WE ARE

REAL DREAMS
REAL STUDENTS
REAL STORIES

Southeastern Oklahoma State University
Southeastern Oklahoma State University, in compliance with applicable federal and state law and regulations, does not discriminate and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices, procedures, or programs. This includes, but is not limited to: admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. The University affirms its commitment to comply with The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended (2018), and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and other federal civil rights and equity laws. Southeastern Oklahoma State University is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

This publication, produced by the Office Of University Communications and Marketing, is distributed by Southeastern Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO). 100 copies have been prepared at a cost of $425.00.
Each of the seven students profiled on the following pages has their own unique and compelling story to tell about their path to Southeastern. Enjoy and learn more about the students at Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

Anna Antuono
Junior
Special Education
Ardmore, Oklahoma

Darrin Wade
Senior
Biology-Biological Health
Houston, Texas

Larissa Flores
Junior
Elementary Education
Bells, Texas

Jensen Simmons
Junior
Chemistry-Biology
Durant, Oklahoma

Jayda Janway
Freshman
Communication
Heavener, Oklahoma

Jacob Tran
Senior
Aviation Professional Pilot
Arlington, Texas

Yoselin Rodriguez-Diaz
Junior
Biology-Chemistry
Broken Bow, Oklahoma
Being a student leader on a college campus carries with it some responsibility.  
And that responsibility has perhaps never been greater than this year at colleges and universities throughout the country as classes begin amid the concerns and uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

At Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Anna Antuono fills numerous leadership roles, including that of Student Government Association (SGA) president, sorority president, senior resident life assistant, as a graduate of the Southeastern President’s Leadership Class (PLC), a participant in the Alumni Legacy Leadership program, and as a past member of the George and Donna Nigh Leadership Academy.

She also serves on Southeastern’s COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, a group that includes faculty, staff and community members that has worked with University president Thomas Newsom to establish guidelines for a safe return to face-to-face instruction this fall.
“Honestly, that (serving on the task force) was stressful,” Antuono, a junior, said recently. “But at the same time, it was very rewarding doing work that really mattered and impacted the lives of students, families, faculty, staff, and the community.”

She is quite visible on campus and in the community, representing the University at various functions and doing an occasional interview, where you may see her on the local TV news talking about Southeastern.

On top of all her leadership activities, Antuono, who is from Ardmore and is a Lone Grove High School graduate, is studying special education; however, her career plans include attending graduate school to become an industrial organizational psychologist.

As SGA president, Antuono has championed the cause of continued low tuition, more involvement from graduate students on campus, and additional mental health resources for students.

In her role as a senior residence life assistant, she works with many students, including those in the President’s Leadership Class.

“‘The best thing I can do is to offer them a listening ear – and then maybe some advice,’ Antuono said. ‘For those students who might be homesick, I tell them to get involved on campus as quickly as possible and make friends. And they will then find their home and place at Southeastern.’

Anna is actually following in the footsteps of older sister Luana Grace, who also was an SGA president at Southeastern, a residence life assistant, and sorority member who participated on the Sparks Dance Team. She is now a teacher-counselor at Ardmore Middle School.

Other family members are educators in Lone Grove, as Anna’s mother is a special education director, while her stepfather is an art teacher and musician.

Anna holds dual citizenship in the United States and Italy, where her father resides.

When she’s not studying, working, or attending meetings, Anna enjoys spending her spare time with friends watching movies and TV shows on Netflix, and sampling area restaurants.
When many people reach a certain age in life, they make a career change. For Darrin Wade, such a decision came at the relatively young age of 28.

Saying that he has always “wanted to help people,” Wade is the midst of transitioning from theater teacher to physician.

But that’s getting ahead of the story.

Wade, a Houston native, graduated from Alief Kerr High School, a magnet school, where he was involved in theater, among other activities. He then moved to the Sherman-Denison area, where his father is a pulmonologist. (His older sister is a cancer research nurse in Dallas).

It was while working on various productions at the Sherman Community Playhouse that Wade first heard about a school nearby called Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

“I met some students there and they told me about Southeastern,” Wade, now 30, said recently.

And the next thing you know, he was in Durant, majoring in Technical Theatre Design, with a minor in Computer Science.
“I was very fortunate in that Dell McLain (director of theater), Riley Risso Coker (director of dance), and Dr. Aaron Adair (theater professor) provided me with different avenues to be successful,” Wade said. “The work ethic I learned at Southeastern was also important to my development. Southeastern gives students the tools to begin their journey in life, and that’s what I would tell high school students today, that ‘this is the absolute best place to start your journey.’”

While immersing himself in theater at Southeastern, specifically lighting design, Wade found time to serve as a True Blue Student Ambassador. He would also return in later years to work at the Oklahoma Shakespearean Festival in the summers.

Wade earned his bachelor degree (magna cum laude) in 2013 and headed for grad school in southern California (Cal-Irvine), determined, in his words, “to be an accomplished lighting designer in theater.”

In addition to graduate school, Wade gained some valuable experience in lighting, with “gigs” at both Universal and Disney theme parks.

“I liked the culture out in California, but at the same time, I missed Texas and Oklahoma,” he said. “Although I am from Houston, I consider Durant to be my hometown now. People will go out of their way to be friendly and to help you. It’s a step beyond southern hospitality in Durant.”

So after three years out west and with master’s degree in hand, Wade traveled back to Texas, searching for a job in education. He found it, teaching theater arts at Marble Falls High School, near Austin.

“After two years (of teaching), I decided it was time to sit down and have a hard talk with myself. People go to the theater to feel better, but I wanted to do something to actually make people feel better. My father always said to follow your dreams……”

So Wade found himself back in his “hometown” of Durant, working on a third degree, this time in Biology-Biological Health. Administrators/professors he cites as influences are Dr. Teresa Golden, Dr. Brad Ludrick, Dr. Diane Dixon, and Dr. Ning Wu.

Wade will graduate in December (summa cum laude) with plans to attend medical school and to eventually become an emergency room physician.
Larissa Flores is like many other students at Southeastern Oklahoma State University – a first-generation college student from a small town with a bright future.

The junior Elementary Education major by way of Bells, Texas (pop. 1,500) instantly found a home away from home by becoming involved in the Student Government Association, Savage Storm Leaders, Baptist Collegiate Ministries, and Project Teach. She also works on campus in the registrar’s office.

Located in Grayson County, Bells is 12 miles southeast of Denison-Sherman. And it’s just 34 miles down the road south of Durant.

Southeastern was actually the last campus visit Flores made, having toured a half dozen schools in north Texas before making her decision to cross the Red River.

“When I first visited here during my senior year of high school, it just felt like home,” she said. “Durant is a small, tight-knit community, and at Southeastern, students instantly make a connection. Everybody says you’re not just a number, but a person, and that’s very true. And I have had a world of opportunities since coming here.”
Flores has plenty of company from her small hometown – no less than 24 undergraduate students from Bells are currently enrolled at Southeastern. This is quite impressive when you consider the enrollment at Bells High School is 288 students in four grades.

For many years, the Southeastern Marching Band has attracted outstanding students from Bells, and this has spread to the athletic fields, as former Bells Panthers now represent SE in football, softball, women’s basketball, and women’s track and field.

And while Flores still spends time with her fellow BHS graduates on campus, she also enjoys interacting with international students from Australia and Brazil; she counts among her best friends students from such Oklahoma locales as Durant, Ardmore, Atoka, McAlester, Shawnee, and Elk City.

For Flores, it’s been a smooth transition from Texas student to Oklahoma student.

“When I first visited here during my senior year of high school, it just felt like home. Durant is a small, tight-knit community, and at Southeastern, students instantly make a connection. Everybody says you’re not just a number, but a person, and that’s very true. And I have had a world of opportunities since coming here.”

Although the majority of Southeastern students are from Oklahoma, Flores is joined by a large contingent of Texans. In fact, currently, 19% (1,014) of all SE students come from the neighboring Lone Star State.

Southeastern traditionally draws a significant number of Texas students in such programs of study as aviation, business, safety, education, and the performing arts.

According to Flores and others, the University’s 100% out-of-state non-resident tuition waiver policy is attractive to Texas students. The waiver makes Southeastern one of the most affordable public universities in the southern Oklahoma and north Texas region. That, coupled with the location of Durant, a drive of a little more than an hour to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, seems to appeal to students from throughout north Texas.
The 2020-21 student body represents 49* STATES  56* COUNTRIES

- Argentina
- Australia
- Bahamas
- Bangladesh
- Belgium
- Benin
- Brazil
- Canada
- Congo
- CA ’te d’Ivoire
- Cameroon
- Chad
- China
- Colombia
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Egypt
- France
- Germany
- Ghana
- Guyana
- India
- Indonesia
- Iraq
- Ireland
- Israel
- Japan
- Kenya
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Mongolia
- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Norway
- Pakistan
- Panama
- Philippines
- Poland
- Romania
- Russian Federation
- Saudi Arabia
- Senegal
- Serbia
- Singapore
- South Korea
- Spain
- Sudan
- Thailand
- Turkey
- Uganda
- United Kingdom
- United States of America
- Venezuela
- Vietnam
- South Africa
- Zimbabwe

* Includes both traditional and 100% online students

Source: Office of Academic Affairs
The Fall 2020 enrollment is the highest on record in Southeastern’s history.
While some local high school students may choose to pursue their higher education goals away from home, **Jensen Simmons** is a great example of someone who found everything he needed at Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

“I like Durant, my family’s all here, and there are a lot of great things going on with great opportunities at Southeastern,” said the 2018 Durant High School graduate. “It was an easy decision for me to stay here.”

Like most college freshmen, Simmons was unsure of his career goals, but he soon made the decision to pursue a career in medicine. The junior Chemistry-Biology double major is part of the Southeastern and Oklahoma State University Center for Health Services (OSU-CHS) 3+1 program.

This program allows students to complete their pre-doctoral medical training in seven years by completing three years of intensive undergraduate education at Southeastern and four years of medical education at OSU-CHS in its Rural Medical Track. After completing the first year of medical school and meeting certain academic requirements, Southeastern will award an undergraduate degree to students accepted in the 3+1 Program.

Simmons, whose wife Jenny is a graduate of the East Central at Southeastern nursing program and works at a local hospital, has already been accepted by the Oklahoma State College of Osteopathic Medicine. He will begin his studies there next year. Jenny, from Blanchard, Oklahoma, met Jensen at Southeastern through their involvement at the Student Bible Center. His mother also has a science degree from Southeastern, while his father is a local business owner and his younger brother is a senior at Durant High.
“When I first started at Southeastern, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do,” Simmons admitted. “I was selected for the Honors Program, and then Dr. (Tim) Smith (Chair of Chemistry, Computer and Physical Sciences) introduced me to the 3 + 1 program. Dr. Smith, Dr. (Diane) Dixon (Chair of Biological Sciences), and Dr. (Ning) Wu (Biological Sciences professor) have all been instrumental in helping me down that path. They have created a great environment in that program. And it (science) is what I love to do.”

Having competed in both football and baseball at Durant High School, Simmons briefly considered playing baseball at Southeastern, but decided to devote full attention to his studies. In fact, because of his rigorous academic load, the only organization he is involved with is the Student Bible Center, where he is a student representative.

Pediatrics and family medicine are two of the fields Simmons is considering as he looks forward to continuing his studies at medical school.

“A couple of family friends work in the field of medicine and they have influenced me as far as understanding the importance of helping people. I would definitely consider coming back close to this area (to practice),” he said. “I would definitely consider coming back close to this area (to practice).”
For Jayda Janway, choosing to attend Southeastern Oklahoma State University was an easy decision.

You might even call it part of a family tradition as the Heavener, Oklahoma, freshman is the last of three Janway sisters to make the 146-mile move to Durant.

And Jayda, a communication major and member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, is proud to follow in the footsteps of Kelsey (‘20) and Sierra (‘17). All three are first-generation college students/graduates.

“They are my role models and I have always wanted to be like them,” Jayda said. “As for choosing Southeastern, Durant is not too far from home (Heavener is about 45 miles southwest of Fort Smith, Arkansas), but far enough where I can start the next chapter in my life. Plus, the school is very affordable and I have family (sisters) here. (Kelsey is employed at First United Bank, while Sierra works at the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma headquarters).”

Like her two sisters before her, Jayda is deeply involved in campus activities, serving as president of the Native American Student Association and as a member of Sigma Sigma Sigma sorority. When not in class (17-hour load this fall) or studying, Jayda can be found working at the front desk as an office clerk at the Choctaw Nation headquarters. Her hobbies include Native American beadwork, in which she has started her own business.
Even while in high school at Heavener, Jayda exhibited leadership skills, chairing (as did Kelsey before her) the Choctaw Nation Youth Advisory Board for a 10.5-county area and representing the Le Flore County south chapter of the board.

“Through the advisory board, we learned leadership skills, how to react to life’s circumstances, and how to help people,” Janway said.

One of her favorite advisory projects was the Choctaw HEART Program, with HEART being an acronym for health, exercise, awareness of what you put into you body, rest and recovery, and teamwork. The Le Flore south chapter implemented a special program involving frequent workouts using machines and incorporating yoga, CrossFit, and Zumba.

Janway says her career goal is to work in “advertising” for the Nation. And like most college freshmen, she says it’s been challenging making friends during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has limited activities and interaction among students.

“As far as choosing Southeastern, Durant is not too far from home, but far enough where I can start the next chapter of my life. Plus, the school is very affordable and I have family here. “

“But we’re making connections in class and through Zoom,” Janway said. “I have a very large and diverse group of friends, and have had the opportunity to meet many international students.”

Janway credits a trio of Southeastern faculty-staff members – Dr. Randy Prus (English professor), Lauren Rowland (director of Native American Institute), and Kelsi Rainwater (Choctaw Nation first-year experience coordinator) – with providing guidance to her.

“All three of them have reached out and helped me,” she said. “Dr. Prus is one of those professors who makes sure you clearly understand your assignments. That’s so important when you’re a freshman.”
When Jacob Tran landed in Durant in the fall of 2017, he quickly found a home in two of Southeastern Oklahoma State University’s most storied programs – Aviation and Honors.

The senior Aviation Professional Pilot major is scheduled to graduate next May and plans to pursue a career – as one might guess – as an airline pilot.

A native of Arlington, Texas, Tran graduated from a large high school (Arlington Martin) in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

His parents (Steve and Justine) and grandparents were born in Vietnam and came to this country in the 1970s, eventually settling in Louisiana before moving to Texas. Justine Tran is an accountant and Steve Tran is an electrician, while Jacob’s sister attends the University of Texas at Arlington and his brother is a UTA graduate. Both are in the field of Information Technology/Marketing.

So how did Jacob find his way to Southeastern?

“I was interested in aviation and a friend of our family who flies for American Airlines recommended Southeastern to us,” he said. “We came here up for a campus visit during my senior year of high school. The biggest thing I remember was that everyone was very friendly and welcoming. That made quite an impression on my mother – she had grown up in a small town in Louisiana (Pineville) and liked the atmosphere. In high school, I had a small circle of friends, but here, it’s been a new experience, venturing out to make new friends.”
Tran, a soft-spoken, articulate 21-year-old, has been a member of the Student Government Association, but has also made fast friends through his aviation classes and involvement in the Honors Program.

Southeastern’s highly-regarded aviation program dates back to 1966, while the Honors Program was founded after the establishment of the Parsons Scholar Endowment in 1978.

Honors is an academic program centered on collaborative and hands-on learning. Students take a core curriculum of honors courses which complement their general education and major requirements. In addition, students participate in professional and cultural enrichment activities. Students must apply to the Honors program, with criteria including college entrance test scores and letters of recommendations; those accepted into the program receive scholarships to assist in their educational pursuits.

Tran credits aviation sciences director Lloyd Sauls, former vice president Kyle Stafford (now president at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College), and honors director Meg Cotter-Lynch for making an impact on him during his time in Durant.

“I love his stories about his past flying experiences,” Tran said of Sauls. “He always make his classes interesting.”

Tran says moving to a new country was a “big deal” for his family.

“The Vietnamese culture is very family-oriented,” Tran said. “They want you to succeed in whatever you do, and that’s what I’ve gotten from my family. Our grandparents instilled in us the importance of getting an education – something they did not have the opportunity to achieve.”

And while Tran embraces his Vietnamese culture, he also appreciates others.

“Coming to Southeastern, I had never experienced the Choctaw and Native American culture, but I don’t see that many differences (in cultures). I think it’s always interesting to learn about other people and where they come from.”

And like his mother, he also enjoys small-town life.

“Durant has a certain appeal,” Tran said. “Unlike in Arlington, when you go into a restaurant here, you see somebody you know. People here are more friendly - you can just feel the difference. And the open spaces - in Durant, you can see the stars at night.”
Yoselin Rodriguez-Diaz appreciates the sacrifices her family has made to enable her to pursue her dream of a higher education. And while that dream may not be achieved for a few more years, she already has a purpose in mind.

“I’ve always liked helping people,” the Southeastern Oklahoma State University junior said recently. “And I want to give back to my community.”

Rodriguez-Diaz was born in Mexico, but moved to the United States when she was just two months old. She grew up in small-town Oklahoma (Broken Bow in McCurtain County), where she recalls learning to speak English by watching cartoons on television.

Today, Rodriguez-Diaz is in pre-professional studies, majoring in biology with a minor in chemistry. Her career goal is to be a physician’s assistant, which requires an advanced degree beyond the bachelor’s.

And as far as helping her community, she would like to eventually return to Broken Bow to open her own practice.

Rodriguez-Diaz gets emotional when talking about her parents, who have worked tirelessly, while encouraging their three daughters to pursue their goals.

“My parents always told us that they were going to pay for our education, but then we were on our own,” she said. “They may have not always been able to be at all of our basketball games or other activities, but that was because they were working so that we could have a better life.”
Yoselin’s older sister, Melissa, is a Southeastern (‘19) criminal justice graduate who works for the Broken Bow Police Department. She also has a younger sister.

Like many other students, Rodriguez-Diaz credits Southeastern’s “small-knit community” and “small class sizes” as being keys to her success academically. She’s also been involved on campus with the President’s Leadership Class, Student Government Association, the Alumni Legacy Leaders, and was a participant in the Newman Civic Fellowship program.

In addition, she has assisted in the University’s recruiting efforts by serving as a volunteer translator at area high school events for prospective students.

“One of the first people I met on campus was Dr. (Diane) Dixon (biology chair/professor),” Rodriguez-Diaz said. “As my academic advisor, she has helped me stay on track. Vice President (Liz) McCraw has also impacted me greatly. Overall, it has been an awesome experience for me here. Southeastern is a place where you make friends easily, and if you need any help with anything, you just ask. It’s like a family away from home.”

But why did Yoselin choose the health care field?

“Most of my family still lives in Mexico, and we go back twice a year to visit them,” she said. “When you go there, you immediately see the need for better health care services. And rural Oklahoma also needs additional health care services as well. I want to do something that can make a difference in people’s lives.”