

## The National Merit Scholars

# Among the BRIGHTEST and Best

by ANNE BARAJAS

**I**t's one of the biggest success stories in the history of the University of Oklahoma. In less than 10 years, OU's Scholars Programs has increased the University's number of entering freshman National Merit Scholars tenfold.

This fall, OU is expected to rank third among the nation's public institutions, seventh among all public and private institutions and first in the Big Eight for freshman National Merit Scholar enrollment. OU has attracted 118 National Merit Scholars, potentially outranking such prominent institutions as Cornell University, the University of California at Berkeley and Johns Hopkins University.

"The number of students who have chosen to join OU's National Merit, National Achievement and National Hispanic classes attests to the quality of education at the University of Oklahoma," says President Richard L. Van Horn. "These students are among the nation's finest, and we are proud and pleased that they chose OU."

OU also is expected to rank second among all public institutions, third among all public and private institutions, and first in the Big Eight in enrolling fresh-

man scholars in the National Achievement Scholarship Program for Outstanding Negro Students.

Twenty-eight National Achievement Scholars are members of this fall's freshman class. Only Florida A&M University—a historically black institution—and Harvard University are projected to have attracted more National Achievement Scholars.

Nine National Hispanic Scholars also began their academic careers at OU this fall. Both the National Achievement and National Hispanic programs are administered by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

OU's National Merit rankings among public institutions, which will be confirmed by the National Merit Corporation in January, should be exceeded only by the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University, according to Lisa Vaughn, director of OU's Scholars Programs. Vaughn explains, however, that both the Texas universities have much larger student bodies than OU's Norman campus total of 21,860. Texas A&M enrolls approximately 42,000 students on its main campus, and UT-Austin has nearly 50,000.

Last year UT recruited 210 freshman National

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Gil Jain

*Steve Sutherland, left, whose efforts helped to place the University in the forefront in recruiting National Merit Scholars nationwide, visits his successor, Lisa Vaughn, center, and 1992 freshman Scholar Cindy Blackwell, of Aurora, Colorado.*

Merit Scholars and Texas A&M had 154. The size of both of these universities' freshman Merit classes has not changed significantly in several years, Vaughn adds.

“When one adjusts for enrollment, OU—the 65th largest public institution—enrolls the highest percentage of freshman National Merit Scholars of any public institution in the United States,” she says.

Vaughn notes that all of OU's National Merit Scholars are provided scholarships through the Oklahoma Academic Scholars Program of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. The academic scholars program was established by the Oklahoma State Legislature in 1988. With combined funding from the state, OU and the National Merit Corporation, each of OU's National Merit Scholars will be awarded enough money to cover all expenses for four years of higher education.

Vaughn credits the OU program's remarkable growth to the pioneering efforts of her predecessor, Stephen M. Sutherland, who recently retired as assistant vice president of Student Affairs for Recruitment Services after 34 years at the University. Sutherland

became involved with the National Merit program in 1984, when a total of 11 Merit scholars were attending OU. Today, the student body includes more than 400 National Merit, National Achievement and National Hispanic Scholars.

In recognition of his outstanding achievements and service to the University and the state, Governor David Walters proclaimed Friday, June 26, as Stephen Sutherland Day in Oklahoma. He also named October 20 as OU National Merit Scholars Day.

“Steve Sutherland laid the foundation for the phenomenal success of the Scholars Programs,” Vaughn says. “I am working to continue that tradition of excellence for future generations of OU students.”

This year, the University's Merit class includes many scholars from outside Oklahoma. Sixty-four National Merit, 25 National Achievement and eight National Hispanic Scholars hail from states as far away as Alaska and New York.

“Oklahoma will be greatly enriched by the presence of these students,” Vaughn says. “All of OU's students are special, but our National Merit Scholars already have proven their potential for success.”

