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From someone who's been there: Consider Ouachita even if you don't know anyone

By Claire Phillips

May 21, 2021

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – As if the final stretch of senior year is not hard enough, you're also having to make a decision that will affect the next few years of your life – where you're going to college. The process can be overwhelming, frustrating and confusing, and it oftentimes can seem like a competition among peers; who will be accepted into the best school, who is going to receive the most offers, who is going to commit to a university first. I know how defeating this process can be. Even during my senior year of high school, I really didn't begin to apply to schools until most of my peers had received their letters of acceptance.

Being from Midlothian, Texas (a suburb of Dallas), most of my classmates had their sights set on large, nearby state schools. I couldn't muster the same excitement they had about attending schools with such huge student populations. I wanted to be known by my professors, not just some number or a face in an auditorium full of students. I also was very closed off to the entire touring process; while my friends were going to look at different schools each week, I barely toured one.

For the longest time, I had my heart set on a Baptist university in the metroplex. It had a small student population, but I wouldn't have been able to play tennis there. I told myself I could be fine with that, but I had a coach that wasn't. He insisted that I consider taking a tour of this school in Arkadelphia, Ark. I didn't want to. I thought I knew what I wanted, and I didn't want to give any other school a chance, but I took a tour anyway.

Once I stepped foot on Ouachita's campus, I felt in my heart that this is where I belonged and was immediately able to envision myself spending my next four years here. I wanted to kick myself for almost missing out on this gem. Yet, even with that feeling of security, there was one seed of doubt in my mind: I didn't know a single other person that would be going to this school. My classmates talked excitedly about rooming together, dorm shopping and scheduling classes in order to have as many together as possible. While I was counting down the days until I moved, it was a little lonely not having anyone to share in my enthusiasm. Although I was only moving a state away, it felt like I might as well have been moving to an entirely different planet.

Looking back on these memories four years later, I wish I could give that freshman version of myself even a small glimpse of everything that was to come. I made an immediate family in the girls I played alongside on the tennis team, I became a member of a social club (Ouachita's version of sororities), I got involved with ElderServe and I found myself in classes that I was truly passionate about. Any worry I had that college was going to just be another four years of high school was shattered very early on in my time here. Instead, for four years I was surrounded by people I laughed with, studied with and ate with and who encouraged me to become the best version of myself.

So, if you find yourself in similar shoes – you're headed off to this tiny school with a hard to pronounce name – fill yourself with excitement instead of worry. Go on every CDA (campus drive around) that you're invited on, scream for the Tigers at every Ouachita football game and never underestimate the power of a late night Waffle House or Taco Bell run. The next four years are going to be what you make of them, and they're going to go by faster than you can even imagine, so enjoy every single minute. Because once you get to your senior year, you'll want to hit the rewind button and do it all again.