

# donlife



For Students

February 18, 2026



## VPA Dean's Long-Awaited Dream Hits the Stage Before Retirement

When John O'Connell first experienced the play "The Taming of the Shrew: The March for the Vote" in Chicago in 2017, he was enraptured.

"The minute I saw it, I said I have to direct this play," the dean of Purdue University Fort Wayne's College of Visual and Performing Arts said.

Serving at PFW since 2007 and VPA's dean since 2012, O'Connell's hope was to direct the play as quickly as possible, but circumstances such as acquiring or creating two sets of period costumes pushed his timeline back. Now, he's almost out of time, with his June retirement date approaching.

Though there are only 13 cast members, this is a full-department endeavor, as everyone wants to make sure the last of O'Connell's directing efforts at PFW turns out perfect. No pressure!

"I think there will be many emotions from everyone," said Olivia Albertson, a senior. "This cast feels like a wonderful, loving community, so I am sure there will be the bittersweet tears on closing night!"

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## First-Year Student Secures Spots in Two Research Labs through Sheer Initiative

With a strong plan, Hayden Oliver Crowell made sure his college experience would be exceptional. By doing early research into how he wanted to, well, do research, Crowell proved his capability early during his first semester on the Purdue University Fort Wayne campus.

First off, Crowell turned down acceptance options at larger state universities because he had studied them and understood he'd likely have to wait until at least his junior or probably senior

year before he could join a professor's research lab. Because large universities have limited laboratory space for expansive student bodies, graduate students and upperclassmen usually take priority after waiting years for a chance.

Crowell didn't want to wait.

After taking dual-credit courses during high school, Crowell decided to stay home and enter PFW as a sophomore to study psychology with minors in criminal justice and forensic investigations. His goal is to become a lawyer, likely specializing in environmental issues. Before ever starting a PFW class, he studied the Department of Psychology professors to learn their specialties.

"You can Google about any research a professor is doing in the department and then get a list of their labs," Crowell said. "I chose which ones looked the most interesting to me."

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Omnibus Series Classroom Visits Illuminate Possibilities and Paths for PFW Students

In more ways than one, the IDEASpace at Helmke Library is a good place to be for folks who want to see what's happening out there in the real world. Featuring windows that stretch almost all the way from floor and ceiling, multiple video monitors, and a steady stream of captivating programs, it's easy to understand why some consider this central spot on the campus of Purdue University Fort Wayne to be a hub of academic pursuits.

Throughout the year, it's also a setting where students get exclusive opportunities to interact with honored guests of the university's Omnibus Speaker Series before the main event a couple hours later. The classroom discussions are insightful, refreshingly candid, and conclude with question-and-answer sessions that frequently draw compliments from all involved.

The most recent classroom experience took place Thursday when Atlanta Hawks executive and professional sports trailblazer Melissa Proctor visited campus to describe her journey to executive vice president and chief marketing officer for the Hawks and State Farm Arena.

According to Proctor, her desire to connect with students is driven by not having comparable opportunities when she was in college.

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## Important Updates for Graduating Students

It might not seem like it today, but Purdue Fort Wayne's 2026 commencement season is just around the corner. Graduating students have new and important information to keep in mind.

### The Ceremonies

Tuesday, May 12 | Graduate Commencement Ceremony | 4 p.m. at the Embassy Theatre | 125 W. Jefferson Blvd.

Wednesday, May 13 | Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony | 4 p.m. at Allen County War Memorial Coliseum | 4000 Parnell Ave.

### Required Steps

Students who plan to participate in either ceremony are asked to review the deadlines and steps below.

1. **Confirm name pronunciation and attendance** by April 13. Students must complete these steps to ensure their names are pronounced accurately as they cross the stage at the ceremony.
2. **Order a cap and gown**. All orders will be shipped directly to the address that's entered, along with a return shipping label. To get the best price, order by April 20. The last day to order commencement regalia is April 27.
3. **Visit the commencement website** often for important information, reminders, and updates.

## Good to Know

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### Summer Scheduling: Register Today

Take charge of the summer with Purdue Fort Wayne's accelerated classes! Two 6-week terms offer the flexibility to balance work, life, and school while getting ahead.

Register now before classes fill up at **GoPFW**.

## Eventful

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*There's always plenty to do at Purdue Fort Wayne. To find your favorites—or discover new activities—check the full [events calendar](#) often to see what's happening on campus.*

FEBRUARY

21

Sat., 11 a.m.–2 p.m.

## JCPenney Suit-Up Event

Meet someone from the Career Development Center at JCPenney, located at the Glenbrook Mall, to utilize our Suit Up discount code and get some new professional clothing as a discount...

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FEBRUARY

23

Mon., 7:30–9 p.m.

## PFW Jazz Ensemble Presents: Gordon, Tom, and Friends

Join the PFW Jazz Ensemble for a fun night of eclectic jazz favorites by Gordon Goodwin, Tom Kubris, and friends The Big Phat Band...

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FEBRUARY

24

Tues., 7–9 p.m.

## Gameshow Series: Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

Think you have what it takes to win? Join the Student Activities Board for an evening full of trivia, fun, and friendly competition...

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FEBRUARY

25

Wed., 2–5 p.m.

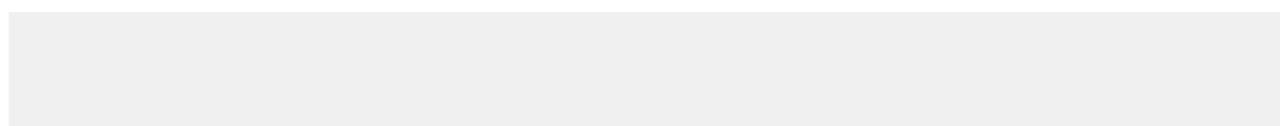
## Prep for the Expo

Stop by the Herd Hideout to prepare for the upcoming Career Expo! Building your confidence by taking part in workshops such as résumé review, networking, professional headshots, and more...

## Mastodon Moments

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*Seen and noted around campus. Monitor our university social feeds for more great moments of Mastodon life.*





Love was in the air in the Classic Ballroom at Walb Student Union on Feb. 10 when the Student Activities Board held its annual Valentine Night Dinner, complete with a movie.

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