



Remembering Dr. Kent Gardner

*September 1, 2023*

It is with heavy hearts and deep sadness that we announce the passing of Dr. Kent L. Gardner after battling a lengthy illness. Dr. Gardner profoundly impacted a wide range of people's lives as a husband, father, papaw, brother, mentor, coach, teacher, supervisor, colleague, volunteer, leader, and friend.

Dr. Gardner most recently served as the Executive Director Emeritus of Order of Omega, an international leadership honor society dedicated to recognizing members of Fraternity and Sorority organizations who have exemplified the highest standards in leadership, involvement, scholarship, and character.

In 1971, Dr. Gardner assumed the role of National President of Order of Omega. He was handed a box with ten file folders of the chartered chapters at that time and a bank checkbook with \$97 in the account. Through decades of steady leadership, vision, and unwavering dedication, Dr. Gardner leaves a legacy today, including an international headquarters in Arlington, Texas, a professional staff, an active Board of Directors, and almost six hundred chapters chartered across the United States and Canada. The international organization has awarded over \$2 million in scholarships and fellowships to members of Order of Omega.

Dr. Gardner grew up in Walters, Oklahoma, and attended Oklahoma City University on an athletic scholarship. He received his bachelor's degree on



a path into law or history, but he got a teaching certificate as a “fallback,” just in case. His former high school principal needed a teacher and coach and recruited him to join the faculty at Stillwater High School. Enjoying his work with students, Dr. Gardner took classes at Oklahoma State University to get his master’s in Student Personnel Psychology. He later completed his doctorate in Higher Education and Student Development at the University of North Texas.

Dr. Gardner and his bride, Nancy, moved to Arlington, Texas, in 1967 to serve as the assistant to the Dean of Students at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). He initially turned the role down, as he would not break his teaching contract since the football season had already kicked off in Stillwater. Because they knew that Dr. Gardner was the right person for the role, UTA held the position for him to start in June, a year after he first interviewed for the job.

Dr. Gardner had planned to stay for about five years at UTA but instead, retired after more than 50 years as a Maverick. During his tenure at UTA, Dr. Gardner held multiple roles including being an Assistant and Associate Dean of Students, the Dean of Students, an Assistant and Associate Vice President, and the Vice President of Student Affairs. After he retired as Vice President of Student Affairs in 2005, he remained at UTA as a faculty member in the College of Education, teaching classes on Foundations of Higher Education Administration and Student Affairs to graduate students.

Dr. Gardner’s legacy at UTA touched various Student Affairs areas including residential life and housing, student governance, student



organizations, and student conduct. He was a leader in transforming UTA into one of the most accessible campuses for students with disabilities in the early 1970s, long before the Americans with Disabilities Act's existence. Today, UTA continues to be renowned for its inclusivity and diversity.

Because of his experiences in college as a member of Kappa Alpha Order, Dr. Gardner established the first fraternity and sorority community when he arrived at UTA. Today, the UTA fraternity and sorority community has grown to twenty-six chapters. Dr. Gardner was the recipient of countless awards from Greek and

Higher Education organizations for his fifty-plus years as a pioneer in advancing the fraternity and sorority life experience, and for fostering positive change in the field.

With his customary chipper greeting, a welcoming hearty handshake, or a warm embrace, Dr. Gardner served and supported generations of students and colleagues throughout his life. He was known for his mentorship, friendship, jovial sense of humor, and caring nature.

We honor Dr. Gardner's legacy by holding dear the values he embodied, values that continue to inspire us all.

Dr. Gardner's remarkable contributions to Order of Omega will endure through the work of the international organization he capably led, and through its programs and services towards the advancement of the student experience, for generations.

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