Rita Hart, MSW is a Native Oklahoman and a citizen of Jicarilla Apache Nation and affiliated with the Choctaw Nation, married 40 years with two children and three grandchildren. She is a graduate from Murray State College, East Central University, and University of Oklahoma with a Master of Social Work. Rita is a Tribal Training Program Coordinator for the OU School of Social Work and Consultant for Capacity Center Building for Tribes providing training, technical assistance, and guidance for Tribal Social Service and Indian Child Welfare programs. She is a strong advocate in Child Welfare with 27 years’ previous experience in Indian Child Welfare through all levels of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Welfare and Domestic Violence and Indian Child Welfare Social Worker for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Eastern Region of Oklahoma. Rita serves on the Oklahoma Indian Child Welfare Association Executive Board and the Chair of the Court Improvement Program for Children ICWA Taskforce. Awards include the Oklahoma State Service Award Native American Heritage, County Director Leadership Award, CASA Distinguished Community Servant, OU Native American Student Award, OU State Leadership Award, and National Social Work Honor Society. Rita has several years of experience in training and presentation at both the local, State, and National level. Her special time is with grandchildren, sewing regalia and beadwork, hunting, and antique shopping.

OU Tribal Worker Core Competency Training

For the past year, faculty from the University of Oklahoma have been collaborating with the Bureau of Indian Affairs Eastern Oklahoma Region and Oklahoma Indian Child Welfare Program Leaders to develop a tribal social services workforce training curriculum utilizing the Simulation Center at OU-Tulsa (OU-SCOUT). This training is both exciting and novel because it not only provides for culturally sensitive and appropriate training of tribal workers but also allows for evaluation of actual practice behaviors in a controlled and protected setting.
The project coordinators are critically conscious of the disturbing history with tribal nations and the project will continue to recognize the sovereignty that tribes have to protect their citizens. Tribal Child Welfare programs have led and created the core competencies and training designed for their employees. Together we create the simulation scenario. Tribes send learners to participate, and Tribes evaluate the performance of the learners. Everything is directed by the Tribal partners.

The collective long-term goal of this multi-partner collaboration is to establish a tribal-University partnership that can provide simulation education in many domains of practice for workers hired by tribes. This would include not only client-worker interaction skills and child safety assessments, but also court simulations and other aspects of tribal work in the field.