

The Edmond Sun

Oklahoma Christian honors outstanding faculty, staff

OKLAHOMA CITY — At its spring commencement ceremony, Oklahoma Christian University presented four faculty members with awards for their outstanding accomplishments, service and leadership.

Heath Jones and Jeff Simmons received OC's Faculty Leadership Award; Jeff Price received the Gaylord Chair of Distinguished Teaching Award; and Richard Wright received the Jack and Barbara Rowe Distinguished Scholar Award.

Jones is a professor of music at Oklahoma Christian, where he

directs the OC Jazz Ensemble. He has served as president of the Oklahoma Jazz Educators Association and was named the 2008 University Jazz Educator of the Year. A professional saxophonist, he has performed with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Lesley Gore, Frankie Avalon, Jim Nabors, The Temptations, The Four Tops, Wayne Newton, and many more. His upcoming album features jazz notables Tony Monaco, Grant Goldstein and Willie Peterson.

Price leads OC's Gaming and Animation program, which The

Princeton Review and PC Gamer ranked 14th in the nation this year. OC is the state's only university, and one of just two in the southwestern United States, to be honored on the undergraduate list. As principal of Price Media Group, he has won numerous industry awards in video, animation, interactive, and print design. His students have gone on to work at industry giants such as Dreamworks, Sony Imageworks, Midway Games, and Big Idea.

Simmons chairs the Department of Management and Marketing in OC's School

of Business Administration. He has led the university's ethics team to two consecutive state championships advancing to the regional and national competition for two years running. He teaches OC's international business and global marketing courses; his expertise includes a stint with the International Trade Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Wright is an associate professor of New Testament in OC's College of Biblical Studies. His scholarship explores the intersection of the New Testament and the early

church with Greco-Roman philosophies and religions. His recent research has explored philosophies about music's role in moral formation and in Greco-Roman society. His upcoming book is tentatively titled, "Citizenship in Heaven: Paul's Advice to a Status-Conscious Church."

Oklahoma Christian also presented awards to outstanding staff and faculty at its annual Spring Dinner. The university named Judy Davis as the Staff Employee of the Year. Davis has served as OC's director of residence life since 2000. She has

worked at Oklahoma Christian for almost 30 years, previously serving as a hall director, housing director, and director of campus life.

The Second Mile Award, sponsored by Citizens Bank of Edmond, was presented to missionary-in-residence Kent Hartman and associate professor of biology Eric Phelps. Hartman teaches Bible classes and a popular class on personal and family finances at OC. Phelps recently received a \$60,000 OCAST grant to develop new training resources for undergraduate educational programs.



Investments in innovation help state

I'M A NATIVE fifth-generation Oklahoman. I get loud and proud when our state does something right. But I am even louder when our state does something wrong.

“Right” was our Legislature having the vision 30 years ago to invest in innovation by creating the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST) and through that enabling statute funding a “commercialization center” that is now i2E.

Also “right” was to stay the course as our state began to reap the rewards.

“Wrong” would be to continue the trend of the past several years of disinvesting in this proven path for innovation — as the Legislature feels it’s been forced to do over the last few budget cycles. (i2E has been cut 34 percent since 2009.)

We are at a tipping point; further cuts risk all the



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good that has come about.

The argument for solving the current budget crisis some other way isn’t emotional; our impact is fact.

The proof of the rightness of investment in innovation is in the jobs created — 887 full-time equivalent employees from 1998 to 2015, with 129 of those new positions reported in 2015.

The average salary earned is \$68,000, which is 64 percent higher than the Oklahoma average. The revenue reported added up to \$113 million in 2015 alone.

And then there’s the investment capital that is leveraged through the Oklahoma Seed Capital and

Concept Funds and the venture advisory services we provide.

Since 2000, the \$39 million in investment capital i2E has provided has resulted in i2E client portfolio companies raising more than \$563 million in private capital.

That means that for every dollar the state invests, another \$14 of critical early capital comes from banks, venture capital funds, angel investors and other strategic investors.

How many other recipients of state funding have produced that rate of return?

Our state doesn’t have (and likely isn’t going to have) a Sand Hill Road — that mecca of venture capital in Menlo Park, California.

Nearly every Silicon Valley company has been a beneficiary of early funding from VCs who call Sand Hill home.

The relatively small

amount of state funding the Legislature provides gives Oklahoma entrepreneurs an accessible starting point, a core source of capital with which to attract additional critical early capital. Without that catalyst, our pipeline of high-growth startups could start to implode.

Those legislators nearly 30 years ago were right when they took the risk of funding OCAST and i2E. They are still right today.

The only difference is that we have proof. Based on this proof, Oklahoma needs to budget more to help early stage companies succeed. This is not the time to budget less.

Scott Meacham is president and CEO of i2E Inc., a nonprofit corporation that mentors many of the state’s technology-based startup companies. i2E receives state appropriations from the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology. Contact Meacham at i2E_Comments@i2E.org.