

MOSAIC a faculty lesson in diversity

By April Towery
THE BATTALION

MOSAIC sounds like an expensive painting, but in actuality, it is a group of Aggie staff members trying to make a difference.

An acronym for Maximizing Opportunities for Staff to Achieve an Inclusive Campus, MOSAIC, is the staff version of the student program UACT, University Awareness for Cultural Togetherness.

The program offers a training workshop to any department on campus, but is also available to individuals through the Human Resource Department.

Diversity Education Coordinator Sheri Schmidt, worked on developing the program and training a staff of 10 campus facilitators before the program came into existence in the spring of 1996.

"I started working with UACT, then gradually moved into Phase II, which was a staff program," Schmidt said.

"The beauty of it is that before, I was doing the workshops by myself; whereas now, it is a group of 10 colleagues with a variety of input." Facilitator Felicia Scott, an employee of the vice president's office, said she has been in-

involved with MOSAIC from the beginning because of all it has to offer.

"I think one important characteristic of the program is that it encourages dialogue in a relatively safe environment and promotes sharing issues and helping to solve problems," Scott said.

The workshops offered by MOSAIC strive to educate the audience on peer diversity.

"We want to teach people the skills needed to achieve an inclusive environment as employees of a university," Schmidt said. "There is more to it than understanding your own cultural identity."

"We discuss the stereotypes that affect each one of us every day. This allows people to recognize the reality of it and develop an action plan to implement in their own department."

Schmidt said the workshops also cover cross-cultural education.

"It goes beyond racism and sexism, to leadership, human relation skills, and day-to-day interaction skills," Schmidt said.

MOSAIC also strives to educate people about the characteristics of an environment in which everyone contributes, regardless of cultural diversity.

Schmidt said that the program itself con-

sists of a variety of people.

Jan Reinhardt, a staff member in the engineering department, got involved with MOSAIC to learn and educate about respect for others.

"We're staff to staff, so we're working on peer education and a commonality of experience on which to draw," Reinhardt said. "Diversity has become a negative word, so the basis of the workshop is to recognize people as individuals and not lump them together as a group."

Although MOSAIC has only been in existence for a short time, facilitators have made considerable time contributions in the year-long preparation and development of the program.

Schmidt said each staff member involved in MOSAIC has enriched the program and made her job easier.

"The work we have to do in order to give the workshops has gone more smoothly and quickly now that I have a board of facilitators to work with," Schmidt said.

Currently, MOSAIC is trying to get the word out that there can be a faculty version of the program, which Reinhardt said will allow for more peer diversity education.

"We're working on Phase III to be a faculty-to-faculty program," Reinhardt said. "We just need people who are willing to get involved."

Soil workers get their hands dirty

Students process soil, water and forage at the Texas A&M Soil Testing Laboratory

By James Fowler
THE BATTALION

"Dirt is a four-letter word around here," Nancy Blackstock, a student worker at the Soil Testing Laboratory and a senior agricultural engineering major, said.

Pay dirt more accurately describes the valuable technical and job-related experience that student workers gain at the lab. It processes soil, water and forage samples to help people overcome drought conditions by identifying problems such as plant nitrate stress.

Dr. Tony L. Provin, assistant professor in the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences and laboratory director, said the lab provides analyses to over 2,000 customers, creating a demanding environment for workers.

"It can be a really high pressure job because the sample flow can be so variable," Provin said.

"We can get a huge number in today, and our goal is to provide results within 24 hours."

The lab is staffed by seven permanent scientists and between six and nine student employees from a wide range of academic backgrounds.

Jason Beaudreau, a senior computer science major, has worked at the lab since his freshman year.

Beaudreau provides a key service by maintaining a customized database. The database annually tracks over 50,000 soil, water and plant samples that contain information on the customers, each sample's status, and results of the analyses.

Beaudreau said his greatest accomplishment was repairing lab software that others had not been able to fix. He said this gave him the confidence to succeed after graduation.

"It makes me feel good knowing, as a student worker, I am doing the same work a successful professional making \$40,000 a year would," Beaudreau said.

Nancy Blackstock, who operates the Inductively Coupled Plasma (ICP) machine, is at the heart of the lab's operations. She runs the customers' samples through the ICP machine to give a basic mineral breakdown in the soil or plants.

"When you ask for an analysis with the basic routine test, we can tell you how much nitrates or nitrogen, calcium, phosphorous, potassium, magnesium, sodium and sulfur is in the soil sample," Blackstock said.

The Soil Testing Laboratory has operated at A&M since 1946 and primarily serves agricultural, business, government and residential customers in Texas. It tests soil, forage and

water for non-drinking purposes for mineral, pH (i.e. acidity or alkalinity), salinity and metal content, depending on customer requirements.

The lab is located on the third floor of the Heep Center on West Campus and its services are available to the public.

The lab offers a testing kit that consists of a bag for the soil sample and instructions for gathering the soil. A routine analysis costs \$10. This test provides useful information for homeowners.

Provin said the student workers gain valuable experience at the lab. They work with customers, get a taste of the business world, and learn about lab management and procedures.

"We can't function without the student workers; it would be hard to survive in today's fiscally restrictive environment without them," Provin said.

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