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Interest in summer sessions surges Slow economy, unique courses bolster enrollment

Jul 21, 2009

By Monica Chapman

For the fourth year in a row, summer enrollment is showing gains at Ohio University as students look for ways to squeeze in credit hours or take advantage of shorter, five-week terms.

Between 2005 and 2008, summer enrollment at Ohio University saw a 29.8 percent increase to 7,170 students in 2008, from 5,522 students in 2005. According to Director of Summer Sessions Pam Brown, the figures are up again in 2009, though an official headcount will not be available until the fall.

"Historically, when the economy is down, summer enrollment is up," said Brown, citing fewer summer employment opportunities and increased online course offerings as the driving forces behind the enrollment gains.

Indirect financial benefits also may influence student attendance.

"You can save money in the sense that if you are able to decrease your length of stay on campus, there are less housing charges over the long term," Brown explained.

Contrary to the traditional 10-week quarter schedule, summer sessions at Ohio University are split into two five-week increments, allowing students to focus on a few courses at any one time. The second session runs July 27 through Aug. 28.

For professors, the relaxed summer schedule offers more time and flexibility, resulting in more specialization and some interesting electives, Brown said.

For a look at some of what students are studying this summer, read on:

Film 471: Rock Docs Production

Part studies course and part production course, "Rock Docs" focuses on the art form of the "rock-u-mentary." Under the direction of graduate student Brian Zahm, students document local, regional and national acts, through a partnership with Jorma Kaoukonen's Fur Peace Ranch.

"Geographically, we are in a musical hotbed of creation -- the heart of it all, if you ask me," said Zahm. "There certainly is no shortage of possibilities as far as the rock doc is concerned, so naturally a production course like this seems like it needs to exist here at OU."

Before coming to Ohio University to pursue his master's of fine arts, Zahm traveled America filming more than 100 musical acts for a documentary about American roots music. Zahm also served as a cinematographer on "Headspace: The Sound of Life," a movie about electronic music to be released later this year.

"Music was one of the first things to truly ignite my soul when I was young," he reflects. "It is an amazing spiritual force that has existed since birds began to chirp, amphibians began to croak, so this is a natural evolution."



Senior psychology major Reese Fowler earns credit for "An Introduction to Alternative Agriculture" by working in the cucumber patch.

Photographer: Kevin Riddell

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Zahm is hoping his summer course will help infuse students with a similar passion for combining music and filmed expression.

"The summer offers a good deal more freedom to explore, play and shift gears than teaching during the very busy school year," he said. "So my plan is to find out what genre of music makes each student excited, and offer them avenues and encouragement to pursue their passion."

Other film courses offered this summer include: "Bruce Lee Films," "The Vampire Film" and "The King of B Movies."

Tier III: An Introduction to Alternative Agriculture

In "An Introduction to Alternative Agriculture," students literally dig into the subject matter by preparing a 100-square foot bio-intensive garden using hand tools and organic fertilizer. The hands-on experience complements the course's academic focus on wide-ranging sustainability issues, from composting and food security to sustainable fast-food.

Led by Art Trese, associate professor of [environmental and plant biology](#), the Tier-III course has been offered spring and summer quarters for the past six years.

Due to the shortened five-week course schedule, the summer sessions typically get off to a running start as students rush to plant their gardens. Trese supplements the learning experience by planting some crops in advance -- ensuring that students will have an opportunity to enjoy the harvest at the conclusion of the course.

The greatest benefit to students, according to Trese, is "the hands-on, real-life experience of gardening -- finding out what it takes and how big of a challenge it is."

Gardening is more than an academic focus for Trese, who holds a doctorate in plant pathology. It is also a lifelong personal hobby -- beginning with his first garden at the age of 10.

"I come from a really big family -- lots of children and not a lot of money. I was always hungry, so that's really what motivated me when I was young," said Trese, the third-born of 17 children.

Today, Trese continues his hobby, managing several acres of university gardens near the West State Street fields, in addition to his gardening endeavors at home.

"A lot of people feel like it can't be that hard," he said. "But I think what [students] find out is that there's a lot more to it than it looks like."

International Studies 610N: Feeding in Emergency Situations

Offered through the [African Studies Program](#) and the Institute for the African Child, "Feeding in Emergency Situations" is unique both in its content and its mode of delivery -- being taught from Sudan via the Internet by Osama Awad Salih, an associate professor at Al-Ahfad University for Women.

Developed in response an influx of humanitarian emergencies worldwide, the course advises the creation of rational and cost-effective emergency relief operations in the areas of food and nutrition.

According to Ohio University's Ismail Elmahdi, who worked with Salih to develop the course, distance learning increases access to top experts in the field, possibilities for guest speakers, and interaction between students across the globe.

It also bodes well for African Studies' current National Research Center grant: "Uploading Africa: How Technology and the Arts Can Inspire Our Field."

"The objective behind this idea is to build bridges that are supported by information technology to bring African voices and stories to our classrooms here in Ohio University," said Elmahdi, associate director of instructional technology with the Center for International Studies.

This marks the first time that the Center for International Studies has offered

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a course from remote location since 2000, but plans are already under way to increase distance-learning opportunities.

According to Elmahdi, "Feeding in Emergency Situations" will now be offered on a regular basis at Ohio University -- potentially as one of African Studies' core courses. As the inaugural course unfolds, Director of African Studies Steve Howard is visiting Senegal and Ghana to forge similar opportunities for distance learning through institutions across Africa.

"I think the students are very interested in the course material," said Elmahdi. "Their interest is evident by their interactions with the professor... and by their comment about the usefulness of the course to their career."

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