



*We're Focused on Your Future!*

Otero College  
President's Report  
May 2023  
Timothy Alvarez, Ph.D.

### **Transform the Student Experience**

**On Saturday, May 5**, Otero held its 81<sup>st</sup> graduation ceremony where 342 students received credentials. There were 214 associate degrees and 176. This totals 390 academic credentials. In addition to the state of Colorado, graduates represented 15 states and 9 countries. On Monday, May 1, seven certificates were awarded during the Phlebotomy Pinning ceremony. Then on Thursday, May 4, 56 certificates were awarded at a nursing pinning. Tuesday, May 9, 12 certificates were awarded for the Otero College's Law Enforcement Academy.

Seth Franzman, Otero Alumni and Foundation Board member was recognized for all of his contributions during the graduation ceremony. He was named Distinguished Alumni for 2023. Seth, originally from Southeast Colorado, graduated from Otero College in 1958 and attributes much of his success to Otero. Seth and his wife Barbara have now helped countless students in their educational journey here at Otero College and beyond. They have never wanted any recognition for their contributions, but Seth embodies the saying 'Once a Rattler, Always a Rattler'. He has remained incredibly engaged with the college and the surrounding area despite living in Phoenix, AZ. The Franzman's have contributed significant amounts of time and energy and money to Otero College and its Foundation. Seth has been a valuable member of the Otero College Foundation Board for five years. They created and funded numerous scholarships as well as being one of Otero's biggest supporters, financially and in spirit!



## **Create Education without Barriers through Transformational Partnerships**

**In late 2021**, Otero College received a grant that helps students return to school to complete the degree they started. The Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) launched Finish What You Started (FWYS), a program providing wraparound support services to obtain college credentials or degrees. Otero College received almost half a million dollars to be used through spring of 2024 for scholarship awards to qualifying recipients.

FWYS can provide students with financial assistance and support services. The academic financial assistance can be used for tuition, books and other costs associated with enrollment. It can also provide non-academic financial assistance. The scholarship funds can be used for the costs of everyday living. Ex. Travel, daycare, utility, rent expenses. The support services include one-on-one guidance and tutoring to assist with academic challenges. It can also help locate resources the student may need, either at Otero, or in the community. Ex. Mental health services, transportation services, food banks. Some of our students shared their stories.

**Natasha Gutierrez** is a first-generation student at Otero College. Life has served her with ups and downs and the “Finish What You Started Program” has provided a helping hand in her life.

Natasha shared, “I went from being homeless and hopeless for years to hopeful and thriving. I am thankful to those who create opportunities for those like me. I hope to help others believe that anything is possible. This program has provided me with motivation and mentor support as I strive to create a better tomorrow for myself and my children, and for that I am grateful.”

**Amanda McKenzie** is another student who was able to be a part of the FWYS program. She originally started college in 2004 when she graduated from high school. She got married at a young age and had a son. She had wanted to be a nurse for her entire life, but when her son was born, he became her sole focus.

Amanda said, “I started working as a sales manager and then I got divorced and had to support myself so I could not go back to school. I just needed to work to provide for my son and myself. When Covid happened, I lost my job of 10 years and was devastated, but when life hands you lemons you make lemonade. Losing my job allowed me to start over and pursue my dream of becoming a nurse. It was a blessing in disguise. It has had many challenges like working full-time and going to school full-time, but it has been worth all the sacrifices. This scholarship has been amazing and helped me pay bills while being in school full time. Advice I would give to other students thinking about going back is ‘do it, don’t hesitate, it will be worth it in the long run’.”

**Kristy Dalton** first went to college when she was 18 years old and fresh out of high school. She had a new baby at home, and it wasn’t good timing for her. She then tried going back again in her late 20’s after a difficult divorce with two small children at home

but she needed to work to support her family. When her youngest son started his senior year in high school she told herself, “When he is done, it is my turn, and I am going to finish my nursing degree.”

Kristy told us, “In the fall of 2019, I went back to school and started this four year journey. I came to Otero in the Fall of 2021. I chose Otero because they offered a non-traditional program where I could work and come to school at night and on the weekends. I heard about the Finish What You Started program from one of my instructors, and looked into it and it has helped me be able to finally finish what I started 30 years ago. It has given me the extra money I needed to be able to not have to worry so much about my bills and place my focus on my education goals. The biggest challenge for me has just been balancing work and school. Nursing school is hard, and you must have a lot of dedication to complete this program. My biggest success is knowing that I am going to finally have an RN behind my name after wanting this my entire life. I would tell anyone thinking about going back to college “DO IT” I have never been so proud of myself!”

**Mollie Miketa** started college right out of high school in 2016. She took a break because she realized she wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life. In spring 2019 she found the path she believes she's supposed to be on. Nursing. She started with prerequisite courses at Pueblo Community College. In 2020, she applied to Otero College Nursing and months later she was accepted into the program. Before the fall semester, she received a call from Jane Wheeler saying she was a candidate for the Finish What You Started Grant.

Mollie stated, “This had been such a blessing throughout my journey to finishing my degree because it has helped tremendously with my paying off my tuition and delaying having to take out another loan. The biggest challenge in going back to school is time management. I have to juggle driving back and forth to school, balancing work and home life, all while trying to find time to study. The advice I would give to a student trying to return to college is go for it! Don't talk yourself out of it or make excuses, just apply! Be dedicated, have a good support system, and talk to an advisor for resources that may be available to you!”

**Daniel Chapa** was born in San Antonio, TX. He moved to Colorado and first attended, then, OJC in the fall of 2012.

Daniel shared, “After a few rough semesters I was done with school and thought it was done with me. Almost ten years later thanks to the “Finish What You Started grant” as well as other financial aid I am back in school and hoping to get into the nursing program this fall and finish what I started at Otero College.”

During her tenure at Otero, Jane has seen success for most of her students. Some have transferred to 4-year schools, some have completed certificates and gone into the work force and launch fulfilling careers. Students that previously had low GPAs have all

increased them. She teaches that students do not have to give up their priorities, be it their families, jobs, or hobbies, they just need to commit to finish what they started.



**In February of 2023**, Otero student Jake Hinds traveled to Lisbon, Portugal to present at the Excellence in Research & Innovation (EIRAI), International Centre of Economics, Humanities, & Management (ICEHM), & Dignified Research Publication (DiRPUB) Conference with Dr. Robert Mitchell, Assistant Professor in the Department of Leadership, Research, and Foundations at the University of Colorado – Colorado Springs (UCCS). Their presentation, titled “Rural and Remote Education: Outcomes and Challenges” focused on the advantages and disadvantages of rural education in the United States.

According to Jake, “Some of the advantages of rural education include the sense of community students feel, similar to a family, small class sizes and flexible coursework that is tailored to student needs, and the fact that everyone in the school wants you to succeed. Some of the disadvantages include a lack of funding, teacher pay and housing challenges, fewer programs, less technology, and challenges retaining teachers”. During Otero’s strategic planning forums last year, these same issues came up as challenges for our rural college.

Jake is currently studying Ag Business at Otero and is interested in sustainable agriculture. He also works on his family’s farm and ranch where they raise cattle and sorghum. He is looking at transferring to Oklahoma Panhandle State University upon graduating from Otero, though his plans may change. Jake was grateful for the opportunity to travel to Portugal with Dr. Mitchell, and he is looking forward to future adventures.



## Transform Our Own Workforce Experience

**Skye Koehl** will begin her duties as Head Softball Coach on June 1. Formerly the assistant softball coach, Coach Koehl brings several years of coaching and playing experience to the team.

And, as we're sure you've heard, on May 8<sup>th</sup>, Chancellor Garcia announced that Dr. Kimberly Zant will be the sixth president of Otero College beginning on August 1.

