

# GROWING PAINS

**How OU, Norman  
are evolving**

**Future of housing:**

**OU grapples with record enrollment | 4-6**

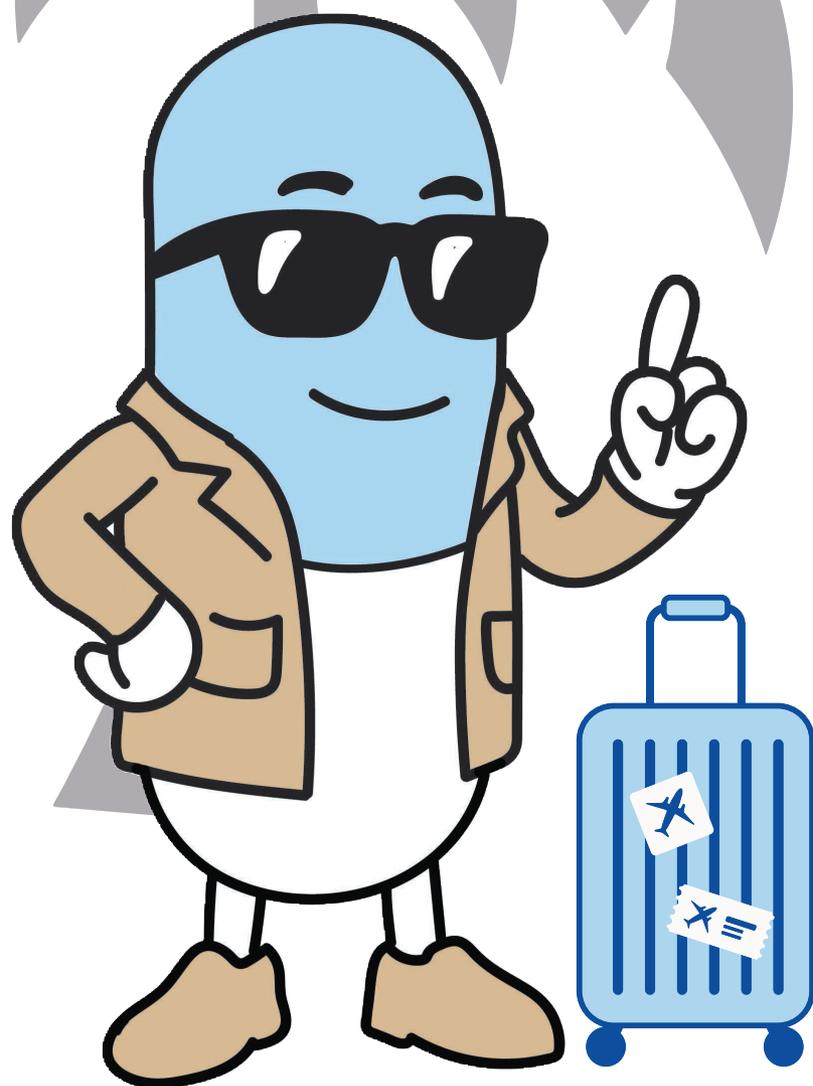
**Premium seats:**

**How stadium renovations will impact Sooner fans | 9-11**

**Under construction:**

**City plans for rising population, aging infrastructure | 14-15**

# Prescription medication reminders for spring break: Pack smart. Make smart choices. Stay safe.



## Hey, Sooners.

Spring break is almost here. I know what's on your mind: flights, playlists, beach days, road trips and group chats blowing up with countdowns.

You've earned this break!

But before you zip up that suitcase, I need a minute of your attention.

While you're tossing sunscreen and swimsuits into your bag, don't forget one essential item: your prescription medications and a smart plan to take them safely.

## Pack Smart: Travel Like a Pro

Travel changes your routine. Early flights, long drives, time zone shifts, and late nights can all throw off your medication schedule.

Here's your Professor Pill pre-trip checklist:

- Pack medications in your carry-on.
- Keep them in original labeled bottles.
- Bring enough for the whole trip, plus a few extra days in case of delays.
- Set phone alarms if you're crossing time zones.

If you're heading abroad, check the rules for prescription medications in your destination country. Some medications that are common here may have restrictions elsewhere. A little research now prevents major stress later.

## Make Smart Choices:

### Avoid Medication Mistakes

Spring break means beach days, late nights, exploring new places, and enjoying time with friends. However, your prescriptions don't take a break. They continue working in your body whether you're in class or on the coast.

Your medications can interact with other substances, like alcohol, including those for anxiety, depression, ADHD, sleep, and pain management. Mixing them can increase side effects like dizziness, blackouts, slowed breathing, dehydration, or heart complications.

Even "just one drink" can hit differently when combined with certain prescriptions, especially if you're tired, dehydrated, or

Have questions for me?  
I want to hear from you.  
No lectures. No judgment.  
Just real answers.

 @Prof.Pill

haven't eaten.

Here's the goal: make smart choices in ways that protect your health, not jeopardize it.

That means:

- Knowing how your medication interacts with alcohol.
- Staying hydrated and eating regularly.
- Taking medications exactly as prescribed.
- Never doubling up on a missed dose without medical guidance.
- Never sharing prescriptions, even "just one."

Sharing medication is unsafe and illegal. What helps you manage focus, mood, or pain could seriously harm someone else.

Smart choices don't limit your experience. They protect it.

## Stay Safe: Protect What Protects You

Spring break usually means shared spaces such as hotel rooms, rental houses, or cruises. Lots of people. Lots of activity.

Keep your medications secure:

- Store them in a zipped bag or small lockbox.
- Don't leave bottles out in plain sight.
- Keep track of them in busy environments.
- Save local emergency numbers if you're traveling internationally.

These steps can help you to make great memories, not medication mistakes!

So before you head out, ask yourself:

1. Did I pack my prescriptions?
2. Do I have a plan to take them on schedule?
3. Do I know how and where to secure my prescriptions?

**Think twice.**

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SAI YADAV/OU DAILY

Jeff Blahnik, vice president for enrollment management and chief enrollment officer, at the dedication for the recent renovations at the Jones Family Welcome Center on Sept. 19, 2025.

# The changing face of Norman

Dear readers,  
Growth has a way of sneaking up on you. One day, campus feels familiar — the same walk to class, the familiar path to your dorm, the peaceful neighborhoods bordering the university. The next, there are cranes in the skyline, new residence halls rising and gameday traffic that suggests something bigger is unfolding.

At OU, growth is no longer a distant projection in a strategic plan. It's visible, tangible and woven into daily life. Increasing enrollment numbers, new facilities and the reshaping of the campus facade signal momentum. They reflect ambition and opportunity. But they also invite an important question: What does this growth mean for the community?

Universities are engines of possibility. They draw students from across the state, country and globe. They bring research funding, create jobs and spark innovation. As campus expands, so does the local economy. Restaurants stay busy, small businesses find new customers and the cultural life of the city becomes more vibrant. Growth can energize a community.

Yet growth is rarely simple. More students means a greater demand for housing. New developments can reshape historic neighborhoods. Longtime residents may feel the pressures of rising costs or shifting city priorities. The character of a college town evolves, sometimes in ways that feel exciting and other times in ways that feel uncertain.

The relationship between campus and city has always been intertwined. Students call Norman home for four years; many residents have called it home for decades. The challenge, and the opportunity, lies in ensuring that expansion strengthens that relationship rather than strains it. Thoughtful planning, open dialogue and collaboration between university leaders and city officials matter now more than ever.

This moment invites reflection. Growth should not simply be measured in square footage or enrollment numbers. It should be measured in how well it serves both students and neighbors, in whether opportunity expands alongside infrastructure and in whether community remains at the center of progress.



**Anusha Fathepure**  
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Norman is changing. That much is clear. The question is not whether growth will happen, but how the community chooses to shape it. If campus and city move forward together — listening, adapting and planning with intention — growth can become not just expansion but shared advancement.

To the ever-evolving future,  
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# HOUSING THE FUTURE



**SAI YADAV/OU DAILY**  
OU alums Jonny and Brenda Jones with university leaders at the dedication for recent renovations at the Jones Family Welcome Center on Sept. 19, 2025.

## OU grapples with changing campus landscape amid record-breaking enrollment

BY ANA BARBOZA • [ABARBOZA@OU.EDU](mailto:ABARBOZA@OU.EDU)

Across a roughly 3,500-acre campus with an ever-increasing student population — 32,662 in fall 2025 — OU's Norman campus is struggling to meet the housing demands of continuous student growth.

Since 2021, the university has welcomed a record-breaking first-year class annually. In 2025, OU marked its fifth-consecutive record-breaking first-year class with 6,229 students.

### Current state of OU housing

OU currently has eight residence halls: Couch and Walker centers, David L. Boren Hall, Dunham and Headington colleges, Headington Hall, Cross Village and McCasland Hall. The university also has two on-campus apartment complexes, Traditions Square — with East and West buildings — and Kraettli Apartments. This fall, the university will open a new residence hall, the South Building, to complete phase one of its First-Year Housing Master Plan.

Roughly 7,994 students can be housed across all residence halls and apartment complexes. The South Building, once

completed, will add over 580 beds.

On-campus residence halls are only offered for first-year students, according to OU's housing website. Traditions Square and Kraettli Apartments have primarily housed upperclassmen, with Kraettli also open to faculty and staff. However, the annual increase in first-year enrollment and the subsequent housing demand led to the university announcing it will turn Traditions East into first-year housing for the 2026-27 academic year.

OU requires all first-year students to live on campus for their first two semesters unless they are admitted in the spring semester or receive an approved exemption. OU Marketing and Communications wrote in an email to OU Daily that, depending on projected enrollment and overall capacity, Traditions West may also be used for first-year housing.

"These decisions are finalized each year based on available inventory and enrollment projections," the email reads.

OU's 2026-27 upperclassmen housing enrollment website shows that a limited number of units will be available at Traditions Square. On Feb. 16, there were 932 applications on the waitlist for Traditions Square apartments, according to the website.

OU Marketing and Communications wrote that students can use the university's off-campus housing resource website, which provides listings and contact information for independently owned and operated local properties.

OU's Architectural and Engineering Services oversees the

planning, designing and building of facilities across all three campuses. Former department director Michael Moorman, a licensed architect, served in the role for 18 years before retiring in 2013, leaving OU without a campus architect.

Alan Moring worked as a staff architect for about eight years before stepping out of the role in 2023 to teach at the Christopher C. Gibbs College of Architecture.

Moring told the Daily he worked mainly as a project manager, overseeing the design process, construction and budgeting of several campus projects. He worked on the Jones Family Welcome Center, OU Daily's Copeland Hall newsroom and the Jenkins Avenue Parking Facility, among other projects.

"Being a campus architect, you're really working as the owner's representative. (For) most projects, you have the owner, you have the architect and you have the builder or contractor, and I was really functioning as the owner," Moring said. "We would interview and hire architects to design the projects and then we would interview and hire contractors to build them."

Moring said Architectural and Engineering Services would build a team with the college or department housing each project to discuss renovation or construction matters. For the First-Year Housing Project, which he worked on, the department worked closely with Housing and Food Services.

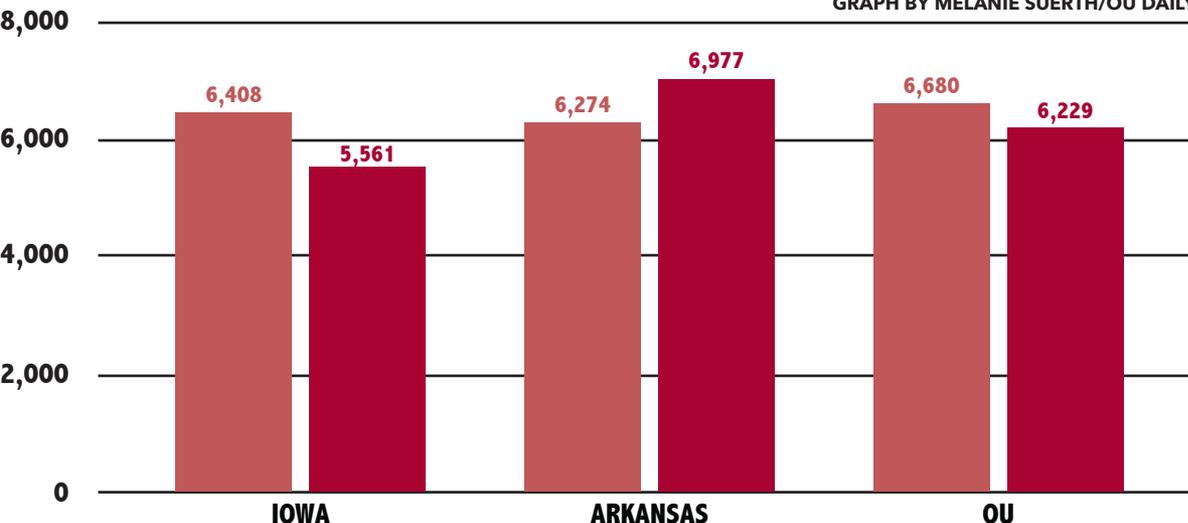
OU Marketing and Communications wrote that housing services works closely with OU Enrollment Management and receives projected enrollment numbers each year.

"Because housing must be provided for incoming first-year

**TOTAL NUMBER FIRST-YEAR BEDS**

**FALL 2025 FIRST-YEAR ENROLLMENT**

GRAPH BY MELANIE SUERTH/OU DAILY



students under Board of Regents policy, those projections are central to annual housing planning and space allocation, ...” the email reads. “All housing facilities follow regular maintenance and renewal processes, with prioritization based on facility condition, operational needs, and planned capital timelines.”

**SEC, AAU universities’ housing demand**

OU entered the Southeastern Conference July 1, 2024. OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. wrote in a June 2024 opinion piece for *The Oklahoman* that he expected enrollment to continue increasing as its SEC status may attract students, and while enrollment has risen, other schools in the conference are seeing similar trends.

“OU is in regular communication with its SEC and regional peers,” OU Marketing and Communications wrote. “While housing models differ across institutions, a common trend is continued enrollment growth and the need to adapt housing strategies to meet that demand.”

The University of Arkansas, another SEC university, welcomed 6,977 first-year students in fall 2025, for a total of 34,164 students enrolled for the 2025-26 academic year.

The University of Arkansas has 20 residence halls that span community style, suite style and apartment style. Three of those are female-only residence halls and one is for first-year students enrolled in the university’s honors college.

The university can house 6,274 students across all residence halls and is working on building two additional on-campus residence halls, one of which will be completed in 2028 and add over 700 beds.

John Thomas, media relations and core communications director at the University of Arkansas, wrote in an email to the Daily that the university requires all first-year students to live on campus or in one of the university-sponsored off-campus apartment complexes.

“We’ve found that students who live on campus their first year at the university, perform better academically, so that’s a

huge incentive for us to support the long-term success of our students,” Thomas wrote.

This finding aligns with Harroz’s belief that requiring first-year students to live on campus can help students have a better transition to college.

“Students who spend their first year on campus are materially more successful than those that don’t,” Harroz told OU Daily editors in September 2024. “It’s also a reason that flagship on-campus research universities are doing well. It’s a big part of the development of freshmen into sophomores.”

However, Thomas wrote that some students may be allowed to live with a parent or guardian within 70 minutes from campus. On rare occasions, a first-year student may appeal to be waived from the residence requirement, including for medical or physical conditions, marriage, custody of children or military service.

Thomas wrote returning or transfer students can live in university-leased apartment complexes near campus. He wrote that the complexes are leased by the university but managed and operated by the owners of each complex.

“Students who choose this living arrangement are issued housing contracts with the (University of Arkansas) as if they were living on-campus,” Thomas wrote.

Like OU, the 2025-26 academic year marked the fifth-consecutive record-breaking first-year class for the University of Arkansas and the first time enrollment exceeded 34,000. While the university does not have an enrollment cap, Thomas wrote it has recently set out to take a more controlled approach to enrollment growth by being more selective with the number of out-of-state students accepted each year.

“We are providing more acceptance and scholarship opportunities than ever before to our in-state students, as is our land-grant mission,” Thomas wrote. “While we have set enrollment records in previous years in both overall and freshman classes, our retention numbers have grown as well, which affects the incoming class size.”

One goal listed in OU’s “Lead On, University” strategic



MATTHEW MOORE/OU DAILY

Traditions Square East houses OU students south of campus.



PHOTO PROVIDED

The University of Arkansas has 20 residence halls.



ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

Alan Moring, now an architecture professor, was an OU staff architect for about eight years until 2023.

plan is to become a member of the Association of American Universities, an invitation-only organization of the nation's leading research universities credited for life-changing education, research and innovation. Member universities earn the majority of federal funding for research.

The University of Iowa, an AAU public university, saw an enrollment of 5,561 first-year students in fall 2025, for a total of 31,563 students enrolled.

The University of Iowa has 11 residence halls, with one exclusively for returning students. According to the university's website, about 6,469 students can be housed across all residence halls.

Virginia Ibrahim-Olin, housing administration director at the University of Iowa, told the Daily that first-year students are not required to live on campus but that 93.5% of this year's incoming students lived on campus.

Ibrahim-Olin said in fall 2025, the university had 1,167 returning on-campus residents, classified as anyone who had previously lived in the residence halls, excluding 169 resident assistants.

The last time the University of Iowa did a housing development was in 2017, Ibrahim-Olin said, when it built Catlett Hall, a residence hall that can hold 1,049 students.

Ibrahim-Olin said the University of Iowa Housing and Dining division works closely with the admissions office to monitor yearly student growth. This academic year, however, Ibrahim-Olin said the incoming class size was a little larger than anticipated.

"We had to make some additional accommodations for students to live on campus, such as opening up some rooms that we had converted to student study spaces," Ibrahim-Olin said.

Ibrahim-Olin said the University of Iowa has an enrollment management plan with each college to coordinate its target enrollment over the next several years. Like the University



PHOTO PROVIDED

John Thomas is media relations and core communications director at the University of Arkansas.

of Arkansas, she said the university does not have a cap on enrollment.

"We just do our best to make sure that we can house everybody that would like to live on campus," Ibrahim-Olin said. "At this time, we are not opening a new residence hall, or we are not leasing space off campus."

Ibrahim-Olin said student growth can be exciting and believes there are many ways to handle it the right way.

"There's a variety of factors that would influence a first-year class size and then subsequent first-year class sizes, and so the biggest hope is that the universities are being an active partner with their housing and dining operations," Ibrahim-Olin said.

#### Future housing plans, what OU needs

In the 2020-21 academic year, OU saw a drop in student enrollment. Moring said the university had projected a big drop in enrollment by the 2025-26 academic year.

That drop has not happened.

"We were concerned about overbuilding in a way, ..." Moring said. "At the time, (Architectural and Engineering Services) were just replacing the beds one-to-one so it wasn't a net gain or net loss."

Harroz told OU Daily editors in October that when the South Building is complete, the university will begin phase two of construction, which consists of three new housing buildings.

"It's a really exciting challenge because you need to be up a couple percent a year in our freshman class, ..." Harroz said. "With this growth, I'm really happy we're building these."

The year prior, Harroz told the Daily that Walker Center will likely be demolished in early 2027, but the administration was "actively debating" on what to do with Couch Center.

"We're still talking about Couch, there's a way to rehab Couch, and there's a way to take Couch down, ..." Harroz said



PHOTO PROVIDED

Virginia Ibrahim-Olin is the housing administration director at the University of Iowa.

in 2024. "Does that work for the students? Does it work overall? That's exactly one of the questions we're looking at."

OU Marketing and Communications confirmed via email that phase two of construction is planned to replace Walker Center with three new buildings, pending OU Board of Regents' approval.

The email reads that each building would have a different opening year, with a goal for all three buildings to be completed by fall 2030, pending approvals and construction timelines.

"The removal of older (residence) halls and phased construction is part of the long-term strategy to modernize first-year housing, though it creates a temporary reduction in total bed capacity during the transition," the email reads.

Moring said there is enough space to add more residential buildings south of campus if needed. He said the university does a good job handling infrastructure changes but emphasized the challenges of not having a campus architect in a leadership role.

"The challenge that comes from not having a campus architect ... it's like if the president was taking legal advice from someone who had been in a courtroom a lot that wasn't a lawyer or if you were to take medical advice from someone that wasn't a licensed physician," Moring said.

Moring said as OU aspires to be an AAU institution, it's important leaders consider how almost all other institutions have licensed architects as their campus architects. He said the lack of one is a disadvantage to building the campus.

Moring said the way the university creates the campus aesthetic needs to be looked at with a more sophisticated eye.

"We're spending literally billions of dollars on construction across our three campuses, ..." Moring said. "Perhaps we would be taking better care of our donors' gifts if we had qualified oversight of the campus design as a whole."

# OLD NEIGHBORHOOD, NEW CHALLENGES

*Residents of Norman's century-old districts face an evolving city*

BY AUDREY MCCLOUR AND ANDREW PAREDES • DAILYNEWS@OU.EDU

Robyn Tower and her husband have lived in their two-story Victorian home in Norman's Old Silk Stocking neighborhood for 42 years.

When Tower and her husband bought the house, her parents considered it "unlivable," but it was affordable for the young couple. Over the years, Tower and her husband, an architect, have renovated the 125-year-old house, making it their long-term home.

Amid increasing enrollment at OU and the university's move to the Southeastern Conference, Tower and other residents of Norman's oldest neighborhoods are raising concerns over community preservation.

As these changes unfold, residents expressed a desire to protect historical neighborhoods from increased traffic, home renovations and short-term rentals that affect neighborhood accessibility.

## Old Silk Stocking neighborhood

In the early 20th century, Norman's Old Silk Stocking neighborhood was a residential hub for city leaders and prestigious Normanites.

Though not defined by the city as a historic district, the neighborhood between Main and Robinson streets and between James Garner and Porter avenues is often considered historic because it contains some of Norman's oldest standing homes.

Old Silk Stocking has a population of just over 1,400 people, according to the city's website. The neighborhood's median age is around 34 years, with nearly 3 in 4 residents owning their home over renting.

Tower, who currently serves as president of the neighborhood association, said one of the biggest issues her neighborhood faces is Airbnbs and other short-term rentals. She has noticed an increase in short-term rentals in her area since OU's move to the SEC in 2024.

"Airbnbs are a big issue," Tower said. "Our concern is that one day you wake up and you're the only neighbor on your street. Every other house is an Airbnb. ... We just don't want to lose neighbors."

Tower said Old Silk Stocking residents are advocating against large developments — like other apartment complex projects in Norman — from being constructed in their neighborhood.

"When they started building those giant student housing things next to teeny, tiny little houses, that was kind of what motivated a group of us to think: We need to be paying

attention to what's going on," Tower said. "We need to have a neighborhood association. We need to be talking to each other. We really need to not just wake up one day and see what's happened to our neighborhood."

Tower said despite an increase in short-term rentals, the neighborhood hasn't seen a significant change in the number of student residents.

"There's lots of college kids living in our neighborhood already, but they're mostly in existing houses that are being rented," Tower said. "We don't have really student-built housing in our neighborhood like you do in some of the other closer-to-university neighborhoods."

Ryen Talbert, an OU psychology junior, lives in a new two-story house in Old Silk Stocking. Talbert has rented the home with three other people since August.

Talbert said she likes the quiet atmosphere and affordability of the area.

"We're still super close to campus," Talbert said. "Once you get closer to campus, you're paying sometimes close to double what we pay here."

Next door to Talbert lives Barbara Norton and her husband Allen Hertzke, who are both retired OU professors. Norton and Hertzke have lived in Norman for 40 years but recently moved into their newly built two-story home in Old Silk Stocking.

Norton said she and her husband are not typical Old Silk Stocking residents.

"We haven't lived here very long, and we aren't living in a sort of house that's been here," Norton said. "We came in as outsiders, but we wanted to be here."

Despite living in a new house, the couple worked to make the home fit the neighborhood.

"We were respectful of the neighborhood and constructed a structure that would be compatible with other historic structures in the neighborhood," Norton said. "We kind of went full circle but came around to doing our best to fit in the neighborhood — to be a part of the neighborhood."

Norton and Hertzke have an adult daughter with disabilities and designed the home to accommodate her while doing their best not to affect nearby residents.

"For us, this design was critically important," Norton said. "We wanted her close, and so having an (additional unit) in the back, as long as, again, it doesn't encroach too much on the feeling of the neighborhood."

Norton said she and her husband appreciate living next to students.

"We think it's delightful, ..." Norton said. "We always make



ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

Former OU professors Barbara Norton and her husband Allen Hertzke live in Old Silk Stocking.

friends with the students. My husband and I, for years, lived in the dorms as faculty-in-residence, so we're pretty accustomed to being around lots of undergraduates."

Norton believes having rental properties in a neighborhood is important.

"We're a homeowner-owned property, and everybody on the property is in our family. Now that's not true for everybody around here, and that doesn't diminish the value of having rental housing in any city," Norton said. "That's critically important, especially when it's convenient for students, for example, and even young professionals."

The Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled in February against a petition to turn the Rock Creek Entertainment District to a public vote. The district will include an arena featuring some OU sports as an anchor tenant.

Norton believes the district will affect traffic in her neighborhood but that the university overall enriches the lives of Norman residents.

"It's not just an economic engine. It's an engine for creativity and problem solving and entertainment, ..." Norton said. "The other asset, of course, that's quite significant, is just the influx of educated and talented people who get involved civically."

Hertzke echoed this sentiment.

"The university, in a sense, impacts this area because it offers so many amenities, ..." Hertzke said. "The arts, the sports and just the campus, it's so accessible."

Tower believes the entertainment district has "saddled" Norman residents with debt and will affect the walkability of Old Silk Stocking.

"The big impact for us might be that the places we go that are near and walkable will all of a sudden go, ..." Tower said. "If

everything starts moving over west to that part of town, then you kind of lose some of the walkability.”

Amy Pence, manager of the Moore-Lindsay Historical House Museum in Old Silk Stocking, expressed concerns for the entertainment district’s impact on visitor numbers.

“I’m worried that the arena is going to pull everyone (in) that direction. But I think that, at least on big event days when there’s a lot of people, they’re going to go through Norman, ...” Pence said. “So even though we’re a little off the beaten track for people who aren’t locals, ... hopefully they will find us too.”

### Chautauqua Historic District

Norman’s Chautauqua Historic District was established in 1995. It includes the area between Symmes and Brooks streets and College and Lahoma avenues, excluding university buildings.

Most homes in the district were built in the 1920s. The area reflects the university leaders who assisted in the development of the city, according to the district’s bio from the city of Norman.

Steven Russell, a resident of the Chautauqua Historic District, and his family have lived in their rented home for about 35 years. He said most home renovations in the area happened in the ‘90s.

“The ‘90s was when most of the flipping went on, ...” Russell said. “You could have bought any house on this street for like 30 grand.”

Before moving into his house on College Avenue, Russell lived in a garage apartment on Monnett Avenue. He said the area has been entirely renovated.

“It’s been flipped pretty much and it’s all new apartments. Yeah, I wish they’d have left the whole neighborhood alone,” Russell said. “Because (the) bottom line is, what’s really affected these as much as anything is all the new apartments that OU’s built for student housing.”

David Hensley, a resident of the Chautauqua Historic District, hopes historic housing will continue to be preserved in Norman.

“It’s a great street, ...” Hensley said. “I really hope that we continue to preserve these old houses, that folks continue to keep them up.”

Hensley and his husband have lived in their 1932 home in the Chautauqua Historic District for four years.

“It’s been interesting. We’ve definitely seen a few houses kind of change hands and go in both directions,” Hensley said. “Some houses kind of go from single-family to rental housing. Some go from rental housing to single-family. So we’ve seen a few changes.”

Much like Old Silk Stocking residents, Hensley praised the walkability of his historic neighborhood.

“My husband teaches at the university, and we like feeling the energy of a college campus. We love the walkability, being able to walk to Campus Corner and walk through campus itself in the afternoon,” Hensley said. “It’s kind of the best of both worlds. You get a bit of a neighborhood feel, but you also get the energy of campus.”

Rena Uddin, an OU biology junior, lives in the Chautauqua Historic District. She, along with her three roommates, moved into the home in July 2024. According to Uddin, her house was built in 1926, making the house nearly 100 years old.

Uddin said she would estimate the proportion of OU students and Norman residents living in the district to be an even split, but notes her area of Chautauqua has more students.



Offering a snapshot of Norman history, the Moore-Lindsay house was built in 1899.

ESTHER HODSON/OU DAILY

“On our block of Chautauqua, it does seem 50-50, almost 51 (percent) college students, 49 (percent) Norman residents, ...” Uddin said. “It’s pretty college-dominant. ... At least where we live.”

Uddin added that the near-even split in resident demographics has led to “minimal” interaction with Norman residents compared to college-age residents.

“I haven’t had that much interaction with our older neighbors, ...” Uddin said. “We’ve never really come across or spoken to them.”

Uddin recognized the historical significance of her home and the area she lives in, and said her home acts as a middle ground between the history of the district and OU students living in the area.

“What makes our house an anomaly here in the district is that it’s been historically a college student house,” Uddin said. “Our landlord’s father actually lived here back when he was a student at OU, and funny enough, we actually have a couple (of) friends whose parents have lived here before.”

Uddin noted some of the difficulties that landlords have when attempting to renovate homes in the district, citing the city of Norman’s construction restrictions.

“Our next-door neighbors’ (grandfather) purchased the house, and they gave it a facelift,” Uddin said. “They redid the windows, relaid the bricks, reinstalled appliances, redid the floors; it was a complete renovation of the house. They weren’t made aware that all of those changes had to be approved by

the city before they were made.”

Uddin said she does not believe the district’s historical value is being diminished by an increase in OU student residents.

“I wouldn’t necessarily say the historic value of the district is being lost by bringing in more college students or allowing more college renters in the area,” Uddin said. “Especially knowing the parameters of renovations that are (allowed) to be made in these houses and the regulations and restrictions.”

Avery Mask, an OU sonography junior, lives in the historic district. In an email to OU Daily, she wrote that she has noticed an increase in college students living in the district. Mask wrote that areas like the district are changing to accommodate more OU students.

“Rents are continuing to go up in price, and to keep up with this growth, the historical areas are getting more profit to compensate,” Mask wrote.

Mask noted the positive relationship she and her six roommates have had with both OU students and Norman residents.

“The relationship with fellow students is more social, while the relationship with residents is more educational and about certain issues that happen in the community,” Mask wrote. “We do get along well with both students and residents! Residents have never seemed to be upset about the growing population of students on the street.”



# PREMIUM SEAT AT THE PALACE

How luxury renovations impact next generation of Sooner fans

BY KEATON SHAFFER • KEATON.J.SHAFER-1@OU.EDU

OU football during the "Warrior Walk" before the game against Louisiana State University on Nov. 29, 2025. ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

After over 100 years of football, almost 30 years of sold-out regular season home games and seven national championships, OU is undertaking The Palace Project, a two-year, \$450 million renovation plan for Gaylord Family-Oklahoma Memorial Stadium that will decrease capacity and upgrade luxury spaces.

Announced in November, the project will see the stadium's capacity decrease by 7,000 seats. The project is primarily focused on the stadium's west side and plans for the construction of 47 suites, 64 semi-private boxes with seating for roughly 280 guests, around 4,000 new club seats and six premium club and lounge spaces.

Cody Havard, University of Memphis sport commerce professor, said from a financial perspective it's inherent that a customer who brings in more money per game is more important to an organization, but emphasizing those customers can neglect younger fans meant to bring in that higher revenue down the line.

Havard said the people who are buying luxury boxes and suites have a strong bond with the team, which is a vulnerable relationship when fans don't have as many accessible entry points to fandom.

"If you start to focus more on those fans, those customers, and organizations start to neglect the regular customer, then you could run into an issue of supply and demand later on, ..." Havard said. "You have to have a plan in place ... to foster the engagement for new fans and for younger fans."

According to the November release, significant funding for the project has been provided by private donors, and fundraising efforts will continue in the following months. No state-appropriated funds or student tuition or fees will be used to finance the project.

Havard said he takes his kids to baseball games but that the experience feels different from what he remembers growing up, when kids' tickets cost just a dollar. Havard compared this relationship to the bond formed between die-hard Sooner fans and OU football games.

Havard said as sports become less accessible, the everyday fan struggles to maintain hype and loyalty.

"If organizations truly want to build, if they truly want to better engage their consumers, those are the types of things that I'm worried are missing," Havard said.

In 2024, OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. wrote in a release that the goal of OU's conference move to the Southeastern Conference was to increase national visibility and improve the fan experience.

OU's stadium has a current capacity of 80,126, over double that of Vanderbilt's 35,000-seat FirstBank Stadium — the SEC stadium with the lowest capacity — but below several major competitors, including the University of Texas at 100,119 seats.

According to an email from OU athletics to OU Daily, the university evaluated a combination of historical seating trends, ticket use rates, fan surveys, SEC and national peer benchmarks and broader live-entertainment industry

standards.

"Across each of those data sets, the findings were consistent: today's fans prioritize accessibility, comfort, efficiency, and quality experiences," OU athletics wrote.

"Seeing these people up and screaming and playing drums and playing instruments — that's part of the experience. Those are the people that if you price those fans out, you don't have that excitement."

**CODY HAVARD,  
UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS  
PROFESSOR**

Havard said when Texas upgraded its south end zone seating at Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium in 2009, it was like an "arms race" with Texas A&M to see who would have the bigger stadium.

"The (pressure) used to be: 'Let's increase and let's have better facilities and grander facilities — larger facilities that people can see and (universities) are known for,'" Havard said.

Havard said he expected OU to increase capacity in response and was surprised to hear about the decrease

caused by The Palace Project renovations.

Havard said it's interesting to hear that OU plans to decrease capacity, but it follows what he sees as the professional model.

Havard said that capacity has been decreased at some professional venues for the sake of more amenities but that attendance at the collegiate level is a bigger driver than it is at the professional level.

“With the collegiate level, it’s typically been, ‘Let’s get as many people into the stadiums as we can, so that we show our capacity,’” Havard said.

The university is partnering with architectural firms Populous and Manhattan Construction Group for the project. Renovations to the west side include:

- New gates on the west side, leading to ground-level and second-level concourses connecting to the north and south end zones.
- New elevators, improved access points, expanded restrooms and new concession stands for the west concourse and upper deck.
- Replacing all chairback and bench seating.
- Additional Americans with Disabilities Act-approved seating options.
- A new fan area on the west upper deck with a “unique common space.”
- A new press box.

The university is also widening aisles and seats, increasing row spacing, installing additional chairbacks and expanding concourses, according to the email from OU athletics. These changes, it wrote, are meant to improve flow and reduce congestion.

“These enhancements are not cosmetic; they are strategic responses to the insights we gained from how fans engage with live events today,” OU athletics wrote.

Havard expects more organizations to follow the model OU is using for the stadium. He said revenue from television rights could enable more organizations to decrease capacity for luxury boxes, club seating and more amenities for people who can be charged more. In another sense, Havard said he sees a shift toward looking at “revenue per customer” in live sports entertainment.

“Another thing that I think we’ve seen organizations do for a really long time, and I could see there being more emphasis on this, is the idea that people really start to pay more attention to what is offered to the fans,” Havard said.

OU athletics wrote it intends to align with national trends. “Across college football, leading programs are prioritizing enhanced amenities and modern infrastructure over raw capacity numbers,” OU athletics wrote. “This trend also holds true for live entertainment venues generally.”

Havard said that some customers are considering what the university offers to facilitate business.

“Are they bringing clients to the contest? Is that a form of entertainment so they can get business deals done?’ ...” Havard said universities like OU may be asking. “Well, if that’s the case, then how can we make that easier for those customers? How can we make it easier for the business owner to do that so they want to keep coming back?”

Havard said it is upsetting that this trend starts to “put a price tag” on a customer’s importance. Some OU fans have already voiced their disappointment over the university’s planned changes.

In a Nov. 23 Instagram post, social media influencer and long-time Sooner fan Kasey McComas shared that she met and has sat next to David Talley during every regular season



RENDERING PROVIDED

Aerial rendering of Gaylord Family-Oklahoma Memorial Stadium from the northwest side.



ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

Isaiah Sategna III against LSU in November 2025.

home game since 1998. After hearing about the stadium renovations, she fears the tradition may come to an end.

“We’ve sat together through 4 head coaches, suffered losing seasons, witnessed a national championship season, and everything in between - together,” McComas wrote. “But now a new stadium renovation was announced ... Leaving people like David and I, who scream at every game, were there when we were consistently losing in the 90s, to most likely lose our seat location to either elimination, or to be priced out of it.”

In an interview with the Daily last December, McComas said over the years, through high-fiving and hugging during touchdowns, season ticket neighbors have become “gameday family.”

McComas also said that the reduction will give OU less of a competitive advantage. The stadium’s current capacity is about 20,000 less than universities like Alabama and Tennessee, which hold 101,821 and 101,915 people,

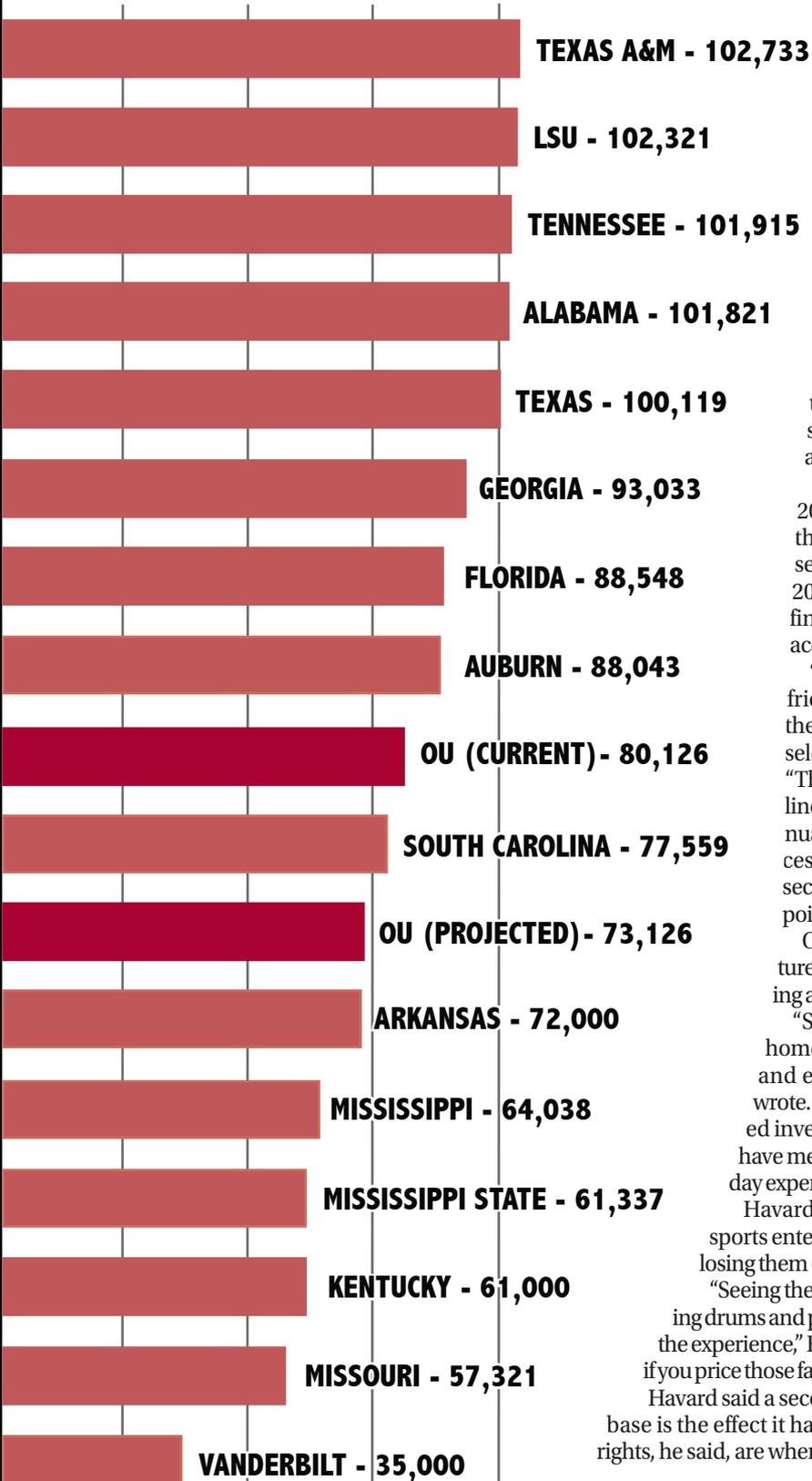


PHOTO PROVIDED

David Talley, left, with his longtime season ticket seatmate Kasey McComas.

# CAPACITY OF SEC FOOTBALL STADIUMS

25,000 50,000 75,000 100,000



GRAPH BY KRISTA FLEMING/OU DAILY

respectively. McComas feels that OU should be closing the gap rather than expanding it.

“It’d be great if they could keep the seats where they are and just build up, but I understand that that’s not possible. I think that 7,000 is too many people to move, ...” McComas said. “I think it’s embarrassing that we are going to go below 80,000 capacity.”

The email from athletics noted that the decrease in capacity will not limit any season ticket holder’s access to seating in the stadium and its goals are to maximize attendance, enhance the overall gameday experience and maintain accessible price points throughout the stadium.

“We recognize that seats at Gaylord Family - Oklahoma Memorial Stadium represent more than a location,” OU athletics wrote. “They represent tradition, relationships, and generations of memories.”

Construction is set to begin after the 2027 season and be completed before the 2029 season. A “stadium-wide re-seating process” will begin ahead of the 2028 season, which will be further defined for fans via email and direct mail, according to the press release.

“For those who have sat alongside friends, family, or longtime neighbors, there will be a structured opportunity to select seats together,” OU athletics wrote. “The re-seating process will utilize an online selection platform similar to the annual Red River Rivalry seat-selection process, allowing groups to coordinate and secure seats collectively based on priority points and availability.”

OU athletics said that as pricing structures are finalized, it is committed to offering a range of options for fans at every level.

“Students are an essential part of our home-field advantage, and their presence and energy are invaluable,” OU athletics wrote. “We are actively reviewing our allocated inventory to ensure students continue to have meaningful access and a first-class game day experience.”

Havard said fans are a major part of the live sports entertainment experience in general, and losing them can be damaging.

“Seeing these people up and screaming and playing drums and playing instruments — like that’s part of the experience,” Havard said. “Those are the people that if you price those fans out, you don’t have that excitement.”

Havard said a secondary detriment of reducing that fan base is the effect it has on advertising revenue. Television rights, he said, are where collegiate sport organizations make



ESTHER HODSON/OU DAILY

OU hosted its first College Football Playoff game in December 2025.

a lot of their money and sports are more fun to watch when TV audiences see dense crowds going wild for their team.

“I’m not against organizations facing the reality of what they have to do today, and I’m not envious of them either because it’s very difficult,” Havard said. “You have to be making the decisions for what is going to be best for your bottom line right now and you also have to be aware of what’s going to happen in the future.”

Havard said would-be audience members undergo cost-benefit analysis in choosing how they watch their sports. When attending a game, Havard said, you have to think about time spent getting to the venue or money spent parking, whereas watching college football on television can be much more accessible. Havard said organizations have to persuade people more now to consume their products.

“A lot of organizations are trying to provide a more entertaining or engaging environment,” Havard said. “When you’re having to compete with all these other forms of entertainment and direct-to-consumer streaming and all of these different mediums of watching a game — you really have to increase what you give fans to attend a live game.”

The November press release states no timeline is currently in place, but a future north end zone phase will offer another opportunity to evaluate the stadium’s capacity and make necessary adjustments.

“Regardless of the capacity figure, OU’s commitment remains clear: every season ticket holder will retain access to the stadium and benefit from an enhanced experience,” the release reads. “The reimagined stadium will offer a range of seating options, strengthen long-term economic impact and ensure the tradition of Oklahoma Football endures for generations.”

# NAVIGATING ‘NEW EVERYTHING’

International students caught in the crunch of campus change

BY ABBY YOUNG • ABIGAIL.F.YOUNG-1@OU.EDU

Her first night in America, Khazar Gorji spread her family’s winter coats on the living room floor and curled up on them with her 5-year-old daughter in her arms.

Gorji’s husband, Reza Saeed Kandezy, was so exhausted he’d fallen asleep on the couch. Their new apartment was empty besides a couch, a table and two beds with bare mattresses. Gorji didn’t trust the beds were clean.

“I was more sure of our coats,” Gorji said. “I don’t know, I felt more comfortable doing it like that.”

Gorji and her family moved to Norman from Karaj, Iran, a suburb of Tehran, in 2021. The family had landed in Dallas earlier that day, where Kandezy was taken to customs for questioning. The nearly two-hour process meant the family had to run through the airport to catch their flight to Oklahoma City.

After arriving at their new home at OU’s Kraettli Apartments, many challenges remained for Gorji and her family. OU has over 1,700 undergraduate and graduate international students, and difficulties with housing, transportation, finances and life in a new country are common.

## ‘We don’t know where we’re going to live’

In November, OU Housing and Residence Life announced Traditions East will become first-year-only housing in fall 2026 to accommodate students as the university continues to welcome record-breaking first-year classes. Traditions West and Kraettli Apartments will continue to house upperclassmen.

According to a statement from OU Marketing and Communications, the university prioritizes on-campus housing for first-years, and a limited number of rooms will be set aside for upperclassmen in Traditions West and Kraettli Apartments.

Delia Benitez is an economics and international studies junior from Asunción, Paraguay, and she plans to attend law school after earning her bachelor’s degree. Benitez currently lives in Traditions East and said barring upperclassmen from living there primarily impacts international students.

“The hardest thing that we have to deal with that is we don’t know where we’re going to live,” Benitez said.

When Benitez spoke to OU Daily on Feb. 9, the waitlist for the Traditions Square Apartments was 908 applications long.



ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

Khazar Gorji is pursuing her master’s and a doctorate in learning experience design and technology.

Applicants were notified if they got a spot in late February.

A spokesperson for OU housing wrote in an email to the Daily on Feb. 4 that Traditions East and West combine for a capacity of 1,125 residents this academic year, with about 562 beds in each location.

OU housing will offer contracts based on availability and projected student enrollment, the statement read. The statement refers students who have questions to the university’s Student Legal Services and suggests they use OU’s off-campus housing website.

Benitez and her roommates are pursuing off-campus housing, but she said the requirements of a lease can be a barrier for international students. For example, most can’t provide a credit score because they don’t have credit cards, Benitez said.

Benitez relies on public transportation because she doesn’t have a car, but she said finding a place close enough to campus is difficult — and the closest housing is generally the most expensive. Callaway Apartments are some of the closest to campus, with monthly rent ranging from \$969 to \$1,700 per person.

Adwaiy Perumana, a junior from Kerala, India, studying aerospace engineering, also lives in Traditions East and hopes to secure a spot in Traditions West. Perumana’s scholarship covers on-campus housing, so he said it isn’t “feasible” for him to live off-campus.

“If I don’t get a position (in Traditions West), then ... (I’m) not sure how to proceed,” Perumana said.

On Feb. 18, Perumana confirmed to the Daily in a text message that he did not receive an offer for housing in Traditions West but was waitlisted.

Finding housing off-campus is harder for international students, Perumana said, and this year the flood of people who didn’t get a spot in Traditions West looking for other housing will only make it more difficult.

The other on-campus housing option for non-first-year students is Kraettli Apartments, which serves upperclassmen, faculty, staff and their families. Kraettli opened in 1964 and is OU’s second oldest on-campus housing option, behind David L. Boren Hall.

Gorji is pursuing her master’s and a doctorate in learning experience design and technology. Her husband, Kandezy, completed an OU doctorate and now works as faculty in the electrical engineering department.

Gorji said she and Kandezy researched housing options whenever their internet was working while still in Iran, and international students at OU recommended Kraettli as a safe option for families. It can be difficult to secure a spot at Kraettli, but since Gorji and her family arrived in the summer, there was less competition.

## ‘Not what we expected’

When they arrived in 2021, Gorji and her family quickly realized a fully furnished apartment in America meant much less than they were accustomed to in Iran. Gorji thought it

would include basic cookware, bedsheets and clothes, like in Iran, but the apartment was bare.

“That was a little bit of a shock,” Gorji said.

The family now lives in a house, but Gorji said living at Kraettli was far cheaper than any two-bedroom apartment in Norman, especially with the added benefit of not having to pay any bills.

However, Gorji expected American life to be a bit nicer than it is in reality, which she said caused culture shock.

“I blame Hollywood for this, to be honest, because when they show you how you live in America, they show you something that’s very far away from everyday life,” Gorji said. “(At) first, we were a little bit surprised because the stuff in the house, they’re not what we expected them to be.”

Jessica Reynolds, director of instructional and language services for the OU Graduate College, said her job revolves around international graduate students. Many of Reynolds’ students live at Kraettli, so she visits the complex often.

“Honestly, they need to be torn down,” Reynolds said. “They’re just disgusting. ... They are probably the oldest and least updated units on campus.”

Reynolds said there aren’t enough affordable apartments for international students, who need to live close to campus since most walk or rely on the bus system for transportation. Kraettli has a long waitlist and it’s difficult to get a contract, she said, so other students are forced to live off campus and make long commutes.

OU’s First-Year Housing Master Plan prioritizes accommodating all first-years on campus and updating first-year housing. One of the oldest dorms, Adams Center, was torn down in 2023 and replaced with McCasland Hall, which its website describes as “enhanced on-campus living.” Adams Center was built the same year as Kraettli.

“By guaranteeing on-campus housing for first-year students, we ensure that new students enter a built-in community from day one,” a spokesperson for OU housing wrote to the Daily on Feb. 11.

### ‘On-campus travel problems’

Reynolds said transportation is a barrier for international students, and most graduate students with families are eventually forced to get a car.

Benitez and Perumana both use the campus shuttle bus, which Benitez said is very convenient for Traditions East. They’ve also both utilized Norman On-Demand and SafeRide.

“(International students) need to be living as close to campus as possible,” Benitez said. “That’s usually the most expensive housing that we have around Norman, and that’s definitely a challenge.”

Perumana said getting a car would be difficult, and he doesn’t have time to get his driver’s license, which creates what he called “on-campus travel problems.” He often uses his scooter but said getting around Norman without a car is difficult.

Gorji said the campus shuttle bus runs efficiently and feels safe, but the city bus doesn’t come often enough; taking the bus to get groceries would take half a day, she said. Inefficient travel times coupled with negative encounters with other bus riders led Gorji and her husband to purchase a car, she said.

“I was like, ‘Look, I don’t care, just go and just grab a car,’” Gorji said. “As long as it has four wheels and it works (for) five minutes, I don’t care if it’s good condition or not.”

### ‘Everybody’s pretty stretched financially’

Gorji said finances can be hard to manage, but there are plenty of community resources. While managing their car payments, they used the OU Food Pantry. Gorji would buy fresh fruit for her daughter, while she and her husband ate canned food from the food pantry to save money.

“It’s student living,” Gorji said. “You have to choose between a lot of things.”

Gorji said many international students are afraid to ask what benefits they can use and become paralyzed by fear of doing the wrong thing. She also said they don’t know their financial rights, for example, that they can dispute it if their credit card company accidentally overcharges them.

Reynolds said most international graduate students are on SNAP benefits or use food pantries and other resources. The university stipend that graduate teaching assistants receive, which is about \$1,700 per month, isn’t sustainable, she said.

“Whatever they get from the university is not enough to cover all of their living expenses. And so with rents increasing, that’s a major pain point,” Reynolds said. “And then food prices increasing, all of these things make it to where most graduate students that I interact with are having financial difficulties.”

Reynolds said that if the student has children, which many graduate students do, the financial situation becomes even more strained. She said some graduate students have a spouse who works in their home country and sends them money.

“Everybody’s pretty stretched financially,” Reynolds said.

### ‘You’re never going to feel alone’

Coming to OU marked a turning point in Benitez’s life, she said, because it’s where she stepped out of her comfort zone and defined her goal of going to law school. She said she loves how there are many opportunities to be involved on campus and that the vibrant international community supports one another.

“It was just the place I wanted to be while I was understanding what my dreams, my ambitions were,” Benitez said. “I think I made the right choice.”

Benitez serves as a representative for Student Government Association’s Undergraduate Student Congress. She is also vice president of the International Advisory Committee, an organization that oversees smaller international organizations and hosts events including the International Royalty Pageant and Eve of Nations.

Benitez said it’s crucial to recognize that no international student will have the same experience as another.

“When people look at international students, they believe that all internationals will be thinking the same and living exactly the same experiences,” Benitez said. “Sometimes point of view and perspective within the community are even more different (than) between Americans and international students.”

“That’s a really common misunderstanding.”

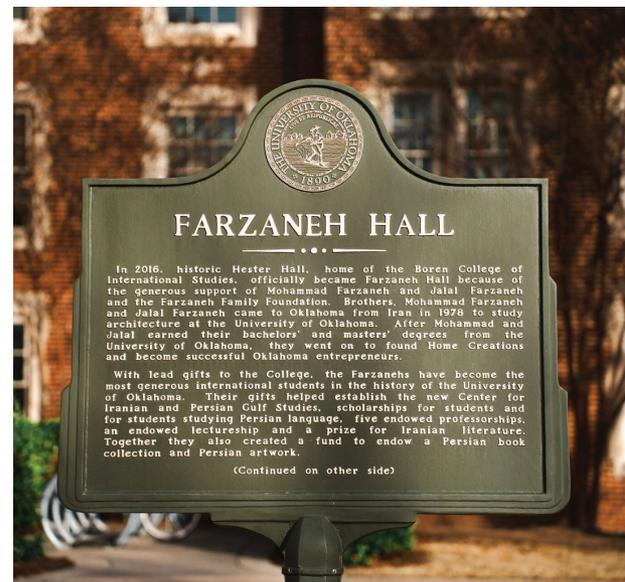
Gorji said she and her husband were surprised at how warm and helpful people were to them when they arrived. Americans are very accepting, she said, and people often worked to pronounce her name correctly — Gorji said it’s kind, but they don’t need to be so nervous.

Many of the systems in America were challenging for Gorji and her husband to learn, like the process of getting a driver’s license or understanding what their health insurance covered.



ANNIE DAVENPORT/OU DAILY

Khazar Gorji came to OU with her family from Karaj, Iran.



MATTHEW MOORE/OU DAILY

Farzaneh Hall is home to International Student Services.

“When you come here, it feels like you regress back to being 2 years old and not knowing what’s what a lot,” Gorji said. “It would be nice to prepare yourself to ask a lot of stupid questions.”

Perumana said that while his university experience could be improved by better housing and transportation options, OU has many benefits, including international student resources and a large international community.

“You’re never going to feel alone as an international student,” Perumana said.

Reynolds said international students are courageous for leaving their families and starting new lives in America. She said seeing their bravery motivates her to support them.

“A new environment, new expectations, new rules, new everything, ...” Reynolds said. “They’re really courageous people that have a determination to better themselves and better the world.”



# NORMAN UNDER CONSTRUCTION

*City plans for aging infrastructure, population growth*

SAI YADAV/OU DAILY

Construction near campus on Jenkins Avenue.

BY THOMAS PABLO • THOMAS.D.PABLO-1@OU.EDU

As OU has continued to see record-breaking class sizes, the city of Norman has kept pace with the expansion, but officials have expressed worries about the sustainability of physical and financial infrastructure.

## Population projection

AIM Norman, or Area and Infrastructure Master Plan, is Norman's comprehensive, 25-year strategic blueprint to guide the city's growth. AIM Norman anticipates the city will house around 180,000 residents by 2045.

The master plan covers multiple aspects of the city, including land use, drinking water, housing, stormwater, parks, transportation and wastewater. The plans were approved by Norman City Council in June.

Scott Sturtz, Norman public works director, said the city factors OU students into the master plan.

"Each one of those accounted for population growth, and including ... some expected growth in student population," Sturtz said. "So we've already planned for that, and all of our previous plans accounted for some of that also."

According to the comprehensive land use plan on the city's website, the student portion of Norman's population grew at a lower rate than non-students during the 2010s. Even as OU entered the Southeastern Conference in 2024, the document notes non-student growth will likely outpace students.

Chris Mattingly, Norman utilities director, said a student population increase of 10,000 could marginally increase the

growth rate, but student population does not alter much about how the city designs and implements services.

"It's weird. (OU)'s a big organization, but ... our town is so big, it doesn't really affect it a lot from our perspective," Mattingly said.

According to OU Institutional Research and Reporting, OU's student population has grown each year on the Norman campus since 2020. That fall, 27,282 students were enrolled across undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. In fall 2025, 32,662 total students were enrolled.

In April 2020, Norman's total population was 128,026, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2024 — the year of the most recent census report — the population was estimated at 131,010.

## Shared resources

Mattingly said OU is responsible for maintaining water and sewer lines and the stormwater system on its Norman campus, which ties into the city's systems.

Roads on campus are also maintained by OU, according to Sturtz, including Timberdell Road, Felgar Street and Asp Avenue.

According to Sturtz, a similar responsibility applies to private developers who are often responsible for maintaining, and in some cases creating, infrastructure in underdeveloped parts of Norman.

"We all coordinate with the university, and we talk to them

quite a bit. We kind of know what their plans are, and we try to assist and make changes necessary," Sturtz said. "But also, as development comes in to help support that additional growth."

## Roadwork projects

The city is working on multiple roadwork projects, including the Jenkins Avenue reconstruction project, expected to be completed this fall, and planned Lindsey Street renovations from Pickard to Jenkins avenues.

The roadwork plans stem from a transportation bond program approved by residents in 2019, covering 19 projects. The Lindsey Street projects are divided into two phases that cost around \$14 million in total through bond and federal funds.

Mayor Stephen Tyler Holman said the Lindsey Street reconstruction will include left-turn lanes and drainage improvements. He said the city hopes the project complements the university and looks good for individuals driving through campus.

"It will fix the flooding problem at Lindsey and Elm (Avenue), and Lindsey and College (Avenue) once and for all. ... We'll be enhancing Lindsey Street as it goes right through the campus," Holman said. "We'll be redoing all that, making it look a whole lot nicer than it currently does. That project is at no cost to the university at all."

But roadwork needs aren't always planned.

Last May, the city began an emergency repair of the storm sewer beneath West Boyd Street that lasted into football season. Sturtz said the sewer was constructed around a century ago

using clay pipe, which was phased out in the mid-1900s.

“It was placed in small sections, and they weren’t even put together correctly back when they were installed, and they had separated, and it caused a void under the road and the road sank 6 inches,” Sturtz said. “It was really an emergency repair that we had to go in and do.”

Sturtz said some lines throughout the city use corrugated pipes from the 1980s and 1990s that have since eroded. He said this contributes to one of the biggest problems the city faces: aging infrastructure.

“We’ve got infrastructure now that’s starting to get to be in that 20-, 25-, 30-year-old range and the materials are just, quite honestly, starting to fail,” Sturtz said. “So, how do we go back and repair and replace these areas that need that?”

Fixing the aging infrastructure issue proves difficult due to the city’s size, according to Tiffany Vrska, Norman chief communications officer.

Norman is one of Oklahoma’s largest cities, covering 189.5 square miles.

“Our staff has a lot to keep up with in terms of infrastructure, and I feel like sometimes people don’t realize how massive it really is,” Vrska said.

**Financial challenges**

Sturtz said the city’s stormwater infrastructure is especially dated, and Vrska said the city lacks a stormwater utility fee, unlike some other municipalities. Norman requires a public vote to increase water rates, and Vrska said a voter-approved stormwater fee would help with maintenance, though it has failed twice in the past decade.

In 2016, 71% of 16,000 residents voted against the utility fee.

In 2019, voters rejected the fee again, with 60% of 13,626 residents voting against.

Sturtz and Mattingly said the city tries to be proactive in how it handles infrastructure needs. Mattingly said this approach saves money for the city and businesses.

“We’ll spend extra money to do a quick repair, so you waste money,” Mattingly said. “It’s an inefficient way to do things. ... An ounce of prevention’s worth a pound of cure.”

Finances are also a concern, Holman said.

“Norman can definitely accommodate the growth of the university and just the general growth of the city of Norman, but we’re really trying to change how we go about that so that we can become more fiscally sustainable,” Holman said. “The demand for services and staffing at the city and all those things is outpacing the new tax revenue that all that growth has generated.”

The city’s 2025 fiscal year end budget projected the city is spending funds faster than it’s gaining them. In September, the city reported earning just over a million dollars less than expected during the 2025 fiscal year.

Holman also said infrastructure must consider housing needs in a way that does not displace residents and accommodates a growing population.

“If we’re not keeping up with demand, the rent and cost of housing in Norman could get to the point where more and more people cannot afford to live, ... and that includes a lot of students,” Holman said.

Putting costs back on developers to maintain infrastructure could also slow developers from creating new housing, according to Jane Hudson, Norman’s planning and community development director.

“We’re putting that cost on the developer to bring those utilities to those sites. And so that’s when it gets expensive, and that’s what has slowed down a lot of it too,” Hudson said.

One aspect of Norman’s growth is the Rock Creek Entertainment District, a \$1 billion project that will include an arena featuring some OU sports as anchor tenants. Two tax increment financing, or TIE, districts will divert 100% of sales tax and ad valorem tax to fund up to \$600 million in project costs for up to 25 years. The remaining portion of the project will be privately funded.

Holman called the project a sizable gamble.

“It’s just a really high-risk gamble, and maybe it pays off down the road, but if anything goes wrong, it could be a real problem for the city’s budget, ...” Holman said. “Instead of hedging all of our bets on one massive development, having 100 small developments is generally more preferable when you’re talking about the health of a city.”

Holman also said he is concerned the city could lose a part of its identity as it develops — its college town feel.

Holman cited Austin as an example of his concern, saying that it isn’t a college town despite housing the University of Texas at Austin. He said as Norman becomes bigger, it becomes harder to maintain a sense of community and resident input becomes less influential.

“(In) Norman, a small group of people can have a major impact on public policy and the direction of the city,” Holman said. “(It’s) just small enough where a small group of people can enact change and big enough that that change can actually, really mean something.”

150,000

**TOTAL OU NORMAN CAMPUS FALL ENROLLMENT**

**NORMAN POPULATION**

100,000

50,000



GRAPH BY KRISTA FLEMING/OU DAILY

Norman population estimates are from U.S. Census Bureau data, and the 2025 estimate is from World Population Review. Census data may include students residing in Norman. OU fall enrollment numbers are from university reports and Institutional Research and Reporting data. Students included in Norman campus enrollment numbers may not reside in Norman.

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