With OSU’s minority population on the rise, the university may need to make some adjustments to keep up with the cultural shift. **(NEWS)**

Going to college can mean a new town, state or even country for some. Moving can be stressful to anyone, but being a minority in a new place can be even harder. Some minority students say they sometimes feel left out or lost in the crowd. **(CONTEXT)**

Oklahoma State University currently has a 69 percent white population, about seven percent above the national average, but the minority population over the last five years has risen by 41 percent. **(SCOPE)**

Public Secretary for the African American Student Association Jasmine Fairley says being a minority on a college campus can make meeting others difficult.

“There can be barriers sometimes,” Fairley said. “I know especially when I first came here, that if there was something going on or some kind of event but I noticed there were mostly just white people there, I just kind of assumed I wouldn’t fit in. It can be intimidating.” **(EDGE)**

This feeling on not fitting in and intimidation goes both ways, making the desired acceptance of others and their cultures even more difficult. **(IMPACT)**

“I’ve noticed a lot of time’s people assume you have to be black to go to our events or that everything we do is just for black people,” Fairley said. “I make sure to give everyone fliers and tell them that everyone is more than welcome to come.”

Fairley says inclusion of minority groups on campus has improved even since she’s been at OSU. Fairley says this year was the first that Afro-Am got involved in the homecoming activities on campus.

“Before I guess we had never really tried to get involved,” Fairley said. “Instead of just being secluded to OSU black alumni, we got to participate in the parade and the harvest carnival which was cool. We took a shot to get more involved, and they really appreciated our efforts.”

One minority group that is expanding rapidly across the country is the Hispanic community. At OSU alone enrollment for Hispanics has increased by 48 percent since 2010, and some students say even though Stillwater has growing diversity, many of its students are still close-minded to cultures outside their own.

President of the Latin American Student Association and native Argentinian Sofia Carbone says she notices how even with the growing diversity on campus many people still seem blind to cultural diversity.

“A lot of people just assume that Latin Americans are just one kind of person,” Carbone said. “People think we look the same and all eat Mexican food, which isn’t the case at all. I think some people are just afraid to approach diversity.”

This perceived resistance to diversity makes cultural understanding even more difficult. With some of the majority seemingly refusing cultures outside their own, Carbone said minorities sometimes feel unwelcome.

Carbone, a member of the sorority Zeta Tau Alpha, said during fall rush she notices how few Latin American women go through recruitment.

“I can see how going into an organization where you are a minority can be intimidating. They might assume that they wouldn’t fit in or that they should pursue more diverse outlets.”

Carbone said she never felt that intimidation or pressure going through the process of recruitment but understands how one would. Carbone isn’t the only member of her chapter with a Hispanic background and said she hopes the Greek community and OSU can become more through organizations like LASA.

Carbone said a main purpose of LASA is to help people get an understanding of different cultures and to encourage non-Latin Americans to attend events to broaden their horizons.

“At LASA we want to create an open-minded environment and bring people together from all around the world. It really is such a small world and there are so many people in it.

“So many people just equate Latin Americans to Mexicans and that’s just not true. We are all so different and have so many different kinds of influences from other cultures. You can’t just put us all into one big group.”

LASA also encouraged Carbone to become more connected with her own culture. When Carbone first came to America, she said being the only Argentinian made her lose her culture somewhat and not until recently had she become more interested in her heritage.

Carbone said going to Hispanic Student Association meetings and LASA meetings made her feel at home because she finally had people around her that she could relate to.

“People will come up and greet you with a hug and a kiss, and it’s not weird because that’s part of my culture. It’s nice to come in and speak Spanish with people and get to know people that have similar experiences as you. LASA helped me get back in touch with some of those little things that can be forgotten.”

Organizations like Afro-Am and LASA not only help minority student’s keep in touch with their culture, but they help them network and advance their careers. OSU’s enrollment of minorities has been on a steady incline the past 10 years and as Stillwater become even more diverse, organizations like LASA and Afro-Am will become even more important in educating people culturally.

Associate Vice President for Instructional Diversity Jason Kirksey has been with OSU since 2010 and said the university has made strides in understanding the importance of diversity on campus. OSU has been a recipient of the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award the past two years. The HEED award measures an institutions level of achievement and intensity of commitment to broadening diversity on campus.

“What diversity does is expose all of us to cultures and ideas that are different that our own,” Kirksey said. “In a higher education setting that’s the goal because it helps with educational growth. We recognize the value that diversity adds to a degree.”

Kirksey said diversity adds to the overall campus experience as well, helping people appreciate others cultures.

“When you walk around the campus it’s very welcoming,” Kirksey said. “It’s something that is valued across campus, and I think it puts us in a good place across the region as an institution of higher education. We are going to continue to progress with our diversity as an institution because we are becoming more attractive to those groups of people because of our growing diversity.”

Marcus Chavez, a Hispanic construction management sophomore, said OSU does a good job of including minorities and embracing its growing diversity. Chavez said the numerous amounts of organizations OSU offers to minorities is something that makes Stillwater seem more inviting.

“You look at those kinds of things when you go to college,” Chavez said. “You want to be included and know that there is going to be other people like you there as well and has a good program set up.”

Sources Sheet

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