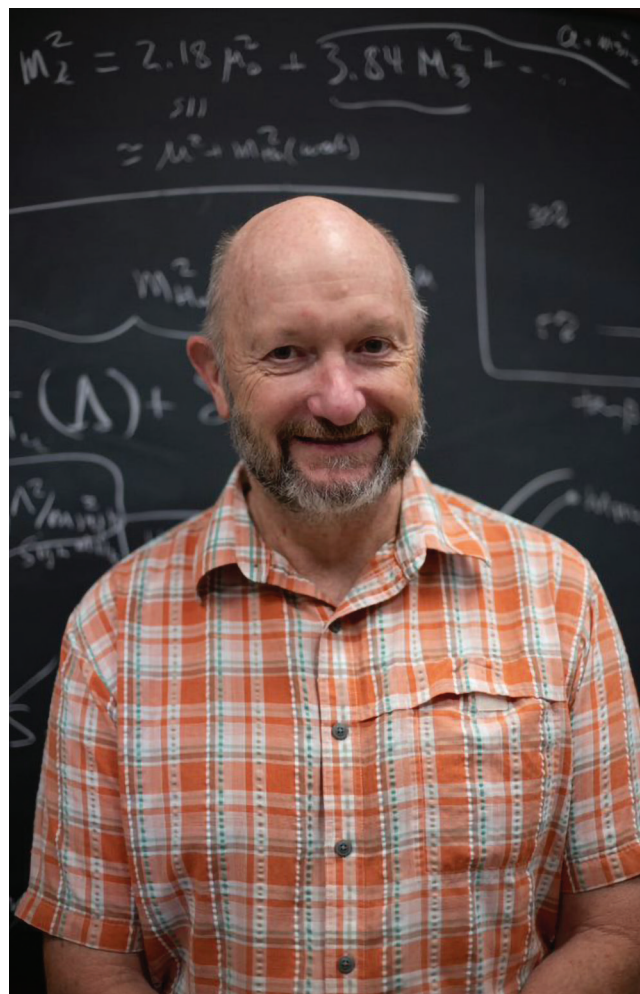
"Endowments help push the boundaries of excellence in research, providing a crucial source of funding to support research opportunities that otherwise may not have been possible," Wright says. "The impact and prestige of OU research are significantly enhanced through endowed chairs and professorships, ultimately leading to new discoveries that will change the world around us."

Hundreds of talented OU professors have held endowed faculty positions or even have had faculty endowments established in their honor. Among them were the late, beloved classics professor J. Rufus Fears, who held the G.T. and Libby Blankenship Chair in the History of Liberty. The chair is devoted to teaching students about how the concept of liberty has evolved throughout the history of Western civilization. Fears captivated countless students with his lectures on the ancient world, and his chair provided extra funds with which to pursue his scholarly interests.

In another example, Dr. Andy Sullivan is so esteemed that he held the Don H. O'Donoghue Endowed Chair in the OU College of Medicine, and the J. Andy Sullivan Chair in Orthopedic Surgery for Resident Education was established in his honor.

In addition to teaching and practicing orthopedic surgery, Sullivan was credited with saving lives in the direct aftermath of the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. His namesake chair will forever allow its holders to further the field of orthopedic medicine through research.

Likewise, each of OU's endowed chairs and professors will continue to achieve excellence in their fields long after the State Regents' program has ended. Read on to discover how five of OU's exemplary faculty members are leaving their mark through endowed positions.



Paige Owens

## HOWARD BAER

### Homer L. Dodge Professor of High Energy Physics

A professor of high energy physics, Howard "Howie" Baer fell in love with nature at an early age. This not only led Baer to many wilderness explorations, but also sparked his exploration of theoretical particle physics and cosmology. Since the discovery of the Higgs boson particle at the CERN Large Hadron Collider, or LHC, in 2012, Baer has been consumed by the need for quantum stability of the Higgs boson mass, which seems to require a new symmetry dubbed "supersymmetry." Baer's group has been involved in fleshing out predictions for new states of matter at the LHC and for the dark matter and dark energy that pervade the universe. "My Homer L. Dodge Endowed Chair position provides important funding for travel and student support in an era of declining federal support for fundamental science," he says.



**DORIS M. BENBROOK**  
Presbyterian Presidential Professor

Doris M. Benbrook is a professor of gynecologic oncology who directs a research program focusing on producing drugs with the potential to prevent and treat diseases such as cancer, hypertension-induced kidney damage, polycystic kidney disease and tuberculosis. Among her most exciting discoveries is OK-1, the first drug developed entirely within an Oklahoma academic institution without funding from the pharmaceutical industry. OK-1 is currently undergoing clinical trials for the treatment of gynecologic cancers. She says the Presbyterian Presidential Professorship allows her to pursue innovative new lines of study. “Investing in the experiments to generate preliminary data for a new direction can be risky because the anticipated results might not turn out as expected,” Benbrook adds. “The Presbyterian Presidential Professorship provides funding flexibility that allows me to take these risks and also brings national prestige, both of which increase the potential for obtaining national-level grants needed to maintain and grow my research program.”



**ROBYN COWPERTHWAITTE**  
Rainbolt Family Chair in Child Psychiatry

As program director for OU Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Dr. Robyn Cowperthwaite has participated in the planning, design and programming of the forthcoming Oklahoma Children’s Hospital Behavioral Health Center at OU Health. The comprehensive, one-of-a-kind behavioral facility will provide intensive inpatient and outpatient psychiatric services. The facility offers a full continuum of intensive care to children with psychiatric needs, neurodevelopmental disorders and eating disorders, as well as children who have suffered significant trauma. “The Rainbolt Family Endowed Chair in Child Psychiatry has allowed me to focus on greatly increasing access to mental health care for children and adolescents in Oklahoma,” Cowperthwaite says. “I have been allowed the time to speak with lawmakers at the state and national levels to highlight the mental health crisis the children of our state are enduring.”



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**MICHAEL DETAMORE**

**Stephenson Chair #1 in Biomedical Engineering**

Professor of biomedical engineering and founding director of OU’s Stephenson School of Biomedical Engineering, Michael Detamore’s research focuses on the temporomandibular joint (TMJ), traumatic brain injury, and cartilage regeneration. Detamore was inspired to pursue graduate school by his mentor, Kyriacos Athanasiou. Together, they were early pioneers in the field of TMJ bioengineering. In his role as director of OU’s Stephenson School of Biomedical Engineering, Detamore encourages open-minded and innovative new research directions that are strengthened by endowment funds. “It’s really nice to have the peace of mind that support is there for the potential to invest in personnel, job creation, bringing talent to the region, equipment acquisition, or pursuing ideas on the side that are not grant-funded yet,” Detamore says. “When you want to explore ‘new seedling’ types of ideas, an endowed chair can provide funding to pursue creative new leads and build them into something that can become a federally funded grant.”



**BONNIE PITBLADO**

**Robert E. and Virginia Bell Chair in Anthropological Archaeology**

A professor of archaeology with a particular interest in the initial peopling of the Rocky Mountains, Bonnie Pitblado founded and runs the Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network, or OKPAN. The network fosters relationships and information-sharing among the many communities that care deeply about the past and its material record, including archaeologists, members of Oklahoma’s 39 Indigenous tribes, historically marginalized descendant communities, K-12 students and teachers, undergraduate and graduate students, and all people who value the stories that ancient belongings can tell. “The endowment allows me to share what I do and to mentor students, all in the service of more equitable archaeology,” Pitblado says. “OKPAN is the fulfillment of my lifelong dream to make archaeology relevant and accessible to more people.”

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