

Meet Arkansas State Chancellor Dr. Todd Shields

REBECCA ROBINSON
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Arkansas State University Chancellor Todd Shields Ph.D. would pick Coke over Pepsi “no question”, eat Mexican food “all the time” and is willing to admit to singing along to Taylor Swift talks goals and ideas for Arkansas State.

Arkansas State University announced Shields as the 4th official university chancellor and 14th individual to lead the university. Aug. 15 marked his first official day as A-State chancellor.

Shields previously worked as dean of the Graduate School and International Education and dean of the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas. Shields never planned on leaving U of A, until it felt “too big”.

“The Fayetteville area has grown dramatically; In 1994 it was smaller than Jonesboro; The university was about 12 or 13,000 people back then,” Shields said. “I wanted that large enough to provide everything everybody really wanted but small enough that you would really count. I felt that the University of Arkansas had grown too big for me and it felt more and more like the students were not getting the experience that I was a part of all through the early ‘90s and 2000s.”

Shields’s daughter, Savvy Shields Wolfe and former Miss America, visited Jonesboro and mentioned “They were the most friendly and welcoming people she had ever met.” Todd Shields had visited Jonesboro

before at state political science conferences a couple of times. When the position opened he and his wife, Karen Shields, visited Jonesboro and decided to pursue the position.

“This (Arkansas State) is much more like what I wanted to do. Being a part of students lives and changing what their trajectory is, helping them find where their passions are and helping them grow. This was really the kind of speed and size that I really wanted to be a part of,” Shields said. “The community that you have here, the college town, the students, the faculty, the staff, I would say the family that you have is something really exciting,” Shields said.

A-State has had near-record enrollment for the Fall 2022 semester with total head-count enrollment with 14,109 students after three years of enrollment decline. This number is the most enrollment in five years and 25 students short of the all time high mark from Fall 2017.

“More than once I’ve had someone tell me that ‘campus seems busy again’ or ‘events are bigger,’ and it adds up to making A-State a great place to be,” Shields added. “I want this university to be the place where all Arkansans feel welcome.”

Some of Shields’s goals for A-State include expanding student life opportunities, making sure the university has programs and finding the majors or programs that students are interested in.

“Talking about the big picture, enrollment growth, some areas for student life to expand like the reasons why



Photo by | Jessica McMillan

Todd Shields talking over goals and ideas for Arkansas State University at the conference room next to his office.

students would stay here rather than go home on the weekend. So more things for students to do through the weekend and keep them here,” Shields said.

Shields and head football coach Butch Jones are talking of teaming up with students to come up with new traditions. “That students maybe 50 years from now will come back and be excited about doing,” Shields said.

When asked by students about leadership Shields said: “Do the best you can at what is on your desk. Don’t look ahead because who knows what tomorrow is? What’s right here in front of you right now? We are trying to think strategically by doing the best we can with what we have right now.”

Quick Facts:

Pets: A Maltipoo named Xena

Hobbies: Walking Trails & Working Out

Children: Savvy and Dane

Education: Bachelor of Arts in political science and psychology at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, Master of Arts in political science and his Ph.D. at University of Kentucky

Salary: \$450,000.



Photo by | Jessica McMillan

Arkansas State University Chancellor Todd Shields Ph.D. gives “Wolves Up” sign at Order of the Pack.

Arkansas State University leaving Blackboard in favor of Canvas

RACHEL RUDD
NEWS EDITOR

Arkansas State University announced they were switching over from the learning management system Blackboard to Canvas at the beginning of the semester. A-State will be joining the rest of the ASU school system in adopting the software.

“Canvas brings several extras to the table, most notably being designed and optimized for mobile devices,” said Dr. William P. McLean, associate vice chancellor for faculty relations, in a press release.

Canvas also allows for easier record transferring between schools. It is also more cost-effective for A-State, as the university will be paying a lower cost per license per student.

“We are just in the beginning stages of switching from Blackboard to Canvas and a lot of the issues that are being worked on concern IT,” McLean said. Faculty can still use

Blackboard for their courses and are not required to transition until June 2023. Smith stated the reason for the year-long transition period was for faculty to grow accustomed and proficient with the software.

“There are some faculty that were in the Canvas test group,” said Dr. Bill Smith, chief communications officer. “That’s the beauty of having both contracts running simultaneously. Blackboard and Canvas are available to our faculty today.”

A-State has been offering faculty training for the software in the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. “The two faculty support specialists who work in the CETL have begun training by taking some in-depth courses provided by Canvas,” said Dr. Ruth Owens, director of CETL and associate professor of Spanish.

The Academic Affairs Provost Office had been looking

into switching softwares before the COVID-19 pandemic. The onset of the pandemic halted the Canvas studies.

Smith stated part of the reason for looking into the switch was due to the software’s similarity with Blackboard Ultra. “They’re adding all the features that are in (Canvas), so why don’t we use the original? That’s what got a lot of that interest moving,” Smith said.

Some students are not happy with the change. “I’ve used Canvas. It was very confusing to navigate,” said Hannah Horton, a senior psychology major from Cabot, Arkansas. “I think it’d be confusing to switch to something completely new and different from Blackboard.”

Others, such as Raven Jackson, a graduate student in the social work program from Little Rock, are more optimistic. “I know I have gotten used to Blackboard, so I’m sure it’d be a learning curve,” she said.



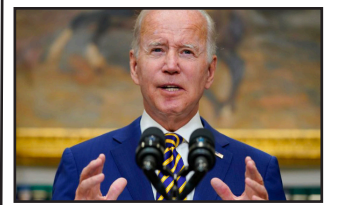
PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. STEWARDS UNIVERSITY
Arkansas State makes plans to leave Blackboard for Canvas. One of the benefits of Canvas is the app is better suited for mobile devices. Faculty will not have to transition to Canvas until June 2023.

Smith stated the courses that went through the Canvas experiment received positive student feedback. “We got a lot of positive feedback on it,” Smith said. “But at the same time, we have

to be realistic, it is change and we have to be very cognizant of people’s need to have some help in making a change.”

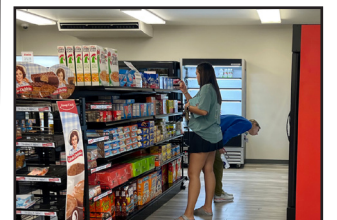
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