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News

11 April, 2019



Six Being Inducted into SWOSU Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame

Six individuals are being inducted into Southwestern Oklahoma State University's Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame during 2019 Convocation ceremonies on the Weatherford campus.

They are:

- Carl Hook, Class of 1967
- Gina Scott Ligon, Class of 2000
- Kelli Litsch, Classes of 1985 & 1986
- Jim Litsch, Class of 1956 (posthumous)
- James Utterback, Classes of 1978 & 1979
- Tom Weichel, Class of 1964

All six will be honored by SWOSU President Randy Beutler at the SWOSU Convocation activities May 3-4 on the Weatherford campus.

Carl Hook of Norman attended Thomas Public Schools prior to moving to Weatherford for high school. At SWOSU, he studied chemistry, math and biology. Hook's parents and older sibling were alumni of SWOSU, and his uncle, Thomas pharmacist Bert Brundage, was instrumental in the establishment of the SWOSU College of Pharmacy. Hook earned an M. D. from the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine in 1970. Hook undertook surgical training at St. Anthony's Hospital and specialty training in otorhinolaryngology at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. Following just under three decades of private medical practice, Hook became President, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and Chairman of Physicians Liability Insurance Company (PLICO), a firm owned by the Oklahoma State Medical Association (OSMA) that functions as the dominant provider of medical professional liability insurance in the State of Oklahoma. In 2015, Hook negotiated the sale of PLICO to The Medical Protective Company (whose parent company is Berkshire Hathaway), the largest medical liability insurer in the United States. Although retired from active management as of 2017, Hook continues to serve as Chairman of the PLICO Advisory Board of Physicians. Hook is Past Chair of the SWOSU Foundation, Inc. Board of Trustees. Hook and his wife, the former Sandra Combs, married while attending SWOSU. Married for over 54 years, the Hooks are proud parents of two and grandparents of five. The Hooks are active members of McFarlin Memorial United Methodist Church.

Gina Scott Ligon of Papillion (NE) graduated from Weatherford Public Schools and studied psychology at SWOSU. Ligon went to the University of Oklahoma where she completed her Ph. D. in 2004. Ligon holds the Jack and Stephanie Koraleski Chair of Collaboration Science and is an Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). Ligon also holds faculty appointments at UNO in Industrial and Organizational (IO) Psychology, Criminology, and IT Innovation. Ligon's research has been recognized in the *New York Times*, *Vice News*, *Business Insider*, and *Omaha World Herald* for content about applying IO Psychology to understand terrorist groups. Since 2013, Ligon has briefed at the Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security over 40 times, sharing her research on leaders, organizational structure, and recruitment strategies for groups such as al Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Taliban. In 2015, Ligon trained DoD planners on the nature of ISIS and what its organizational vulnerabilities were using the psychology training she received at SWOSU. Ligon is part of the Department of Homeland Security Centers of Excellence, Department of Defense Strategic Multilayer Assessment Group, Nebraska Public Policy Center, and the National Strategic Research Institute. Ligon is also a non-resident fellow for the George Washington University Program on Extremism, where she presents on panels in Washington DC about the nature of violent ideological leadership and organizations. Ligon is currently the Editor of the Taylor & Francis journal *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict Journal: Pathways toward Terrorism and Genocide*. Ligon and her husband, United States Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Derek Ligon, are proud parents of two.

Kelli Litsch of Weatherford graduated from Thomas Public Schools where she set the record for most points scored by any player—male or female—in Oklahoma high school basketball history. Litsch followed in the footsteps of her father, Jim, and mother, Peggy, and attended SWOSU where she studied education. In her freshman year at SWOSU, Litsch led the Lady Bulldogs to an undefeated 34-0 season and national championship. She would then lead the Lady Bulldogs to national championships in 1983 and 1985. Litsch was the first NAIA student-athlete to be named to the All-American First Team four times. Litsch ended her time as a SWOSU student-athlete with an historic 129-5 record as the NAIA all-time record holder in points scored at 2,700. Following completion of her undergraduate and graduate work at SWOSU, Litsch served as Assistant Women's Basketball Coach and helped lead the team to championships in 1987 and 1990. In 1995, Litsch was named SWOSU Assistant Athletic Director, a post from which she directed the institution's compliance with NCAA and other applicable regulatory regimes. Litsch retired in 2014. She is an inductee of the SWOSU Athletic Hall of Fame (1990), NAIA Hall of Fame (1991), Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame (2004), Women's Basketball Hall of Fame (2005) and the Dewey County Hall of Fame (2013). Litsch serves on the Board of Directors of the SWOSU Athletic Association.

The late Jim Litsch of Fay studied education at SWOSU. During his time as a student-athlete at SWOSU, Litsch played basketball for the university's inaugural NAIA national basketball tournament team under the legendary Coach Rankin Williams. Litsch was a model of consistency and discipline and set a number of records for the university. Following his graduation from SWOSU in 1956, Litsch served over three decades in the classroom and as an administrator in public education in school districts at Fay and Thomas. Litsch was an early volunteer and leader within the SWOSU Alumni Association but it was in formation of the SWOSU Athletic Association that he left his mark as a "Founding Father" and as one of SWOSU's most faithful, enthusiastic supporters (along with his wife, Peggy, also a 1956 SWOSU alumnus). A 1999 inductee into the SWOSU Athletic Hall of Fame, Litsch was posthumously honored with the Cecil Perkins Service Award by the SWOSU Athletic Association in 2017. Litsch and Peggy were proud parents of Kelli (SWOSU Classes of 1985 & 1986) and Staci (SWOSU Class of 1996) and grandparents of Luke Lewallen (SWOSU Class of 2018) and Trent Lewallen (current SWOSU student).

James Utterback of Seminole studied psychology at SWOSU, earning undergraduate and graduate degrees. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Northern Colorado. Utterback was the fourth and longest-serving president of Seminole State College (SSC). Under his leadership from 1997 to 2017, SSC more than doubled the size of its campus, expanded academic and athletic programs, developed international partnerships and set record student enrollments. Numerous new buildings and sports facilities were constructed during his tenure, which also included a three-fold increase in federal funding. Utterback has authored or co-authored eight journal articles, a book chapter and has made roughly three dozen professional presentations at national and international conferences in areas related to student development, gang violence, economic development, and diversity in higher education. With a strong record of civic and community service, Utterback was named the 2004 Seminole Citizen of the Year. He was formerly Chair of both the Oklahoma Council of Two-Year College Presidents as well as the Council of Presidents. In 2018, he was inducted into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame. Utterback has served on the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Governing Board as well as on AACC's Commissions on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Workforce Development; and Global Education. He was also a member of AACC's Future Leaders Institute, which trained higher education administrators on how to ascend to an effective college presidency. He is a Past-Chair of both the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority (OETA) Board of Directors and the OETA Foundation. He currently serves as the Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors of Alliance Health in Seminole and is on the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, Gaylord-Pickens Museum and the Advisory Board of the Jasmine Moran Children's Museum. Utterback is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Utterback met and began dating his wife, Karrie, during his freshman year at SWOSU. They have been married for 36 years and are proud parents of two daughters, a son in law and one granddaughter.

Tom Weichel of Colony studied physics and math at SWOSU. Following his graduation, Weichel joined the National Aeronautics & Space Administration (NASA) where he served as a Flight Controller for, among many other professional achievements, the Gemini and Apollo missions. Weichel was Retrofire Officer in NASA Mission Control during the Apollo 13 mission and for his service during that incredible drama, Weichel received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. After retiring from NASA, Weichel returned to Washita County, Oklahoma to farm and ranch and raise his family. He was employed with the Southwest Oklahoma Development Authority (SWODA) Community Action Program for over a decade and served just under 20 years with the Caddo-Kiowa Technology Center as an instructor and coordinator of the Center's Educational Reform Program. Weichel was honored by Caddo-Kiowa as Outstanding Educator in 2004. Weichel sat on the governing board of the Weatherford Regional Hospital for 23 years and continues to sit on the governing board of Washita County Rural Water District #2 where he has served for 43 years. Weichel has been active in the Colony Presbyterian Church his entire life.

For more information on the 2019 SWOSU Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame inductees, please contact the SWOSU Office of Institutional Advancement at 580-774-3267 or visit www.SWOSU.edu.

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