

DEMOGRAPHICS DON'T SUPPORT OSU EXPANSION PLAN

Summary

Demographic data for both the U.S. and Oklahoma show that building new athletic facilities now is like throwing money down the drain. In fact, investing new money in any bricks-and-mortar enterprise, except perhaps in high-tech training facilities, is a calculated risk, but it's a risk that is at least in line with OSU's mission of teaching, research, and service.

If the multi-million-dollar gift is for athletics only and is not available to support academic programs, OSU should decline the gift.

Introduction

OSU's proposed expansion plan to create an "athletics village" has raised issues and hackles among Stillwater residents, faculty, and homeowners. These concerns about philosophy and fair treatment are sincere and legitimate – but some might counter those objections by saying that OSU growth is inevitable. Some might say that if this land weren't purchased for an athletics village, OSU would need it sooner or later for academic programs.

However, demographic information exposes flaws in both the current expansion plan and any other building-intensive expansion. Population projections from the U.S. Census Bureau demonstrate that the numbers don't support that type of investment. A sprawl of new buildings would stand empty until 2025 or 2030, when the facilities would be out of date. A closer look at population statistics, broken down by age group, shows why.

Traditional College Population: Age 18 to 24

Data Highlights

Looking at the 18-24-year-old age group across time,

- In Oklahoma, the current population of 358K+ is the high-water mark until 2025, when it rises to 366K+. Between 2005 and 2025, the population plummets -- by 9000 people by 2010, and another 9000 between 2010 and 2015.
- In the U.S., the total will hover at or below the 30 million mark before jumping to nearly 31 million in 2025 and 32.5 in 2030.

Implications

Although the traditional college-age population nationwide will hold steady, with small fluctuations, between now and 2025, the same is **not true** in Oklahoma. In 2015, there will be **18,000 fewer** warm bodies in that age group in the state. That's 18,000 **fewer** potential students, simply because they weren't born. Fewer students means fewer athletes.

OSU may draw students from states other than Oklahoma, but with population in that age group holding steady nationwide, it's a zero-sum game – OSU will need to take students away from other institutions simply to maintain current enrollment levels. A university offering exceptional, forward-thinking academic and life experiences for undergraduate and graduate

students, including the chance to study with outstanding faculty, is more likely to successfully attract out-of-state students (and their out-of-state tuition) than a university with a huge sports program.

International students – a traditional strength, especially in OSU’s engineering programs – aren’t the answer, either. With the security climate in the U.S. growing ever tighter, it won’t be easy to recruit students from Asia, the Middle East, and developing nations (such as India and Indonesia), where population is bulging and interest in studying in the U.S. is high. Security may be particularly tight for students in engineering and other technical areas.

Bottom line: **Now is not a good time to invest in sports facilities** -- the total campus population that could conceivably use them and the number of elite athletes they are designed for are declining. Although investments in academic programs include infrastructure investments, remodeling and renovation would be less expensive (in both dollars and goodwill) than buying land, razing or moving the buildings, enduring the negative publicity and ill will, and building new facilities from scratch.

Nontraditional Student Population: Age 25 to 44

Data Highlights

Looking at the 25-44 age group across time,

- In the U.S., the total will decline briefly from its current level until it starts an abrupt upswing in 2015.
- However, even in 2015, these people won’t be living in Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, this age group **keeps declining significantly** from its 935K+ level in 2005 (down from 975K+ in 2000) to 914K+ by 2010. By 2030, this group won’t yet have built back up to the 2005 level.

Implications

This age range holds some graduate students and students on “10-year plans,” who work while going to school. It also includes some students who need career training or significant (multi-year) retraining. The training or retraining is likely to be caused as much by students finally figuring out what they really want to do as by technology or global economic developments. These students will be **attracted by academic programs**, not by athletic facilities.

OSU will be drawing from a significantly smaller pool of possible students for any of these purposes – graduate school, returning students, job retraining. Nationally, the outlook brightens in 2015, but even if OSU attracts some of these students from other states, these students **won’t be competing in NCAA athletics**.

Furthermore, the pool of OSU alumni in these years will also be smaller and will be struggling under the economic pressures of raising a family, building their careers, and buying a home. These people may be interested in sitting in a stadium on a Saturday afternoon, but they won’t be able to help pay for the stadium – and may not be able even to afford the ticket.

3. Adult Training and Retraining: Age 45 to 64

Data Highlights

Looking at the 45-64 age group across time,

- In the U.S., the population between the ages of 45 and 64 jumps from nearly 73 million today to 81 million in just 5 years. In 2015, there will be more than 83 million people in this age group; that level will hold for 10 years before dropping slightly in 2025.
- In Oklahoma, the population will jump similarly (from 873K+ to 973K+) between 2005 and 2010, but the **decline starts earlier** than it does nationwide.

Implications

This group is made up of people sending their children through college and preparing for their own retirement. A few will begin to spoil grandchildren before they move into the next demographic sector. They may have some discretionary income and be interested in donating some of it to their alma mater, OSU – but are more likely to set up education funds for their grandchildren. They would be more impressed by the prospect of Grandchild going to an academically prestigious OSU than an OSU with nice dorms for athletes.

This is also the age at which many workers are laid off by companies trying to save on costs – workers in this age range have experience and seniority, so they're laid off in favor of younger, cheaper labor. Also, healthcare costs for this age group are usually higher than for those just starting out, which is another incentive to show them the door.

Retraining programs for this laid-off labor pool could attract new students to OSU. But the retraining they'll need will be in high-tech skills that will require investments – ongoing investments, not one-time building expansion programs – in technology infrastructure and state-of-the-art laboratory facilities. An extremely wise investment would be in new methods of training and educating these workers – both the currently available distance learning technologies, such as videoconferencing, satellite television, remote hands-on training, and internet-based courses, and training methods we haven't invented yet.

Although workers in this demographic group could be a valuable part of OSU's academic future, they **won't be participating in NCAA athletics**. They also might not have the income to spend on season tickets, much less large donations.

4. Fulfilling Dreams: Age 65 and Over

Data Highlights

Looking at the over 65 age group across time,

- In the U.S., the population aged 65 and older jumps by millions every five years, from 36.7 million now to more than 71 million in 2030 – an increase of nearly 100% in 25 years.
- In Oklahoma, the trend is similar but slightly flatter. By 2030, this age group in Oklahoma is projected to be 757K+, up from 464K+ now, an increase of some 66%.

Implications

It's cliché to say that 80 is the new 65, but it's true. The U.S. population is aging, but we're redefining the meaning of the terms "retired" and "old age" as we go. However, these students also **won't be participating in NCAA athletics** – we haven't thwarted aging at that level.

Younger members of this age group have more discretionary income than they have had – their children are through college and their houses are paid off. Yes, they're saving for retirement and living somewhat carefully, but they want to travel and buy that vacation home before they start being too frugal. Young members of this age group may well be excellent donors for OSU and would even be interested in traveling to bowl games and supporting OSU athletics.

However, that doesn't mean that OSU athletics teams must be any more "successful" to inspire donation-sized loyalty from this age group. Previous efforts to institute "big-time" athletics were extremely costly in the long term. Scandals such as the NCAA sanctions following the Barry Sanders era and the embarrassment of OSU alum Dexter Manley's nationally touted functional illiteracy point out that the price of athletic "success" can be too high. Most alumni want their school to be respected academically, not featured in the "best party school" or "biggest supplier to the NFL" stories.

A better way to involve people from this demographic group is to encourage them, now that they're retired, to return (or turn) to formal study. OSU could take advantage of their interest and pocketbooks by

- Creating practical training programs to give young retirees skills – building on OSU expertise in engineering, agriculture, osteopathic medicine, teaching, and veterinary medicine – that they can then use as volunteers in inner cities and developing nations.
- Ensuring their ongoing mental health by challenging retirees to get the degree they really wanted before they got sidetracked by family and the practicalities of earning a living. Encourage them to fulfill their dream, whether it's studying business or biology, art or agronomy.

Conclusion

Impossible as it is to predict the future with 100% certainty, population statistics show that an **investment in athletics facilities would be foolish and irresponsible**, given the inevitable drop in the number of student-athletes at OSU during the next 25 years.

The demographic data of the U.S. and Oklahoma both demonstrate that it is **necessary** for OSU to establish relationships with people as potential students **at many points in their lives**. Finding creative ways to attract students of any age requires investment in current assets – above-average faculty salaries, inspired research programs, valuable experiences for graduates and undergraduates, and of course laboratory and computing facilities. Investing in the substance of OSU, instead of the entertainment that athletics programs provide *whether they win or lose*, will ensure that OSU remains a strong and respected institution in the long term.

Sources

Population projections for the U.S. as a whole and by state, based on 2000 U.S. Census data:
<http://www.census.gov/population/projections/SummaryTabB1.pdf>

A graphic representation of population shifts that clearly identify booms and busts in population between 2000 and 2030 (graphics comparing 2000 with 2010 and with 2020 are also available): <http://www.census.gov/population/projections/37PyrmDOK3.pdf>

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