

Oklahoma or Bust!  
By: Darrell Hansen

Many consider Oklahoma the crossroads of America, and for a large number of out-of-state and international agricultural students, that statement is true.

In-state students make up 77 percent of Oklahoma State University's 2005-06 freshman class, while 22 percent are out-of-state students and 1 percent are international students.

The number of Oklahoma freshmen admitted to OSU this year increased by 2 percent, while the number of freshmen entering from out-of-state has increased 11 percent, with all 50 states being represented, said OSU President David Schmidly. Both undergraduate and graduate students help increase the diversity of the OSU student body.

"While I was doing my undergraduate work here, I really enjoyed the meat science classes and wanted to see what the graduate program had to offer," said Megan McMichael, a meat science graduate student from Scottsburg, Ind.

McMichael earned her Bachelor of Science degree in animal science from OSU in 2004.

"It just seemed like a good fit for me," said McMichael.

Julia Burnett, from Healdsburg, Calif., received her Bachelor of Science degree in agricultural economics from OSU in 2000 and is now in the agricultural education graduate program.

"I did my undergrad here and then went to work for a few years," said Burnett. "When I made the decision to return to school for my master's degree, OSU was a natural choice. In addition to the reputation of the program, I already knew the area and the professors. It just felt right continuing my education at OSU."

Compared to larger cities, students enjoy the small-town atmosphere of Stillwater and the surrounding area.

"When I visited OSU, I just loved the campus and the small-town feel it had," said Jessica Jeffrey, an agricultural economics senior from Bells, Texas. "It's just so beautiful on campus."

The city and the people are two reasons students choose to attend OSU, but the university also has a reputation for high academic standards and qualifications.

"Several of our programs are considered among the strongest in the nation," said Linda Martin, College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources assistant dean for academic programs. "The faculty is committed to the academic and professional growth of our students."

Another draw for students is the opportunity to represent OSU nationally.

Jeanne Sankey, from Council Grove, Kan., is a senior seeking her bachelor's degree in agricultural communications.

"The livestock judging team and agricultural communications program were much more appealing for me than at any school in Kansas," said Sankey.

"Being on the judging team is something I have always wanted to do, and OSU has one of the best," said Sankey. "It was a great opportunity for me to come here and be able to do that and also be involved in one of the best ag communications programs in the country."

However, a price comes with being an out-of-state student at OSU. The difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition can be high. With the cost of each credit hour being more than \$100 for in-state students and nearly \$400 for out-of-state students, the decision to attend OSU can be a tough one. A typical schedule of 15 hours per semester can cost an out-of-state student as much as \$6,000.

"For me, it is completely worth it to pay the extra money," said Sankey. "The reputation a degree from OSU brings will make up for it in the long run."

Compared to some colleges in other states, OSU still has affordable tuition.

"At the time I was doing my undergrad work, it was actually cheaper to go to school here than it was at some of the schools in California," said Burnett. "Tuition has gone up since then, but it is still a great deal for the quality of education you get here."

OSU has many ways to help students waive their out-of-state tuition. Entering the university with a high grade point average and maintaining it, participating in one of the many competitive teams OSU has to offer or applying for a scholarship are a few ways you can cut down some of the costs. Another is if a family member is an alumnus or alumna.

"I don't have to pay out-of-state tuition," said Jeffrey. "My grandfather went to school here, so I got a waiver to cover the out-of-state fees."

Family tradition is strong among all universities, and OSU is no exception. Many students choose to attend OSU based on one or more of their family members being alumni.

"My grandfather, along with five cousins and one sister all went here," said Jeffrey. "So, it is kind of a family tradition for me."

For some international students, prestige and academic standards are the reason they attend OSU, not family tradition.

Nearly 1,800 international students attend OSU, representing 114 countries, with India and Japan sending the most students to OSU.

Koichiro Ito, a plant and soil science senior from Yokkiachi, Japan, had no hesitation in choosing OSU.

"There were two big reasons I came to OSU," said Ito. "OSU is famous for its agriculture, and that is what I wanted to learn about. Plus, it is cheaper than any other university that I looked at."

Some international students are able to attend college in their home country but choose to come to the United States for their education.

"I had the opportunity to go to college in Japan, but I wanted to learn English and soil irrigation so I decided to come to OSU," said Ito.

For many out-of-state and international students, staying in Oklahoma after graduation will depend mostly on finding a job and making money. For some of the academic departments, available jobs allow the students to stay in Oklahoma. For others, it might not be that easy.

"I really have no idea if I am going to stay here or not," said Jeffrey. "Right now I am looking into going back to Texas for grad school or maybe even law school."

OSU and CASNR have many sources available to students to help them find jobs after graduation.

"The ag communications department does a great job of letting us know about jobs that are out there," said Sankey. "It all depends on who is going to offer me the most money. I already moved away from home once, so doing it again wouldn't be that hard."

Money, or the lack of money, can be the driving factor for many students who are contemplating their futures.

"If I can, I want to attend graduate school in the United States, but I need to go back to Japan and save some money first so I can return," said Ito.

Some students have fallen in love with the area and have no plans of leaving anytime soon.

"I have been here almost eight years and have spent a large part of my adult life here," said Burnett. "At this point in my life, I can't really imagine living anywhere else. For me, living in Oklahoma is like coming home."

Choosing a college is a crossroad in everyone's life. For students following the road to OSU, their choice made perfect sense.

*Jeana Sankey of Council Grove, Kan., will have a world of opportunity after graduation. (photos by Darrell Hansen)*