

Far from being abandoned during the summer months, OU's Norman campus buzzes with the energy of young campers who get to experience life as a Sooner.

BY SUSAN GROSSMAN PHOTOS PROVIDED

Summertime Scholars

When Kelli Norris packs her duffle bag for summer camp, she will not be stuffing it with sunscreen and bug spray. More likely, she will be toting along some notebook paper and pencils. The soon-to-be freshman at Calumet High School in El Reno, Oklahoma, is heading to Norman for her fourth and final sojourn at Horizons Unlimited, a weeklong residential learning camp for gifted and talented students.

"It's kind of like going to school, because some of the classes have homework, but it is really fun, too," the 14-year-old Norris says. "I learned a lot of stuff in the creative writing class I took last year that helped me in eighth grade, like the year-end writing test I had to take. I'm really looking forward to coming back."

Today's parents and kids want something more out of a summer camp than s'mores and bug bites, and University Outreach has long filled that bill. What could be better than spending a week pretending to be an OU student? Now in its 11th year, Horizons Unlimited provides just such an opportunity. For one week each summer, students in sixth through eighth grade who are in gifted and talented programs can move into the OU residence halls and experience life on the campus of a major university.

Kelli's mom, Jamie Norris, says the program gives her daughter not only confidence in her studies and with meeting her goals, but a taste of college life as well. "This program has been really good for her," she says. "Kelli plans to go to OU and study speech pathology, and I like that she has already had some experience there."

A 4.0 student and valedictorian of her eighth grade class, Kelli says there are other aspects of Horizons Unlimited that are appealing, outside the classroom. "I really like staying in the dorms and some of the things we get to do at night," Norris says.

"I have to be sure and bring my alarm clock, though, because we have to get up on time for roll call."

That is exactly the kind of experience the camp teaches, according to the program's director. "These are kids who are going to go to college," says Amy Logan, program specialist with Precollegiate Programs for University Outreach. "Horizons Unlimited lets them see what it is really like to study and live on a campus. The chance to have this experience, a preview of life at a major university, can be invaluable when it comes time to choose which college to attend."

Born out of a 12-year partnership to enrich the existing gifted and talented program in Norman Public Schools, Logan says Horizons Unlimited is an extension of that relationship. "During the school year, Outreach provides programming for middle school gifted and talented students in the Norman school system. Horizons grew out of this program since we are teaching the same group of students."

The chance for some stimulation throughout the long summer vacation is what landed both children of Jannett and Terry Maxon in Norman from their home in Arlington, Texas, the past few summers. "We are always on the lookout for programs that will challenge our kids," says Jannett Maxon. "It's hard to find programs for this age group that fit that bill. While we want them to be challenged, another benefit of this program is that they also are around other kids on their intellectual level."

As alumni of the University, the Maxons learned of the program and sent daughter Lindsey, soon to be a high school sophomore, to Horizons Unlimited for two years. Son Stephen will be attending for the second time this summer.

To be considered for the program, students must fill out an application highlighting their accomplishments, obtain two

letters of recommendation, one of which must be from the coordinator of their school's gifted and talented program, send in their grades and submit a half-page essay explaining why Horizons Unlimited is appealing to them.

Participants who are accepted live in University residence halls, but also can opt to commute. Many of the approximately 80 students are from Oklahoma schools, as well as from Arkansas, Texas, Kansas and even Georgia. They can choose from 13 courses by ranking their top four choices. Students are assigned two, three-hour courses: one in the morning and another in the afternoon.

Norris is hoping to be enrolled in "American Popular Music Geography," which explores the origins of music such as heavy metal, surfer rock and urban rap, and "Severe Storms and Society," where students learn the basic concepts of atmospheric science.

Although it is officially a summer camp, students are expected to apply themselves when in the classroom. "We remind them that part of being challenged is working hard," says Logan. "Those who excel are those students who take responsibility and have a genuine desire to learn."

For Carla Winters, OU graduate assistant athletic trainer, teaching "Sports Medicine—Principles of Athletic Training" to these young academy students is something she looks forward to doing each summer.

"First of all, they are natural fans of OU and are excited just to be on campus," she says. "But also, at least in my lessons, they learn things that they can apply at home. Either they've been on a team, or have known someone who has hurt themselves, sprained an ankle or something like that. It's exciting when they see that they may actually be able to help an injured person in the

Although campers find the curriculum at OU's Horizons Unlimited decidedly more academic than at other summer camps, the experience is mixed with enough fun and new friendships to keep the middle school scholars coming back year and year.



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future. I like watching the light turn on in them when they learn how to clean a wound, for example, or apply a splint and see that this is something they can do in daily life.”

Winters’ hands-on course covers various aspects of sports medicine such as basic prevention, identification and management of common sports injuries, as well as emphasizing a knowledge of anatomy. Because they have spent the previous nine months in school, Winters says it is important that her students get to choose what they want to learn about during the week they spend with her.

“On the first day, I usually have an idea of what I want to cover, but I let them choose. I make sure that we cover things like what to do in an emergency, how to place a 911 call and understanding appropriate treatments. I also cover the foundations of sports rehabilitation and who is on a sports medicine team, from coaches, to athletes, team physicians and trainers.”

As she prepares for her third year of teaching in Horizons Unlimited, Winters says it is exciting to work with students who are middle school aged because she is able to introduce them to sports medicine as a potential profession. “Every once in a while I have a student who is interested in the field as a career, and Horizons Unlimited helps them enrich that interest.”

Other course choices this year include: “Chemistry and the Lab,” “Chemical Detectives,” “Creative Writing,” “Geology Rocks!,” “Journalism Ins and Outs,” “Mathematics,” “Plants Rule!,” “Reel Life: Telling True Stories in the Movies,” “Theatre Arts: How Do I Act?” and “Visual Art—Making a Book.”

In addition to the classroom, physical activities are planned for the evening. Students are never left unattended. Vans take them to and from main campus for class time. Lunch, which is served in Couch Cafeteria, is from noon to 1:30, with

■ If Katelyn Deaton had an actual ankle injury, she might be more appreciative of Kelli Norris’ efforts to follow treatment instructions in Carla Winters’ Sports Medicine class, a popular choice for summer campers in the Horizons Unlimited program.



■ Melanie Kuriger was among the approximately 80 middle school students from gifted and talented programs in Oklahoma and several surrounding states who participated in 2005 Horizons Unlimited. One of her two class choices was a course in Web page design.





■ Above: Phoebe Spencer puts the finishing touches on her weaving project in Janey Crain's 2005 class in Mini College, the OU Outreach summer program for elementary school-age youngsters.

■ Below: Summer campers in Horizons Unlimited test their creativity and imagination by tackling the principles of cartooning, one of 13 choices offered in 2005, from which each student participated in two, three-hour classes.



afternoon classes resuming at 2 until 5 p.m. Activities are planned for evenings.

Cost of the program, held July 9 through 14, is \$500 for residential participants and \$450 for commuters. Scholarships are available.

For the younger camp set, Precollegiate Programs offers Mini College, an all-day enrichment program for students who will enter grades one through six in the fall. A themed program, which in years past has featured Harry Potter and Oklahoma history, this year will be an arts exploration. Students participate in three classes each day—visual art, weaving and drama—and close each day with a swim at the OU pool. On the final day of camp, students present what they have learned during the week.

The past two summers, Ryan Farmer, now 11, enjoyed attending Mini College at OU. The soon-to-be Norman sixth grader liked many things about the program. "I didn't know anybody when I went, but I made a lot of friends," he says. "My favorite parts were learning how to weave and playing with the animals that were there, especially the snake and the scorpion. I also really liked the tornado class where we learned about how they rank them."

The fact that Farmer liked weaving is music to the ears of Oklahoma artist-in-residence Janey Crain. As a long-time instructor for Precollegiate Programs, Crain says she teaches her students to be lifelong learners, and weaving is something that can be done anytime, anywhere.

"Weaving is the most calming of the visual arts," she says. "When we do weaving, I teach the basics, and kids learn that weaving can be done anywhere. All it takes is a piece of cardboard, some string and yarn. If they get done with school work early, they can pull out their weaving and wait for the rest of the class."

Among the many positives of Mini College, says the 73-year-old Crain, is that students are there by choice. "Teaching in the summer is different, because the kids really want to be there. I teach them to be good stewards of the planet, about making their own presents and using recycled materials."

Cost of Mini College is \$185 with a \$15 discount for OU faculty and staff.

The summer Sooner campus, filled with much younger students, furthers the mission of University Outreach, says Outreach vice president James Pappas. "As a lifelong learning organization, programs such as Horizons Unlimited enhance our ability to engage with our community in a different way," he says. "Fostering the love of learning early ultimately motivates young students to continue their higher education."

And no one will be surprised if these summertime youngsters one day become full-time Sooners.

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