



Acclimating to college life gets easier as more

Taking a Popsicle break at Camp Crimson are, from left, Sara Hooker, Flower Mound, Texas; Jason Garcia, Oklahoma City; Ashley Ferguson, Plano, Texas; and Sarah Enhardt, Jenks.

CAMP



The energy and excitement in Catlett Music Center's Paul F. Sharp Concert Hall one afternoon in late July was palpable. As University of Oklahoma staff milled about making last-minute preparations, the audience, chattering and laughing, filled the auditorium. Hip-hop music blared from backstage speakers.

"BOOMER!" shouted a handful of students on stage. "SOONER!" came the tentative reply. "BOOMER!" insisted the leaders. "SOONER!" came the reply, this time with gusto. And so it went, until the audience, feeling the power, roared. "BOOMER!" "SOONER!" "BOOMER!" "SOONER!"

Camp Crimson 2003 officially had begun. And nearly 900 incoming freshmen—the largest group in Camp Crimson's seven-year history—got a preview of life at OU—and a head start on another 2,900 freshmen expected to join them in the fall.

Just a few hours earlier, these members of the class of 2007 were welcomed to campus by 120 Camp Crimson counselors—many of them former campers themselves—with something like, "What's your name? Hey, everybody! This is Joe from Ardmore! Let's give it up for Joe!"

Overwhelming? Maybe. But that was bound to be temporary. There was too much to do and see and learn and experience—from the minute Camp Crimson began with Thursday afternoon's opening session at Catlett to noon

Sunday when the exhausted but invigorated campers departed.

An optional summer orientation program, Camp Crimson began in 1996 with 120 campers, modeled after a Texas A&M University program called Fish Camp. Designed to acclimate students to campus in fun and innovative ways, the camp provides the opportunity to meet other students, sample college life and learn about OU's rich history and traditions. A small group of students known as Camp Crimson's operations or "ops" staff, with guidance and support from the Center for Student Life, began planning and organizing the camp months earlier.

J. P. Audas, associate vice president for Student Affairs and director of the Center for Student Life, says, "It's a great way for new students, especially those who come from greater distances, to meet people. We want all our incoming students, whether they're from rural areas, small towns or big cities, whether they're in-state or out-of-state, to know the University better.

"What's compelling about Camp Crimson, aside from the great orientation it provides for incoming freshmen, is how many current OU students who are former campers participate. They shape the program; they want to give others the tremendous experience that they had at Camp Crimson."

One of the veterans is Vicki Guerra, who came to camp in 2000 and has been a counselor for the past two years. "I'd heard about the A&M Fish Camp when I was in high school [in McKinney, Texas], and I knew the University of Texas had a camp called Camp Longhorn. I was accepted to both OU and UT. When I

incoming freshmen opt for a summertime head start.

CRIMSON

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decided to come to OU, I knew I wanted to participate in a similar program so I would have a better transition from high school to college and would know what to expect once I came to school here,” she says. “I loved Camp Crimson. It helped me become familiar with all that OU offered me.”

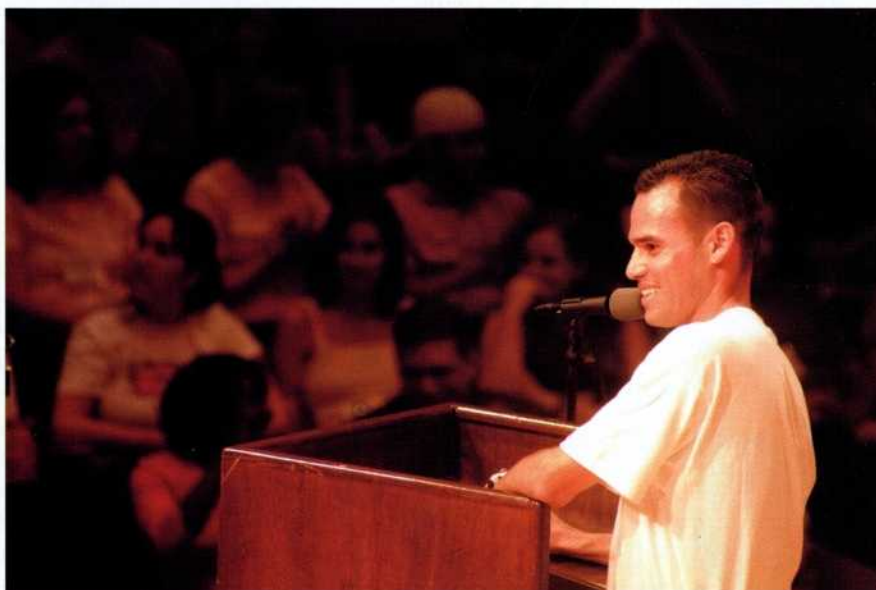
She wanted to become a counselor, she says, because she is proud of the University and wants to show new students how diverse the campus is and how many opportunities are available. “I’m excited that mine is one of the first OU faces new freshmen see; they know that we really are friendly,” she explains. “Students have been building up to college since junior high school. We try to make them more comfortable when they get here so they know they made the right choice in coming to OU.”

Guerra admits that as a camper she felt intimidated at first but says she forced herself out of her comfort zone. “The counselors, staff and faculty helped make it OK to do that. You see people your age running the camp, and you feel better about asking them any kind of question.”

After the campers check in and find their camp roommates, each randomly selected group of 15 or so is led by its assigned pair of counselors—one male and one female—to Catlett Music Center for the opening session. First on the agenda: learning the “OU Chant” and “Boomer Sooner.” As the words are projected on a giant screen on stage, the campers stand,



Lining up at Camp Crimson 2003 are 900 freshmen-to-be (of the 3,800 expected in the fall), who registered for four July days of meeting new classmates, learning about OU, acquiring coping skills and, oh, yes, fun, food and non-stop activities.



J.P. Audas, associate vice president for Student Affairs and director of the Center for Student Life, welcomes the Crimson Campers to OU at the opening session in Catlett Music Center, where the resounding refrain became “BOOMER!” “SOONER!”

raise their right arms, index finger extended, and begin. “O-K-L-A-H-O-M-A. Our chant rolls on and on . . .” If they did not feel it before, surely they feel it now: that famous Sooner Magic.

The rest of the weekend consists of nonstop activities, including ice-breakers and team building sessions; “find your class” expeditions as well as tours of the Barry Switzer Center, Lloyd Noble Center and the Sam Noble Oklahoma Mu-

seum of Natural History; panels led by student leaders on how to become involved in campus activities. In “Interactive Theater,” students list their biggest fears about coming to college—homesickness or fear of failing, for example—and counselors and staff act out a skit illustrating what to do and what not to do under those circumstances. On the social side, campers attend a pep rally, a pool party, a scavenger hunt, barbecues, an



ABOVE: Team building is the order of the day at the Camp Crimson Chant Competition where each pre-designated group performs an original "chant" for their peers.

BELOW: Group 22, "The Twanky Twos," guided by counselors Vicki Guerra and Devin Jackson, in red shirts, gather outside Catlett Music Center to rehearse their Chant Competition routine, one of several confidence-boosters for the freshmen-to-be.

evening with a hypnotist and a '70s-style "Retro Nite" dance.

"The hypnotist is always a hit because it's a big-group experience that gives campers a common bond," says

Guerra. Bonds of another type are established during the many "getting-to-know-you" activities. Outside consultants lead sessions designed to prod incoming students into thinking about decisions they

will have to make in college and beyond. In one exercise, small groups talk among themselves for a few minutes, then identify the group member most likely to make the smoothest transition from high school to college.

To build team unity, each of the more than 50 groups of campers design and build boats from cardboard boxes and tape. Each boat must float and accommodate one person. The teams then race their vessels in the swim complex pool.

Perhaps the biggest ice-breaking, team-building activity of all is the Chant Competition, scheduled near the end of the first full day of camp. Each group creates and performs a short original "chant" in front of hundreds of their peers, competing for a position in the finals and ultimately first prize. The chant can be about practically anything. This year's competitors included Group 15, whose members stuffed their T-shirts with pillows and lamented the famous "Freshman 15" weight gain, while Group 18 sang of the benefits of being legally recognized as an adult in "The Legal Bunch," to the tune of TV's "The Brady Bunch" theme song.

OU student body president Mary Millben did not attend Camp Crimson as a freshman but was a counselor last year



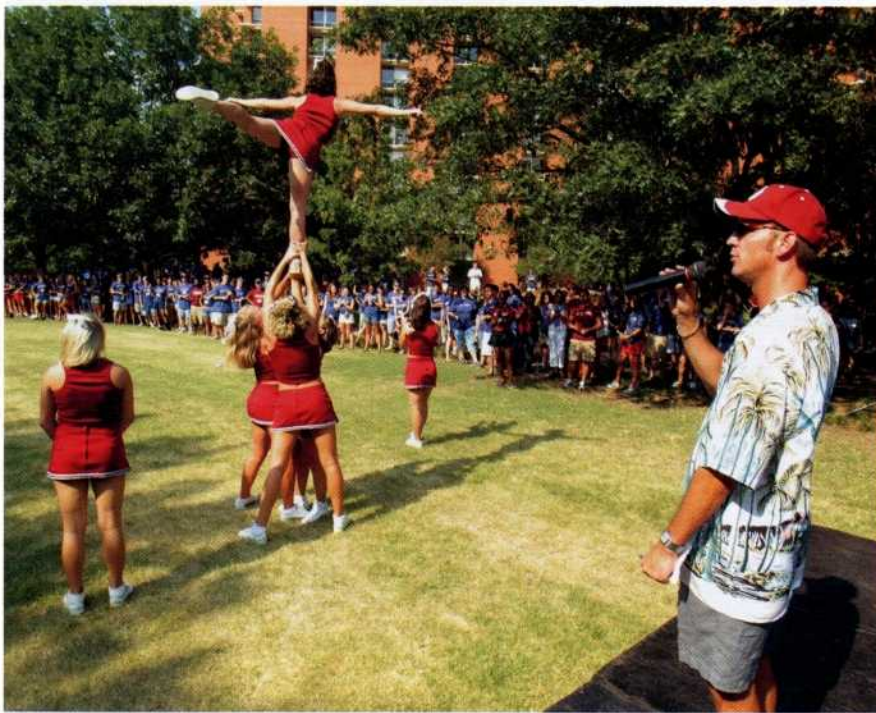
and has participated as a representative of student government the past two years. "Campers are hungry to know about OU, and they're hungry to be involved," she says. "It's encouraging to see the positive effects of Camp Crimson when they come to campus in the fall. The camp makes their first week so much easier. They'll wear their Camp Crimson T-shirt and see someone else with the shirt on, and it's an instant connection."

At this year's student panel sessions, Millben says she fielded questions ranging from the effects of the recent tuition increase to whether there is a curfew ("They're oblivious to the fact that they're now pretty much on their own," she says) to the easiest ways to get involved on campus. "I tell them to find one or two things that suit their academic and social interests to get their feet wet," she says. "One of our responsibilities as student leaders is to help campers learn the importance of balancing activities with academics. We remind them it's easy to major in extracurricular activities, but they're here for a degree."

Millben, who served as student body vice president last year, established bonds of her own with campers she counseled last summer. "I'd just see them on campus, or they'd stop by the VP office to say hi," she says. "Now many are in positions of leadership themselves. I like to think I helped mentor them."

Everyone connected with Camp Crimson benefits in some way from the experience, but it is the campers, of course, who benefit the most. "When it's all over, the campers always tell us that they had so much fun, camp was really helpful, and they were glad they came," Guerra says. "We always ask, 'How many of you have parents who made you come?' There are always some, and they admit that mom was right."

But she says they will realize fully the camp's impact a month or so later when they come to school in the fall. "It's a great feeling when, as a freshman, the first person you see moving into the residence hall is someone from Camp Crimson," she says. "It gives you a common camper identity that you'll carry with you through your years at OU."



TOP: Student Affairs Vice President Clarke Stroud, right, emcees the campers' first OU pep rally on the Walker Tower lawn. While the crowd sought the shade of surrounding trees, cheerleaders and the National Champion men's gymnastics team performed.

ABOVE: Crimson Campers got acquainted even before they had time to don their identifying T-shirts. Waiting outside Walker Tower for activities to begin are Jesse Agyemang, left, McKinney, Texas; Ashley Harris, Texarkana; and Jesse Greadington III, Tulsa.