



The harder it is to get in, the more they want to come.

There's always an air of heightened anticipation when the numbers come out. Opinion polls, election results, football rankings, jobless rates, expected earnings—whatever your area of vested interest happens to be. If the outcomes are favorable, you can exhale and broadcast the news; if the numbers are disappointing—well, a whole industry has grown up around spinning the results.

Within the University of Oklahoma, the statistical reports that annually top my personal expectancy chart, especially over the past few years, are the fall enrollment figures. Perhaps because they affirm that OU is doing something right—no, make that a great many things right. No spin needed here; the numbers speak for themselves.

For the fourth consecutive year, the total enrollment of 30,799 for the three campuses is an all-time record-setter, up from 29,896 last year. The site breakdown is 24,500 for Norman, 2,711 in non-traditional programs such as the colleges of Liberal Studies and Continuing Education, 2,693 at the Health Sciences Center and 895 at OU-Tulsa.

Interestingly, the continued growth in enrollment is occurring in spite of (or maybe because of) OU's efforts to limit the size of its freshman class through higher admission standards, the only fair and equitable enrollment management tool available to public institutions. But the higher bar does not seem to discourage prospective freshmen. With a declared target for the fall semester of approximately 3,800, OU received 8,471 freshman applications, 778 more than the previous high. Of that pool, about 6,100 qualified for automatic admission, while approximately 750 were placed on a wait list. Since many of the qualifiers made multiple applications, their ultimate decisions opened spaces for 242 admissions from the wait list.

While much is made of the standardized test scores required for automatic admission to OU, it is important to note that an

alternative route exists through high school grade point average and class ranking, both for resident and non-resident students. Currently Oklahoma residents must have a 24 ACT or 1090 SAT—or may qualify with a 3.0 and rank in the top 25 percent of their high school graduating class. Hit either target, and you're in. Non-residents need a 26 ACT or 1170 SAT—or a 3.5 GPA and a top 25 percent class ranking. In addition to these performance requirements, applicants must meet an Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education curriculum requirement with credits in 15 college-bound courses.

Applicants with a 3.0 GPA in the required core curriculum courses who fall short of automatic admission on the performance side can be placed on the wait list with a 22 ACT (1020 SAT) or a 3.0 GPA and top 30 percent ranking for residents; the non-resident wait list requires a 24-25 ACT (1090 SAT) or a 3.0 GPA and top 30 percent ranking.

For students who do not meet the entrance requirements, another, more circuitous route is available to keep the OU goal alive. The State Regents allow students completing 24-59 hours at another college to transfer to OU with a 2.5 GPA, and 60 or more hours requires only a 2.0 GPA. As OU registrar and associate vice president for enrollment Matt Hamilton is fond of saying, "After all, it's not when you start, but where you finish that is the most important."

How much more difficult is it for a freshman to be admitted to OU today? Harken back to 1985 for a comparison, when a 17 ACT would do the job or a 3.0 GPA or top half of the class. As late as 1995, only a 21 ACT (990 SAT) was necessary or 3.0 GPA and top third of the class—for residents or non-residents.

Then the inevitable question: How do OU's entrance requirements compare to Oklahoma State's? According to a State Regents report, OSU makes no distinction

between resident and non-resident, requiring a 22 ACT or 1020 SAT—or a 3.0 GPA and top 33 percent class ranking.

So why has OU adopted the slow-the-growth policy? The first reason is obvious: The University must operate within its physical, financial and academic resources in housing and caring for its students and providing for them the best possible educational experience. The second reason lies in making certain that its students are prepared for the academic challenges of University life. Of course there are late bloomers who fail to find their footing in high school and blossom in college, but OU officials contend that if a judgment must be made, the best gauge of college success is high school performance.

The 2003 OU freshmen are a pretty remarkable bunch. Their 25.8 average ACT score tops any other public university in the state by two points and is the highest in Oklahoma public institution history. The class includes 302 who ranked first in their high school classes and 429 who finished with a 4.0 GPA. More than 300 OU freshmen are State Regents Scholars, who rank in the top one-half of one percent in national test scores, nearly three times the number at any other Oklahoma college or university. Once again ranking at the top among all the nation's comprehensive public universities, OU enrolled 170 freshmen National Merit Scholars, up 60 in the past two years and bringing the total on campus to nearly 700.

And these freshmen are sticking around to become sophomores. The retention rate climbed from 77 percent in 1991 to 83.8 percent in 2002.

In analyzing University successes, never discount the David Boren factor. His tenure has seen the creation of a stimulating academic environment and attainment of a more enviable position in the public eye. And to prospective students, OU is undoubtedly more desirable because it is more difficult to access. —CJB