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Story 2: OU and Southwest partner to give students future job security



Photo by: Kaslyn Tidmore

Aspiring pilots have a direct pathway at the University of Oklahoma to a career in one of the nation's largest airlines, providing job security as early as freshman year.

The Southwest Airlines Destination 225° Program recently partnered with OU aviation in 2019. It is a pipeline program that allows students from university pathways to fly for Southwest and their partner programs after ongoing training.

"I don't believe that any other school I was looking at had an opportunity like this," said Anya Schnetzka, sophomore aviation major. "It assures me that I have a job after college."

For incoming students with the desire to be a pilot, this program has many benefits. One of the most prominent benefits is the Southwest pilot mentor that each student receives.

"I can call him anytime, ask him any questions I have because he has experienced most or all of the things that I have experienced," sophomore aviation major, Kaleb Chan said.

The mentor is just one way Southwest makes students feel accepted into the company. Giving the students connections for the future is one of the biggest parts of the Destination 225° Program.

"I've met so many people through it," Annika Petras, aviation major said. "So when I go to Southwest, I already have a bunch of connections for my final job."

In their employee promise, Southwest refers to their employees as the "Southwest Family." Making the students feel connected is another part of creating the Southwest culture that draws so many students to this program.

"Southwest is a real friendly, reliable culture and it is a workplace that I want to be a part of for the rest of my career," said sophomore Hayden Riggins, aviation major.

To create this culture, Southwest has handpicked four universities that they feel embody the Southwest family, and OU is one of them. This partnership benefits not only OU students but also Southwest itself.

"They are getting the best of OU aviation students. They're finding the cream of the crop," said Chan.

By giving the students in the program personal teaching, OU aviation makes sure they can provide Southwest with the most prepared pilots possible.

"They walk alongside us and check up on us," said Chan. "They have a bird's eye view of what we're really doing."

By creating this hands-on program, Southwest and OU aviation have created an environment where students are excited to be a part of this program. They are grateful for the opportunity they have received that is unlike any other program in the country.

"They're investing in us at such a young age, whereas other comparable airlines don't really bother with us," said Petras. "I think that is going to put them ahead of other competitive airlines."