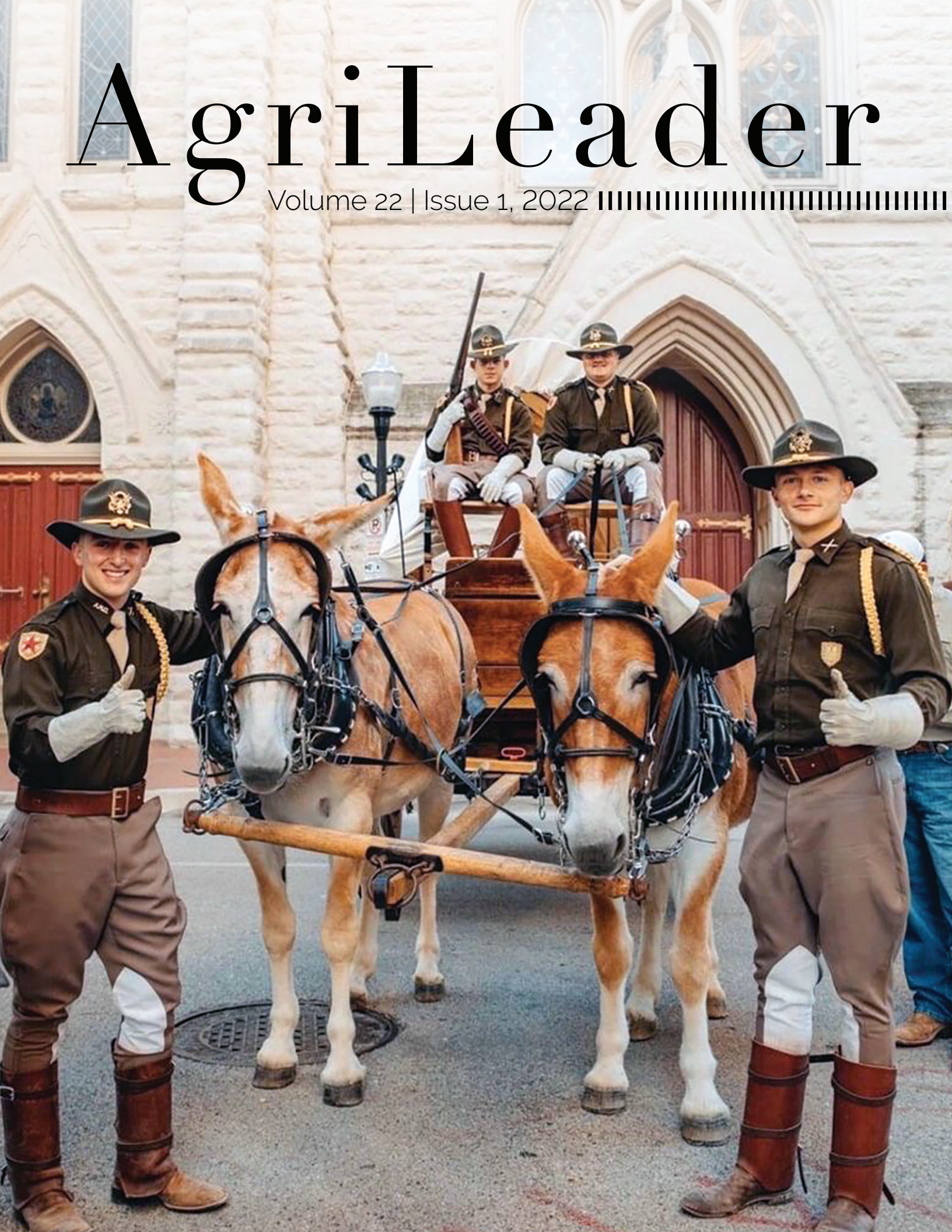


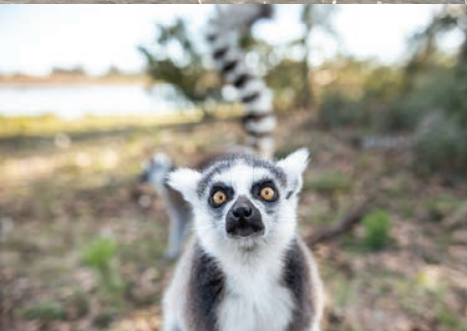
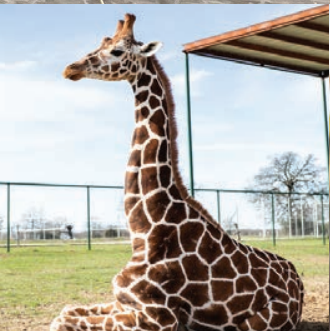
AgriLeader

Volume 22 | Issue 1, 2022





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Letter From the Editors

Howdy,

On behalf of all of the writers and staff, thank you for choosing to read this edition of the Agrileader. This issue is the culmination of months of dedicated writing, editing, and group contribution, and we hope that in reading it you are inspired by the stories within. The Agrileader aims to highlight outstanding examples of the grit, ingenuity, and values exhibited by those connected to Texas A&M's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences through these stories, which exhibit personal examples related to various topics and industries. It has been our joy to learn from the stories of the individuals in this issue, and it's our wish that our readers would be as impacted as we have been.

To the Agrileader staff, we thank you for the hard work and dedication to excellence that has marked our semester together. It's been a joy to be on this team with each of you. To our faculty leader, Lauren Jenkins, we extend heartfelt gratitude for your leadership and guidance throughout this entire process.

We hope that our readers will enjoy this issue of the Agrileader magazine as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

Shelby Smith '22
Karli Geyer '23
Editor-in-chiefs

Shelby Smith Karli Geyer

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Sydney Fritsch

Not Pictured: Madison Cobb, Drew Douglass, Ally Lain

Diversity & Excellence in ALEC

By: Drew Douglass '22

The formalities and customs that connect us to different places, peoples, cultures and religions are an important part to the development of becoming a leader. Diversity encourages the cultivation of different ways of thinking and promotes a path learning key components that an individual may not have previously been exposed to. Diversity education has been incorporated in several educational programs of the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication (ALEC) department at Texas A&M University, especially with the introduction of the CLUES program.

CLUES stands for Culture Leadership Understanding and Exploration for Scholars and is a class and learning community. The development of CLUES was initiated by the collaboration of the Multicultural Services and Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications departments. The learning community and class were created by the

departments as a means of educating students about important knowledge and effective skills that will directly impact their leadership success in the future.

The initiative by the ALEC department encourages students to adapt to different ways of thinking and exposes them to experiences outside of their own culture, allowing for a new form of leadership to flourish in their students.

The concept of CLUES was developed into a course that is divided into two semesters. Each semester, the fall and spring semester courses bring something new to the table in terms of cultural education. This course is a hands-on course that promotes cultural education through co-curricular activities that happen inside and outside of the classroom. Students have the opportunity to interact with major Texas A&M administrators, sampling food from all over the world and even attending cultural performances.

For registration purposes the fall semester class is listed as ALED 322 and the spring semester listed as ALED 323. There is an online application for the course, and if students are wanting to learn more about the program, they



2021 CLUES Students.
Photo by: CLUES

can reach out to an ALEC advisor for more information.

CLUES opportunities

Micah Rundell, an agricultural communications and journalism major, had the opportunity to participate in the course in Fall 2021 and was able to participate in several cultural experiences. She was able to attend the LGBTQ+ exhibit at the Cushing Library on campus where memorabilia depicted a timeline of important and crucial events within LGBTQ+ history.

"Visiting the library was an eye-opening experience to see the hardships that people within the LGBTQ+ community faced, and it opened my eyes on how to be a better advocate and ally for the community," Rundell said.

The exhibit provided students with an opportunity to learn about something that may or may not have impacted them personally but made them aware of the issues that others within the community at Texas A&M may have had to face over the years.

The students are encouraged to attend several on-campus events such as the Fusion Fiesta which is an event where students of different ethnic and religious clubs and organizations on campus meet to educate other students. The event, which is held during the fall semester, provides cultural experiences such as the introduction of different foods, music, religious and cultural attire, as well as about 50-60 booths with information regarding the club or organization.

Sydney Loveless, Class of 2022 University Studies major, attended the event and was able to explore the various opportunities to connect with students and learn about aspects

of their cultures.

"The event was a great experience, and I learned some interesting things at each booth I attended. The food was amazing, and I was able to try different cuisines that I had never been around before," Loveless said.

Students were able to participate in several other engaging events that correlated with different religious, cultural, ethnic and race-oriented celebrations, conversations and collaborations. The events give students an in-depth look at aspects discussed during the course work and give a tangible experience for students to build on and develop connections to cultures other than their own.

The discussion over race relations was a major topic discussed within the program



Micah Rundell gives a Gig 'em to the camera
Photo by: Micah Rundell the student

and students were able to have open and respectful conversations over race relations to understand a variety of views. There is extensive coverage over civil rights within the course work and conversations are encouraged over how individuals as a society have progressed and how much work society still has to do.

The class overall impacts a student's ability to communicate intense and controversial topics effectively while being able to provide differences in opinion over these topics. Students are encouraged to share their own thoughts and feelings both out loud and through various assignments that foster communication over these topics.

The experiences provided by the class encourage students to embrace differences of opinion and how to communicate effectively how one feels on a certain topic without diminishing or targeting the opinion or belief of another.

The Importance of Cultural Education

Diversity in the workplace and in educational institutions such as the ALEC department can be crucial to communication channels and tolerance for others. Cultural Education is becoming more recognized as a beneficial knowledge base due to the

ever-increasing cultural climate that is being acknowledged in the media as well as in the local community.

Cultural education is also being recognized as a major advantage in dealing with customer and employee relations in the work environment. Employers are looking for individuals with a well-rounded education that can effectively communicate with as many people outside of their culture as possible in order to draw consumers in.

Drexel University conducted their own research on cultural diversity and education and if it is critical to an individual's social development. The study determined that cultural diversity in the classroom and education over different cultures is crucial to social development and can help students handle differences in others easier throughout the different instances and settings they might face.

Diversity and cultural education in the classroom can provide numerous positive attributions for students as they grow and develop into the leaders and educators of tomorrow.

Initiatives set by Texas A&M's Multicultural Services Department have made it a priority for cultural education to enrich the learning



DIVERSITY

and working environment for students in various departments. The goal for classes such as CLUES is to promote inclusivity, diversity, equity and accountability through cultural education. It is strongly acknowledged that diverse perspectives and identities can enrich a learning environment and classes such as CLUES are put in place to encourage these differences to be explored and accepted.

The course offers a vision of various cultures and experiences for students to take part in and can be great ways to extend one's previous opportunities to participate in cultures that differ from their own. As cultural climates continue to change, the students who previously participated in the course hope that the course work will continue to positively influence the student body to be better, do better and continue to reflect on

the core values set in place by our institution.

From discussions over controversial topics to hands-on approaches out in the real world regarding cultural education one can truly experience aspects of a culture outside of their own through the CLUES program. As the cultural climate is ever changing it is important to sharpen our leadership abilities in the ALEC department and participating in programs such as CLUES will give students an advantage as they enter the workforce.

To learn more about the CLUES program or various other programs that encourage cultural education, please head over the CLUES website (<https://dms.tamu.edu/academics/clues/>). To learn about the specifics of the clues programs please contact Mr. Mark Dawson at mdawson@dms.tamu.edu.



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From Helmet to Headset

By: Sydney Fritsch '22

After making her mark on the softball field, former agricultural communications and journalism major, Tori Vidales '18 is looking to make a bang in the broadcasting field. The two-time All-American and Team Mexico Olympian is sharing her insight in the world of softball.

Question: What made you choose to go to school at Texas A&M University?

Answer: I chose Texas A&M, because of how at home I felt when I stepped on campus. The environment was so welcoming, and I knew that I would be in good hands, whether I was on the field

Answer: Ag comm was a huge push in the right direction artistically for me. It opened my eyes and helped me realize there are so many moving parts to the media we consume every day. I was pretty natural in front of the camera, but ag comm helped me comprehend the behind-the-scenes content that helps a broadcast. My first class project in leadership (my minor) propelled me to pursue a job at 12th Man Productions (12MP). It all came full circle as my ag comm classes helped me with work at 12MP and 12MP helped me with classes.

Question: What classes did you find to be the most beneficial?

Answer: All of my classes were so beneficial as I still use a lot of those skills today, but I think the class that was MOST beneficial was ag media writing. That class was intense,

"I chose Texas A&M, because of how at home I felt when I stepped on campus.

The environment was so welcoming, and I knew that I would be in good hands"

with the coaching staff or in the academic building with all of the advisors. On top of that gut feeling, my grandparents only live 45 minutes away in Brenham, and it was important to me that they would be able to come to my games as they have my entire softball career.

Question: How has your major in agricultural communications and journalism benefited your sports broadcasting career?

but I was able to strengthen my ability to get across the crucial information in a short period of time. This helps a ton when watching highlights and narrating them telling the audience who it was, who they were playing and why the play was so good.

Question: What is your favorite part about being a broadcaster?

Answer: My favorite part about being a color commentator is that each game



is different. Nothing will ever stay the same while you're breaking down the game. There are constantly new plays, new situations and new players. This makes it so exciting to watch the athletes perform at a high level and break it down, but also enjoying the game as a spectator!

Question: How would you like to see your broadcasting career expand?

Answer: I think the sky's the limit with broadcasting. Eventually, I would love to

call the Women's College World Series. I also love being in the studio, so I'm open to any opportunities that come my way!

The former Aggie softball star is just getting started with her broadcast career and is looking to make just as big of an impact off the field as she did on the field. Look for Tori broadcasting on SEC Network in the Spring.



Photo by: Tori Vidales

Dedication to Education

By: Sterling Pieniazek '22

Chris Skaggs, PhD, is no stranger to students enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University. Not only does he greatly influence students, he has a tremendous impact on youth in the livestock industry.

A native of Pampa, Texas, Skaggs is the son of educators; his mother was a family and consumer science teacher and his father was an agricultural science teacher. From a young age, he was always involved in the livestock industry, as he was heavily involved in 4-H and FFA. While a member of these two organizations, he raised and competitively exhibited market steers, heifers and barrows across Texas. In addition to showing livestock, Skaggs prepared himself for post-secondary success while participating in events such as public speaking, chapter conducting, livestock judging and illustrated talks. Moreover, he served as an FFA district and area officer. While growing up, Skaggs had the goal of becoming an agricultural science teacher. However, his experiences as a college student opened his eyes to the possibilities of becoming a professor.

Following high school, Skaggs attended Texas Tech University where he double majored in animal science and agricultural education. Beyond the classroom, Skaggs was involved in a myriad of other activities including participating on the Texas Tech Livestock Judging Team. As a member of the livestock judging team, his team finished fourth at the North American Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Kentucky, and his horse judging team achieved the honor of the Champion team at Colorado State University and the American Quarter Horse Congress. Upon completing his undergraduate degree, Skaggs completed his Master of Science degree at Kansas State University. As part of his graduate research, Skaggs focused his research on beef cattle reproductive physiology. During his time at Kansas State University, he served as the assistant coach for the Kansas State Collegiate Livestock Judging Team. After completing his master's degree, Skaggs went on to Iowa State University to pursue his doctorate. He



Dr. Skaggs is the Superintendent of the Junior Market Steer Show at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

once again pursued his passion to coach youth and served as the Iowa State Livestock Judging Team coach. In addition, he served as an academic advisor, and was an instructor in a multitude of classes within the Iowa State Animal Science Department. During his time at Iowa State, Skaggs led research focusing on swine genetics.

"Texas A&M University has a strong reputation in agriculture and I was completing my PhD in Animal Science at Iowa State University and starting to apply for positions across the country," Skaggs said. "Dr. John Edwards, who was on faculty at Texas A&M at the time, called me and told me of an assistant professor position opening in the Department of Animal Science. I applied for the position and was invited for an interview. Dr. Russel Cross was department chair at the time and called me following the interview on Memorial Day to offer me the position. I was ecstatic and have been here since 1992. Other universities have reached out to me regarding other positions across the country, but I have never really considered other options. Texas A&M has such a strong national reputation and attracts outstanding students which has made my time here so enjoyable," Skaggs said.

After a year of teaching, researching and advising, he transitioned into the role as Livestock Judging Coordinator. Under his leadership as the Texas A&M University Livestock Judging Coordinator, Skaggs had six National Champion teams and numerous Reserve National Champion teams.


Skaggs served as the livestock judging coordinator until 2009, when he transitioned into the role as Associate Dean for Student

Development in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University. In this role, Skaggs has recruited and advised prospective students, current students and former students.

In spring 2021, Skaggs was promoted to serve as the Associated Vice Chancellor for Producer Relations alongside his current position as Associate Dean for Student Development. Through this new role, Skaggs will work with assistant and associate vice chancellors to strengthen partnerships with agriculture industry stakeholders.

In addition to both of these roles, Skaggs also holds the San Antonio Livestock Exposition Endowed Chair, and serves as the Superintendent of the Market Steer Show at the State Fair of Texas and the Junior Market Steer show at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Additionally, he serves as the Assistant Superintendent of the Market Steer show at the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo.

Skaggs has made a lasting impact on students across Texas and the United States. The impact that Skaggs has made on the students of Texas A&M University does not go unnoticed.



"The impact that Skaggs has made on the students of Texas A&M University does not go unnoticed."

In fall 2021, efforts were made to honor him by Steven '85 and Sandra '85 Lastovica family of Salado, Texas. Through

their efforts, the Lastovica family initiated a scholarship with a goal of the scholarship reaching \$500,000. Through this scholarship, 60 percent of the income generated will go to the Texas A&M Livestock Judging team. Through this endowment, livestock judging team members at Texas A&M University will be provided with scholarships. Additionally, 40 percent of the income generated from the endowment will go to benefit a graduate-level student pursuing a Master of Agriculture in Animal Science at Texas A&M University.

Texas A&M University means a lot to Skaggs. "Texas A&M means opportunities for students to develop into leaders in agriculture and life sciences. A multitude of high impact, experiential learning experiences exist for students to explore and better prepare themselves for future careers. The Aggie Family bond is strong as our former students are so willing to assist the current students in exploring and identifying their career opportunities. Texas A&M offers such a diversity of programs that students can certainly find their passion here. I have the opportunity to work with and mentor such talented students who will definitely make a difference in the world following graduation."

The livestock judging program is a long-lasting tradition at Texas A&M University. The first livestock judging team at Texas A&M competed in 1904 and finished as Reserve National Champions. However, the first national championship at Texas A&M was won in 1913. Texas A&M University won their 12th national championship in 2013 and became

the only team in history to win national championships 100 years apart.

"Most students who are on a judging team will say that it is the most influential and beneficial activity they did in college. It not only helps polish their public speaking and decision-making skills, but just as importantly, it fuels a competitive drive in them they can continue on with the rest of their lives. Additionally, many of the students' best friends and sometimes even spouses will be their teammates," said Caleb Boardman, the current livestock judging team coordinator.

Boardman returned to Texas A&M University in fall 2020 to assume the role

as livestock judging team coordinator. Boardman says that is humbling and an honor to be a former livestock judge and now getting to serve as the coordinator. "If you've ever been through the walls of Kleberg, you know just how many industry leaders have been team members or coaches in this program.



Dr. Skaggs is the Assistant Superintendent at the San Antonio Livestock Exposition Junior Market Steer Show.

To have the opportunity to lead this legendary program where so many greats have come before me is nothing short of inspiring. It is another driving and motivating factor that we work every day to ensure we make the alumni proud. When people ask what my dream job would be when I was on the team, I'd answer 'to be like Dr. Skaggs.' So to now hold the same position he did, I guess is truly a dream come true," Boardman said.

Skaggs continues to assist in recruiting and managing certain aspects of the team. His legacy is a key motivator to why so many

students want to be a part of the livestock judging team at Texas A&M University. Boardman said, "His professionalism and legacy for excellence that he created is part of what drives me as a coach each day to make us the premier judging program in the nation."

The livestock judging program is one of three judging programs at Texas A&M University. The other two programs include: wool judging and meat judging. A lot of students participate on one team; however, some students compete on all three.

Lauren Lee '22, competed on the 2019 Reserve National Wool Judging Team, 2020 Meat Judging Team, and was a member of the 2021 Livestock Judging team. Her experience on these teams influenced her personally and professionally.

"Being a member of the 2021 Texas A&M Livestock Judging Team impacted my life in ways I didn't know were possible. I learned so much about myself and how to manage my time with school, work, judging and my personal life. High-impact experiences like being a judging team member has taught me more about life than I have ever learned sitting in a classroom. The real-life experiences teach you how to work under pressure, make critical decisions that you can defend, and be a part of something greater than yourself. All of the skills I developed while being a part of competitive teams at A&M have better prepared me for graduate school and entering the workforce after graduation," Lee said.

In addition to developing skills that will assist students post-graduation, the relationships that members gain are second to none. "My favorite experience

while being a part of three competitive judging teams at Texas A&M was the people I got to know and interact with while being on each team. Starting out as a freshman on the 2019 Reserve National Champion Wool Judging Team, I had no idea how important the sense of community and lifelong friendships I would build while being a part of competitive teams at Texas A&M would be. As an undergraduate, I had the chance to build a network of team members, coaches and coordinators that I know I can count on for the years to come," Lee said.

So far, the 2022 livestock judging team has had a great spring. They have won five out of the seven contests they have attended and have reserved the other two. Individually, the team has had several top-10 individual finishes, with several members being named high-individual overall at a contest. In the fall, the team will travel to compete for the National Champion title to bring back the bronze bull to College Station.



The Skaggs family are proud supporters and exhibitors in Brazos County.

Photos provided by: Chris Skaggs

Livestock Judge- more than a title

By: Addison Coburn '22

Being a part of the Texas A&M University Livestock Judging Team is hard work. There are many hours spent on the road, numerous practices and lots of time spent with fellow teammates.

Gage Hogan, one of the members of the 2022 Texas A&M Livestock Judging team, has been judging for many years. He started judging when he was in the fifth grade. He continued to judge through junior high, high school and furthered his livestock judging career at Blinn College in Brenham, Texas, before attending Texas A&M.

"My family moved to Texas from Michigan, when I was in the fifth grade. I had never even heard of livestock judging, but the county extension agent in Sterling County asked me to join and I did. Livestock judging has truly changed my life path and I am so glad that it did." Hogan said.

Hogan said that a normal week for the Texas A&M Livestock Judging team consists of driving through many states across the country, looking at many classes of various livestock species, such as cattle, swine, sheep and goats.

Hogan said that livestock judging competitions are mentally draining, but they can be very rewarding in the end. "Judging contests are very difficult mentally and you just feel drained afterwards, but it is worth it in the end," he said.

There are typically 12 classes of livestock in a competition. There are a mix of market classes and breeding classes. For example, the Cattleman's Congress Collegiate Judging Contest had 12 classes that consisted of MaineTainer Heifers, Market Steers, Hereford Heifers, Market Lambs, Wether Dam Ewes, Crossbred Gilts, Angus Bulls with Performance Data, Brangus Heifers, Hereford Bulls with Performance Data, Breeding

Does, Market Hogs 1 and Market Hogs 2. For market classes, competitors are expected to judge the animals based on a certain criterion for the animals to eventually go to slaughter. For breeding classes, competitors will place the classes based on the animals' breeding qualities.

Each class consists of four animals that competitors must place from best to worst. A committee is put together to discuss how the animals should be placed. Competitors are also expected to give typically eight sets of oral reasons over some of the classes in the contest. In a set of oral reasons, the competitor will explain why they placed the animals in the order that they did. They will also compliment and criticize each animal individually, as well as compare the animals to each other. Competitors are scored on their oral reasons and this score counts toward their overall score.

There are typically awards given for the high individuals and high teams in cattle, swine, sheep, goats, reasons and overall divisions.

Hogan said that his role on the Texas A&M Livestock Judging Team is as a competitor, teammate and sometimes the driver of the team van. "Livestock judging has taught me so many things that have prepared me for the real world. Livestock judging has taught me respect for others, time management and public speaking skills." Hogan said.



Photo by:
Gage Hogan



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Tradition Meets Innovation

By: Cydney Whiteus '22

The National Western Stock Show, located in Denver, Colorado, first opened its doors in 1906 and has been a place rich in tradition and history for 116 years.

Change is inevitable and the National Western Stock Show made some significant changes in 2022.

**"CHANGE IS
INEVITABLE"**

All forms of change will be met with a bit of resistance at first, and Clancy Anderson, The National Western's Livestock Coordinator, discussed the change with the long-term factors in mind.

"Think about the stability and the longevity of an event like the Stock Show. If you do not invest in modern conveniences, it is going to be so inconvenient and expensive that people will not come, and the show will die," Anderson said.

For those that are unfamiliar with the National Western Stock Show, there are two main locations frequently referred to as the "yards" and the "hill."

The "yards" is catered to the seed stock side of the industry who come and exhibit their best several heads once a year, while the "hill" is home to the junior market exhibitors and those who show across the country all winter.

The "yards" was the first location to receive change and opened their doors in January 2022 after years of planning and preparation.

The almost 20-acre "New Yards" facility is covered with hard surfaced asphalt.

The "New Yards" facility includes 180 wash stations with 90 tempered water taps and 90 tap water taps. There are four-foot splash guards installed to keep the surrounding pens dry.

There is a 100 feet by 100 feet lighted exercise arena available for exhibitors to use and can even be divided into multiple sections.

In the Yard's 24 feet by 32 feet pens there are 120 amps with overflow provided and six, 20-amp outlets having their own circuit and breaker box.

"The founders of the stock show were thinking where we will be in 20-50 years from now. Well that is what we are doing, thinking where will the stock show be 100 years from now," Anderson said.

In her interviews with different show exhibitors, Anderson said the exhibitors noted the "New Yards" facilities saved them from having to haul about a half a truckload of stuff, because of the conveniences the "New Yards" provide to them.

"Costs are extremely important to ranchers. For us to be able to provide power probably saves every single exhibitor a

couple thousand dollars, because they don't have to rent or bring a generator," Anderson said.

The increase in space of the "New Yards" also brings new possibilities for exhibitors.

Alyssa Deporter, National Western Livestock Administrator said, "There is more opportunity to include all species in the 'New Yards, which has not always been the case for a very long time. It's always been cattle or other specialty animals."

Another great thing about the "New Yards" is the accessibility it has to offer those who are unable to easily maneuver on uneven surfaces

The "Old Yards" was made up of broken gravel, dirt, concrete and brick and someone who has difficulty maneuvering on uneven surfaces wouldn't be able to experience it the way they can now with the consistent footing offered in the "New Yards."

In the new HW Huchison and Family Stockyards Event Centers, there is an elevator



The new wash tempered water wash racks being put to use by a Hereford exhibitor.

that runs between the first and second floor, allowing patrons unable to use the stairs to still have access to the second floor.

"We got a review back from a gentleman with a disability and he has never been able to see an auction from the top level until now, because we now have an elevator in the sale ring," Anderson said.

The construction for The Sue Anschutz-Rodgers Livestock Center which will be the "New Hill" is slated for completion in 2025 and will cover approximately 30-acres of ground.

The "New Hill" will have stadium arena seating 5,000; 200,000 square-feet of livestock space; 75,000 square-foot junior market barn that will be able to house over 1,400 head of cattle; an auction arena with 700 seats; and many more great features.

"Going forward they are going to continue to incorporate things from the previous facilities to make it a unified space. Before you saw it as "down in the yards" and then you had to walk all the way up to the hill. Having the facilities right there back-to-back has never been the case before," DePorter said.

DePorter said, "It is enticing for exhibitors and probably anyone in the industry that all the business happens right there."

There was a lot of concern around the changes to come when the idea for the "New Yards" and "New Hill" was proposed. People were afraid of losing the history and traditions that had been around for so many years.

Anderson understands the importance of the National Western's history not only as the livestock coordinator but also as a Colorado



The new auction arena in the Stockyards Event Center that has 635 fixed seats, and can add another 200 seats on the concourse. Photo by: Legacy Livestock Imaging

native and former Catch-A-Calf participant.

Anderson says she grew up walking the cat walks in the yards with friends and skipping school to attend stock shows.

The new facilities are being funded by the city and county of Denver and they are very respectful of the historical aspects of the show.

When the dismantling of the "Old Yards" began, inventory was taken for every hinge, board, screw, gate and more to properly and respectfully reimplement these pieces into the new facilities.

"The "Old Yards" wood was reincorporated into the "New Yards" in unique ways covering up transformers and we created landscaping using old fences," Anderson said.

Other ways history is being reincorporated is through the wall of champions that displays champions from

past decades that allows people to reflect on how the industry has changed over time.

The wall of champions showcases previous winners from the pen and carload cattle shows of various breeds such as Red Angus, Wagyu and Texas Longhorns.

The Herds Sire Display is where producers and companies can market their genetics to potential customers.

Though the "New Yards" and "New Hill" will bring new memories and traditions, the old ones shall live on through photos and stories passed from generation to generation.

As a former exhibitor, DePorter says the most historic aspect of the National Western is walking the corridor into the hallway and into Stadium Arena and onto the dirt, and the feeling will never get old for her.

Anderson's favorite part about the National Western Stock Show is hosting

interns each year. She said many of them have become good friends and peers of hers and she enjoys seeing them become successful after their internships.

Each year, the National Western hosts around 28 interns ranging from the administration department to the livestock department.

The livestock department hosts nine interns each year.

The interns gain hands-on experience working with exhibitors, breed associations and National Westerns show managers.

Duties the interns can expect to partake in include clerking shows and sales, operating a webcasting camera, working in the satellite and feed offices and much more.

Lilly Koechevar, a Texas A&M Meat Science graduate student served as a 2022 National Western Livestock Intern.

Koechevar said, "My intern experience with National Western allowed me to gain new knowledge about the show industry, while allowing me the privilege to network with key associations. Spending time with the other interns made all the hard work so much more fun!"

The applications for the 2023 National Western Stock Show internships will come out in early fall and can be found on the show's website (nationalwestern.com) under the get involved tab.

The big changes for the National Western are not out with the old and in with the new situation, Anderson said, "Having the facilities we have now is an insurance policy to make sure that we can still keep the industry alive. With the updated facilities, we can truly serve livestock people the way they should be served."



The Angus Show is taking place in the Stadium Arena, surrounded by the legendary green stadium seats.

Photos by: Legacy Livestock Imaging

Howdy, from COALS students abroad

By: Kate Dreyer '23

Merely weeks before news of the coronavirus pandemic began circulating around major media outlets, Helena MacCrossan, '23, then a freshman, was taking in the sights, smells and culture of central Mexico. She was a student on the International Poultry Production study abroad to San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato and Queretaro, Mexico.

While in central Mexico, MacCrossan visited Pilgrim's Pride's poultry production plants, historical sites, markets and museums.

The International Poultry Production study abroad is one of the many international programs offered by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (COALS). It is also one of the many programs that has not resumed since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak.

According to the COALS website, there are four types of study abroad programs: faculty-led, exchange, field trips and affiliate provider. In total, the college offers 50 study abroad programs.

After a two-year travel hiatus, study abroad

programs are slowly beginning to resume. For example, the faculty-led, winter Costa Rica Culture in Agriculture and Natural Resources trip took place at the beginning of January 2022.

Gary Wingenbach, PhD, has been leading the Costa Rica Culture in Agriculture and Natural Resources study abroad since 2017.

"This is a very popular program because it fits well between the semesters and is also very low cost," Wingenbach said.

This year, only 14 students traveled to Costa Rica due to COVID-19 vaccination requirements, restrictions and general hesitation toward travel, Wingenbach said. In previous years, upwards of 30 students attended.

Travel abroad does not look the same as it did in years past. The locations visited in January were the same places visited in past years, but masks were required at all times and there was physical distancing in place, he said.

Despite the differences, students still had positive, hands-on experiences that will continue to benefit them throughout the remainder of their undergraduate career.

"I was really fortunate to go on a study abroad as a freshman and super grateful I got the experience," MacCrossan said.

By participating in an international program so early in her college career, she has been able to apply what she learned to her coursework, she said.

"I have been able to cross compare the United States poultry industry and the Mexican poultry industry," she said, "Consumers have very different expectations





there than they do here.”

MacCrossan traveled abroad right before the pandemic forced classes online.

“With classes being online that semester, I was able to take the hands-on experience I had in Mexico and apply it to my classes that should have had labs, which really enhanced my learning during a difficult time,” MacCrossan said.

Due to the pandemic, many international programs were either canceled or put online for a few hours a day.

There has been recent research that concludes virtual study abroad opportunities provide the same learning experience and outcomes as in-person trips, Wingenbach said. For some abstract majors that may be true, but not for Wingenbach's trip.

Study abroad is more than what you learn, it is about the experiences you have with those around you and the senses that are appealed to, he said.

“It is about sitting around a campfire and being in that moment, that place, taking in the sounds and smells,” he said.

Former COALS student and current law student at St. Mary's University, Coy Westbrook, '19, traveled with Wingenbach to Costa Rica in 2018.

“Through the Costa Rica study abroad program, I was able to see a slice of life that one would not get merely by visiting another country,” Westbrook said, “We were able to see actual agricultural operations, from small farms to massive coffee plantations, all while learning about another culture.”

Upon returning from his study abroad, he was able to view America and agriculture on

a global level, Westbrook said. The trip also helped him become more focused on career and education goals, which pushed him to graduate early.

MacCrossan said a big part of her international program experience was the relationships she developed with those on the trip.

“Since I traveled abroad as a freshman, I was one of the younger students on the trip which allowed me to form peer-mentor relationships with the upperclassmen,” she said.

“One of the greatest benefits of the trip was the relationship I developed with Dr. Wingenbach,” Westbrook said.

His relationship with Wingenbach helped him have an abstract titled Students' Views of Employability Skills Gained from Short-term High Impact Experiences published. The abstract is about students gaining employability skills after a short-term, high impact experience, such as a study abroad, Westbrook said.

“I witnessed this change happen in my cohort of study abroad students and myself,” he said.

Some students change their career goals as a result of participating in a study abroad, Wingenbach said.

“While the International Poultry Production Mexico trip did not influence my future goals, it definitely strengthened my interests,” MacCrossan said.

MacCrossan said she had been interested in international trade and foreign policy and experiencing both industries firsthand made her more eager to pursue those dreams.

After the trip, Westbrook gained mental clarity and self-awareness, he said. Post-returning, it was easier for Westbrook to step outside of his comfort zone, which greatly impacted his career success.

Students who participate in study abroad while in college, especially with COVID-19 impacting careers, are more competitive when it comes to job searches, Wingenbach said.

Upon returning from Costa Rica, Wingenbach asks his students to write about how they expect their experiences to impact them as a job candidate.

Students write about being more flexible in unfamiliar situations, being better listeners as a result of language barriers, being more aware of the resources that surround them, being more appreciative of what they have and being more empathetic, Wingenbach said.

"We were put in situations, such as local markets, where no one spoke English so there was a major language barrier," MacCrossan said.

She said that learning to be flexible with language barriers has positively impacted her.

"These skills are what qualifies students to be an asset to companies, and they cannot be taught in a textbook or classroom," Wingenbach said.

Aside from learning competitive skills, students are able to network with not only those on the trip, but also with the companies they work with while abroad.

"In Mexico, we worked directly with Pilgrim's Pride, and they basically offered us jobs and internships on the spot," MacCrossan said.

If she ever wants to intern with the company, she just has to reach out because she built that connection with them on her trip, MacCrossan said.

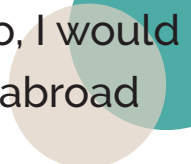
"I also developed more of a cultural

awareness and international perspective on the agriculture industry," she said, "Both of which are critical to my career goals."

"I truly believe the study abroad program was a springboard that has propelled me from Texas A&M, to working for the United States House of Representatives and Texas House of Representatives, to succeeding at the top of my class in law school, to the United States Court for the Western District of Texas to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals," Westbrook said.

Because study abroad experiences can be linked with successful careers, many wish to see international programs become part of degree plans.

"If I had the opportunity to, I would absolutely make study abroad programs mandatory," Wingenbach said.



"If I had the opportunity to, I would absolutely make study abroad mandatory"

MacCrossan said she would also like international programs to be strongly encouraged, especially for COALS students.

"Every culture participates in the agriculture industry, but every culture participates in it so differently," she said.

Realistically, putting a study abroad on degree plans would not be the easiest thing, Wingenbach said.

Over the years, he has conducted research on the barriers to participating in international programs. The main barriers to study abroad programs are finances, fear of the unknown and some misconceptions, he said.

One of the misconceptions is that going abroad will delay graduation, Wingenbach said. For the Costa Rica trip, graduation is sped up because the course is six credit hours.

"My study abroad permitted me to receive enough credit hours to graduate early, while completing an additional minor and a certificate," Westbrook said.

Many students do not travel abroad out of fear of the unknown, Wingenbach said.

"If a student is hesitant about going, I would encourage them to do their research, be comfortable with the culture, get out of their bubble, be encouraged to learn more and to just take the plunge," MacCrossan said.

Students have benefited greatly from international programs offered by COALS and will continue to benefit, especially in our changing day.

"I know that to this day, I still am able to relate back to my study abroad experience, and I will continue to excel from the small changes instituted by the program," Westbrook said.

**"I know that to this day,
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Sightseeing in Central Mexico during the International Poultry Production trip.

Photos by: Helen MacCrossan '23

COALS students who are interested in studying abroad can visit the international programs page on the college's website.

According to the website, it is recommended students meet with their advisor to determine which program works best for their career goals and degree plan. Applications open at various times throughout the year.





SPOTLIGHT

Building a Business

By: Jayla Donnelly '22

The strong smell of leather is sure to turn anyone's head, but for senior renewable natural resources major, Carter Davis '22, it's just another day at work running his business, Oxbow Leather.

"I got involved in the leather industry as a hobby which then grew," Davis said. "I saw how well we were making products, and I wanted to share it with friends and family, and that grew into the community which has continued growing since."

Davis said he has always wanted to be his own boss, but never imagined the gratification that could come with making his own business decisions.

"I love being able to impact people's lives on my own terms in a positive way," Davis said. "For example, if someone is a veteran, we give a discount—no questions asked—because it is a small way to thank them for their service to our country."

In the short year and a half of being a licensed business, Davis said he is extremely proud of how far his business

has come.

"We're in multiple retail locations including Ace Hardware. We did a deal with Brazos Valley Credit Union and got to be a part of a men's line with a company called Doing Well Daily," Davis said.

Davis said his time at Texas A&M has helped him with cultivating relationships, getting out of his comfort zone and knowing right from wrong, which he incorporates into all his business practices and how he interacts with customers.

"The Aggie Network alone has been amazing," Davis said. "One of our largest non-retail sales started from both the customer and I being students at Texas A&M, and since then he has been a loyal customer."

Davis admits that while easier said than done, he hopes other Aggies with a dream to start a business worry less about the potential downsides and look

at the big picture.

"You cannot be afraid of missing out on things, you put the work in now and later you will have time to enjoy things," Davis said. "Be comfortable with delayed gratification and meet lots of different people because people are going to make [a business] possible."

As for next steps, Davis will be attending Mays Business School upon graduation, working toward earning his Master of Science degree in Business to further his business knowledge and achieving his dreams of making Oxbow Leather a household name.



Photos provided by: Carter Davis





Serving Those Who Serve Us

By: Emily Buckner '22

Upon receiving a degree in Agricultural Communications and Journalism from Texas A&M University, Rachel Brauner '09, wanted to pursue a career that reached nationally and internationally. In 2010, she graduated with a Master of Agriculture in International Agricultural Development with hopes of traveling internationally for work. However, an even greater career awaited her.

Because of her background in communications, marketing and graphic design, Brauner was offered a job with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Military Program to work on a wounded warrior project that would provide help to service members. "I was able to travel within the state and country for this job, and it scratched that itch I had for international travel," Brauner said.

According to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension website, the Military Program has been in place since 1987 with the sole purpose of better serving military personnel and families through education and resources they might otherwise never receive. Brauner and her team have created countless programs and resources for service members and families at Fort Hood, Fort Bliss, and most recently, Joint Base San Antonio.

As her time with the Military Program continued, she was able to work on countless projects with the goal of ensuring service members, veterans and their loved ones are taken care of. Brauner said the need for services such as education on healthcare, training caregivers and substance abuse programs are necessary.

"Military families are families too; they are regular people just like the rest of us. They face the same hardships and it is easy to forget that sometimes," Brauner said. That is why she is so passionate about working to better serve them.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Military Program works closely with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Department of Defense to create programs that can be used

"Military families are families too; they are regular people just like the rest of us. They face the same hardships and it is easy to forget that sometimes."

in military homes. For example, mental health issues are growing in the military community and the Military Program created a training program called "Mental Health First Aid." Military members and their families can come and learn how to identify and deal with different disorders, Brauner said.

"I have worked with spouses and loved ones who do not even recognize their service member after they return home due to things like post traumatic stress or physical disabilities and our goal is to equip them with tools to help," Brauner said.

The Military Families Learning Network (MFLN) — Military Caregiving program is a large part of the Military Program. Brauner said she works with the Department of Defense, such as a social worker for a military family, and is able to provide education on caregiving. For example, the Military Program offers classes entitled "Powerful Tools for Caregivers" for the spouse or loved one who needs help and does not necessarily know where to start.

"I have also worked with dual-caregivers, who are not only caring for their service member, but also a child who may have something like Autism," Brauner said. There are a lot of situations where loved ones go from having a completely normal life to having their world flipped upside down, and that is why the Military Program is in place and so passionate."

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension website offers online educational resources that extend beyond the hardships a service member or military family may face. Through the website, individuals have the opportunity to take courses

or purchase materials that cover a range of topics such as how to maintain a garden, ranching and even child development information. Another neat resource provides online courses for service members or loved ones to receive certifications in things such as pest control or food handling that could aid in them finding a job. Essentially, the Military Program exists to help and serve current service members, veterans and military families in any way possible.

There are countless service members and families who are in constant need and Brauner works so hard to meet those needs.

"At the end of the day I just want to serve those who serve us so bravely each and every day," Brauner said.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Military Program works to help children of service members who may need extra support.

Photos provided by: Rachel Brauner



Load, Ready, Aim, Fire, Boom

By: Sydney Fritsch '22

A Parsons Mounted Cavalry member pulls the trigger and the blast of the Spirit of '02 cannon ringing throughout Kyle Field can mean only one thing, a Fightin' Texas Aggie touchdown.

Today, Parsons Mounted Cavalry is one of the most recognized traditions at Texas A&M University, with around 80 junior and senior cadets and 61 horses and seven mules.

The military training and horse operations tradition at Texas A&M was once a pastime of the university up until 1974. The reintroduced cavalry unit commanded by Colonel Thomas R. Parsons would become known as Parsons Mounted Cavalry.

The purpose of the use of military training and large animals teaches the cadets in the cavalry skills like confidence, leadership, decision-making and learning to control something much larger than themselves.

Cole Swinnea '23, an agricultural systems management major from Harlingen, Texas, is one of the many members of the Cavalry and talks about a day in the life of being a Texas A&M student and a member of Parsons Mounted Cavalry during the fall semester.

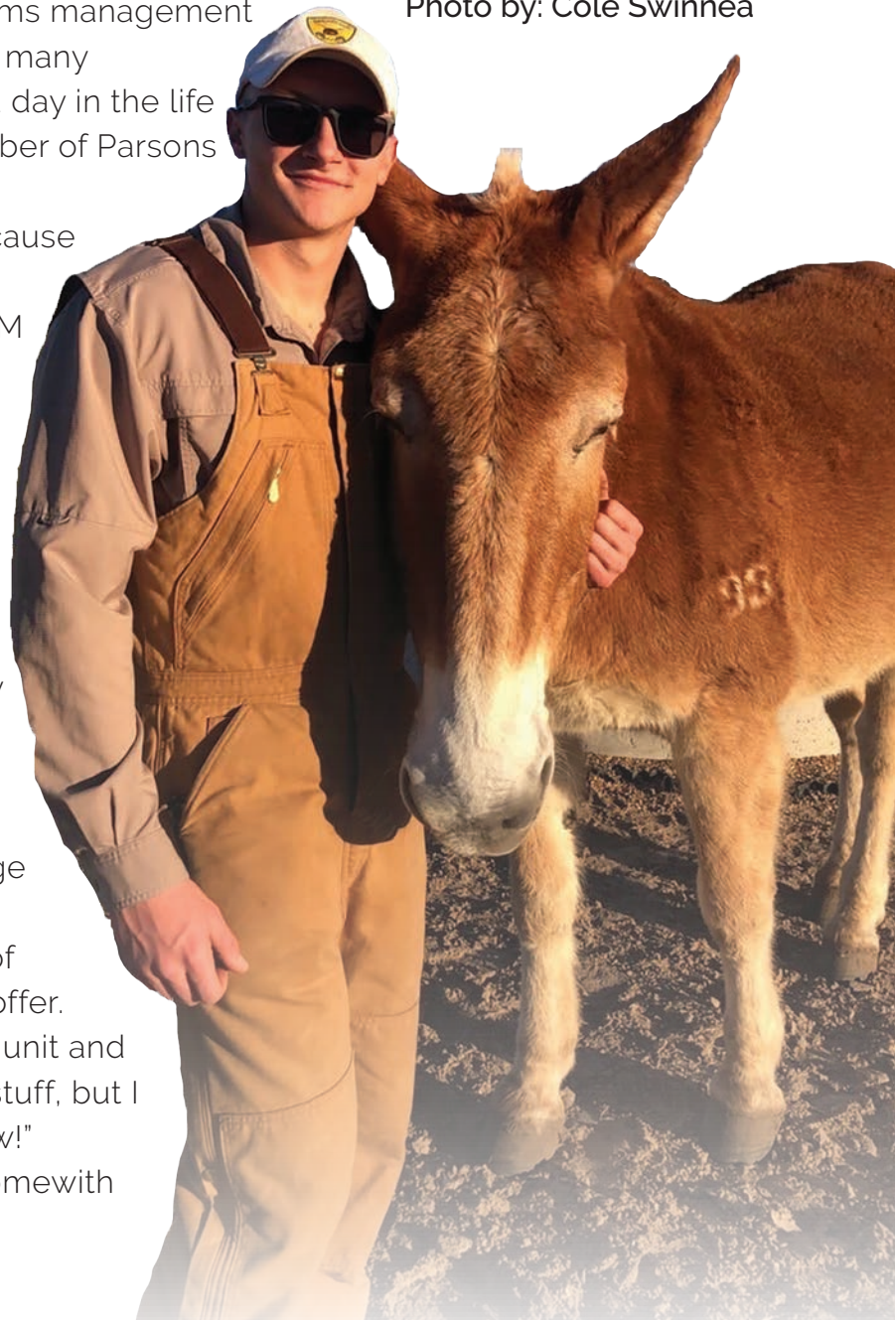
Photo by: Cole Swinnea

Swinnea said he chose Texas A&M because of the traditions and was interested in the different special units offered at Texas A&M such as the Cavalry. He said his favorite tradition at Texas A&M would have to be Silver Taps or Bonfire.

Swinnea said, "I really enjoyed the fact that Aggies always remember those who have come before us. Each of these traditions never fails to bring a tear to my eye every time I hear the three-gun volley or hear the Yell Leaders recite the last corps tribute.

There were many deciding factors when Swinnea was choosing which college to attend. He said that the Cavalry wasn't the reason he came but just the amount of different opportunities the school had to offer. He added, "...they have the marksmanship unit and I saw the Cav and I saw a bunch of other stuff, but I am definitely glad that I am in the Cav now!"

There are many responsibilities that comewith



being a cadet in the Cavalry, in order to be fully prepared for the events in the fall season, the cadets have practice daily at Fiddler's Green located at the corner of F&B Road and Harvey Mitchell Parkway.

Throughout the week you can drive by in the afternoon and see members of the Cavalry at Fiddler's Green practicing with the horses and mules and preparing for their next operation or event.

Swinnea said, "Practices in the fall include tacking up the mules, hooking them up to the wagon, and performing turns that simulate the terrain that we are going to be expected to travel through for the next operation or event such as the track around Kyle Field."

Football game day in College Station, Texas is a big deal and with that comes big responsibilities that the cadets are faced with. To ensure a successful game day, they conduct "Game Day Prep" at Fiddler's Green. Swinnea said this includes things like trimming the mane on mules and getting the wagon clean and filling it with necessary equipment. Then at the end of practice they review the plan of execution and make sure everyone knows their responsibilities for the day, Swinnea said.

The duties don't just call on game days for Cavalry members, but for some cadets they start the night before with another beloved aggie tradition, Midnight Yell.

Swinnea said, "My responsibilities include cleaning the Spirit of '15 cannon, loading it up on the night of Midnight Yell and dropping it

off at Kyle Field and having the privilege of pulling the trigger at any given time that they assign us for Midnight Yell."

There are two different cannons that are used for game week, this includes The Spirit of '02 and the Spirit of '15. Both of these cannons are used for different events. The Spirit of '15 cannon is fired during Midnight Yell, while the Spirit of '02 is used to begin the Corps Step-Off and when Texas A&M scores a touchdown throughout the football game.

After the game-day preparations and Midnight Yell take place, it's time to bring out all the stops for a Fightin' Texas Aggie football game on Saturday.

"After the game-day preparations and Midnight Yell take place, it's time to bring out all the stops for a Fightin' Texas Aggie football game on Saturday."

For Swinnea, game days as a member in Parsons Mounted Cavalry mean having a lot of responsibilities and making sure that things are done right every time. In order for the operation to go smoothly, Swinnea has a few game-day superstitions that he rehearses.

Swinnea said, "My only game-day ritual would be giving the mules extra love and attention. They love ear scratches and neck scratches. I usually hype them up before the football game, they sense your energy so they can definitely tell when we are about to go on a game day operation."

Swinnea said, "...we show up to Fiddler's Green and we all take accountability and

make sure that everyone is there. The next part is setting out all of the tack and equipment for the mules. Then we'll go catch them from the pasture, after that we'll start grooming them and tacking them up."

After the mules are tacked up, the cadets check each other's tack to make sure everything is set up properly and ready for the day. Once that is complete, they begin to 'ground drive' the mules.

Swinnea said that ground driving is, "...pretty much just before hooking them up to the wagon. We'll walk them around the pasture and simulate them being hooked up to the wagon but we're just walking behind them."

Once the ground driving is complete, it's time to say a group prayer and begin the nearly three-mile trek to Kyle Field from Fiddler's Green. The route starts down F&B Road, then turns right down Agronomy Road until the Cavalry reaches Kyle Field and stops at Centennial Park.

When the cadets and animals arrive at Centennial Park otherwise known as the "pony pen," members of the Cavalry will be able to get lunch during this time and visit with the public.

"After the pony pen, we'll stage the Spirit of '02 cannon here at the quad, then we'll shoot it to start the Corps march toward Kyle Field," Swinnea said.

The Corps of Cadets Step-Off is another one of Texas A&M's popular game-day traditions that many fans will gather an hour and half before kick-off to witness. As the Corps of Cadets make their way through campus and into Kyle Field, Parsons Mounted Cavalry follows closely behind, then they will make their lap inside of Kyle Field.

Following the conclusion of the lap around the track, the Cavalry will form back up behind Kyle Field. Swinnea said that certain members

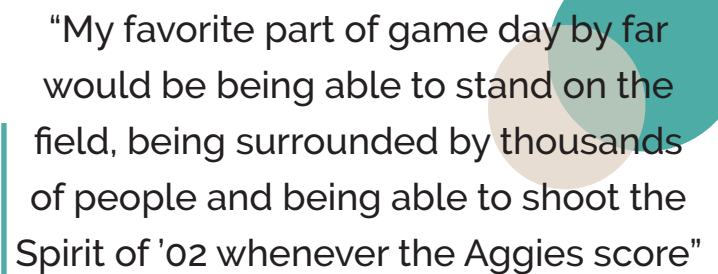
will stay back and prepare the cannon for the game while the others will ride the animals back to Fiddler's Green.

Swinnea said, "During the first and maybe second quarters of the game, they'll be dropping off all of the animals at the Green, cleaning them off, trying to hurry up to get back to the football game."

One of Swinnea's many game-day responsibilities includes blocking people off from the cannon throughout the game and firing the cannon when Texas A&M scores a touchdown.

Post-game for the Cavalry unit consists of loading up the cannon and taking it back to Fiddler's Green and then hanging out after.

When asked about his favorite part of game day, Swinnea said, "My favorite part of game day by far would be being able to stand on the field, being surrounded by thousands of people and being able to shoot the Spirit of '02 whenever the Aggies score."



"My favorite part of game day by far would be being able to stand on the field, being surrounded by thousands of people and being able to shoot the Spirit of '02 whenever the Aggies score"

When the football team is away, the Cavalry is here to stay. During the weeks that the football team has an away game or an off week, the Cavalry is still practicing at "The Green."

Swinnea explained some of the differences between game weeks and off weeks. He said, "Game weeks at the green include training that involves turns that simulate Kyle Field and we'll go up and down hills and stuff if we expect to go over

that on game day."

He added that game weeks, "Are kind of more stressful because we can't afford mistakes on game day."

As for off weeks, Swinnea said that off weeks are pretty fun because they are able to partake in different activities that they usually aren't able to do during game weeks. Some of these activities include doing trail rides, capture the flag, and taking the horses and mules to their playground where they have toys to mess around with.

Each year members of the Corps of Cadets try out for the Cavalry and a piece of advice that Swinnea would offer to incoming cadets is, "Strive to be the hardest worker, no matter what the task or activity is. Hard work at the Green never goes unnoticed."

The Cavalry is one of Texas A&M's most beloved traditions, especially since it was revived in 1974. They embody the Spirit of Aggieland by embracing the traditions and duties of being a cadet in Parson's Mounted Cavalry.



Malo pictured wearing Swinnea's hat at Fiddler's Green. Malo is one of the mule members of the Cavalry. Photo by: Cole Swinnea



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From Classroom to Courtroom

By: Sterling Pieniazek '22

Most children aspire to be a vet or a doctor, however Natalie Koehler Denbow knew she wanted to be a lawyer since she was in the fifth grade. Now, she is living out her childhood dream.

Denbow graduated from Texas A&M University in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in agricultural development. Additionally, she is a 2002 graduate of South Texas College of Law in Houston. Since graduating from law school, she has served as the county attorney of Bosque County since 2009.

When it came time for her to choose where to go to college, she chose Texas A&M due to the Aggie Network. "None of my family members went to Texas A&M; however, both of my parents went to Tarleton State University," Denbow said. "I wasn't going to go anywhere else. Texas A&M has a prestigious network and I wanted to be a part of that."

"I wasn't going to go anywhere else. Texas A&M has a prestigious network and I wanted to be a part of that"

While at Texas A&M, she was a part of several student organizations. She expressed her love for her time as a student senator and as a member of Ag Council, but her favorite experience was

being an Aggie Hostess. Aggie Hostesses are recruiters for the football team. They are similar to Diamond Darlings and Aggie Sweethearts, as they help support the football team. "I loved getting the opportunity to interact with girls from all different backgrounds and majors," Denbow said.

"I loved getting the opportunity to interact with girls from all different backgrounds and majors"

In addition to several accolades, Natalie received the Buck Weirus Spirit Award when she was a freshman. The Buck Weirus Spirit Award is an award that honors 55 students each year at Texas A&M University. This award honors students that are highly involved and embody the Aggie Spirit. Receiving this award was a "huge" moment for her. At the time they only awarded it to seven freshmen. "I was really honored to receive (the Buck Weirus Spirit Award). My parents knew and actually kept it a secret from me and came to College Station on Family Weekend for the presentation. It is one of the greatest honors I've received," she said.

Being an agricultural development major helped prepare her for her career as a lawyer. "I always knew I was going to be a lawyer. Being an ag development

major allowed me to practice my public speaking skills I learned as a Texas FFA State Officer and student senator.” She said that being able to practice these skills also increased her confidence.

Natalie currently serves as the chairman of the Texas A&M Student Government Association Former Students Network in addition to other board member and chair positions for various associations and

councils.

As she looks back on her time as a student, she encourages students to be involved but not to overextend themselves. “Pick two or three things, and really focus on them. And also go to class and study.”

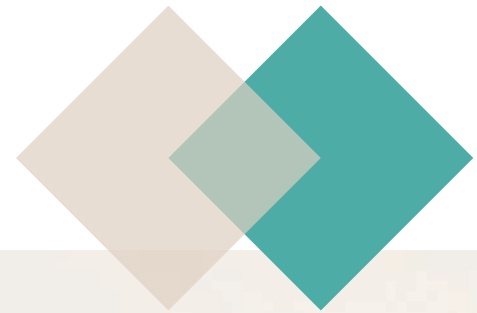


Photo provided by: Natalie Koehler Denbow

Ag Involvement from behind the camera

By: Samantha Corn '22

Photography has been around for almost 200 years. There have been major innovations made, and at this point in time, the possibilities are endless when it comes to capturing an image. Joelynn Rathmann is a prime example of paving the way with a singular mind and determination to make an impact through photography. Rathmann, Fightin' Texas Aggie Class of 2010, earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in agricultural communications and journalism. Since then, she has become one of the most esteemed livestock photographers in the game. During her career, she has captured numerous livestock shows, sale animals, senior photos, livestock judging competitions, State 4-H events and so much more. Since beginning her photography journey, she has become the owner of Joelynn Rathmann Photography, as well as behavioral specialist and social media director at J-J (J bar J) Rathmann Show Cattle in Smithville, Texas.

Question: What was a point in your college career that helped you determine what you wanted to pursue?

Answer: Deep down, I always knew I would be a livestock photographer. I know that is somewhat hard to believe, but when I was about eight years old, I pointed to the lady who was doing the backdrop pictures at our state fair (Linde's Livestock Photos, and the Pennsylvania Farm Show), and told my mom I wanted to be the picture lady. She told me that was silly and near impossible to achieve as a career. I knew

she wasn't entirely wrong.

However, I kept that dream in my back pocket all throughout my collegiate career. I attended Butler Community College in El Dorado, Kansas, for livestock judging, which got me into the circle of stockmen who lit such a passion in my belly for the livestock industry. I was just a girl from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, yet I was talking with the leaders in the cattle world. I felt confident, intelligent and hungry for their respect. I knew I was doomed to stay in the national show cattle circle, I just wasn't sure how.

When I chose to further my education at Texas A&M, it just made sense to be in ag communications. However, the photography class was only offered in the fall semester... and on Saturdays. Well, I'm a judging kid; it's all I've ever done. So, I was NOT about to miss my Saturdays on the road or at practice. My photography dream did not overshadow my judging career.

During this time, I got into the writing side of ag communications. Oddly enough, it was the AgriLeader class that re-lit a fire I didn't know was smoking for years. I found that I absolutely loved to write. My grammar and editing needed work, but telling someone's story, putting their experiences into a song on paper... was such a rush for me. I loved every second of it.

I chose to use future fellow

photographer Devin Sisk (then Felgar) as my feature story. She was Miss Rodeo Texas, and a true friend. Showing her strength and beauty through words and reflections was simply awe-inspiring. I was in love with how a feature could make the reader feel so special, so "one" with the subject. I was hooked. From that semester on, I wanted to write. And I did. A lot!

Now, I have written for every major livestock publication in the nation, and truly miss getting to research, interview and tell other's tales. I lucked into the livestock photography world shortly after graduation. But I truly think that writing, and the classes I had with Dr. [Douglas P.] Starr at [Texas A&M] TAMU, gave me the confidence I needed to make that initial step toward my original lifelong dream.

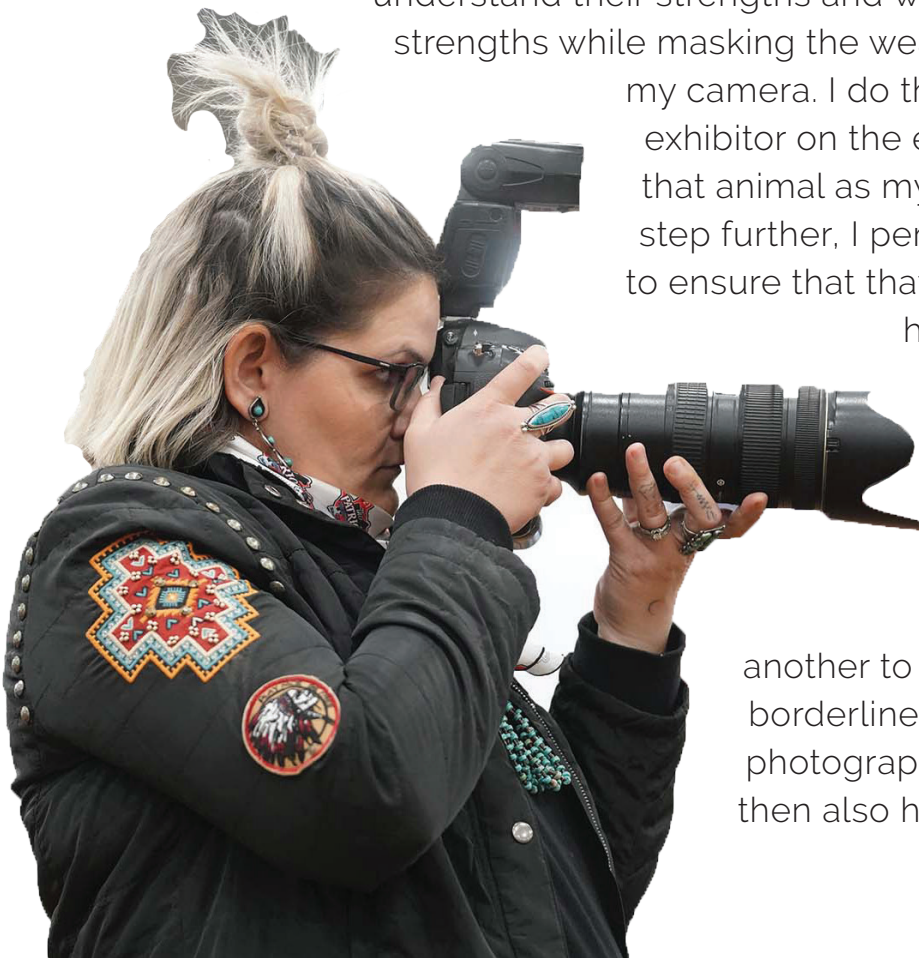
Question: Were there any activities or organizations you were involved in while at Texas A&M?

Answer: I was a member of the 2009 National Winning Livestock Judging Team. Additionally, I was a member of the Saddle and Sirloin Club and Texas Aggie Cattlewomen's Organization.

Question: Explain what your occupation is and what you do on a daily basis.

Answer: As a livestock photographer, my ultimate goal is to analyze the animal in front of me effectively and efficiently. It is to recognize and understand their strengths and weaknesses, highlight those strengths while masking the weaknesses through the snap of

my camera. I do this, all the while keeping the exhibitor on the end of the halter or head of that animal as my utmost priority. To go one step further, I personally do everything I can to ensure that that exhibitor has the absolute highest-level experience when they interact with me, whether that be at the backdrop, or when I congratulate them outside of the ring. It is one thing to be a photographer. It's another to know livestock. However, it is borderline unheard of to be a qualified photographer who truly knows stock, and then also has the biggest heart for the



youth that control our industry's future.

I do this job because I love kids, and I want them to look back on their favorite moments and see the most perfect memories, rather than just a picture. I crave capturing every emotion, every ounce of effort these kids put into their projects. I am not the photographer that is standing at the backdrop for their paycheck. I am the human who is there excited for my friends when they land a brand and ready to cry with them when they make the lap. I am a human with a heart bigger than Texas... the camera is just one of my many accessories.

On a daily basis, I am either at a show working from before that first animal hits the ring to well into the following morning, editing the day's images or I am at our family's ranch, caring for our 200 head of cattle. We raise show steers, so no matter what hat I am wearing, a youth exhibitor learning through his/her hold on a halter is my one and only goal.

I have drastically stepped away from the photography world in order to help with our cattle. However, I am still there for the kids. I am still sitting in the stands, even if we don't have a steer in a certain class. I am there cheering on the exhibitors, hugging their necks when they succeed, and offering a shoulder and warm smile when things don't work out the way they hoped. All day, every day, my world revolves around what that show ring can teach our kids.

Question: What steps did you take/what other paths led you to this career?

Answer: The confidence and the people



skills I gained through judging taught me, allowed me to take the chance in applying to livestock photography companies. I had zero experience and knew nothing about how the camera worked, but I had made connections with others in the industry and in our deal word of mouth is everything.

Question: If you were able to speak to students who are pursuing similar careers or similar paths as you, what is something that you wish you would have known or been told?

Answer: You do not have to know anything about your desired career. You also don't have to have any professional training in said field. You just have to be a good person who is willing to hustle.

Right now, the livestock photography

"You do not have to know anything about your desired career. You also don't have to have any professional training in said field. You just have to be a good person who is willing to hustle."

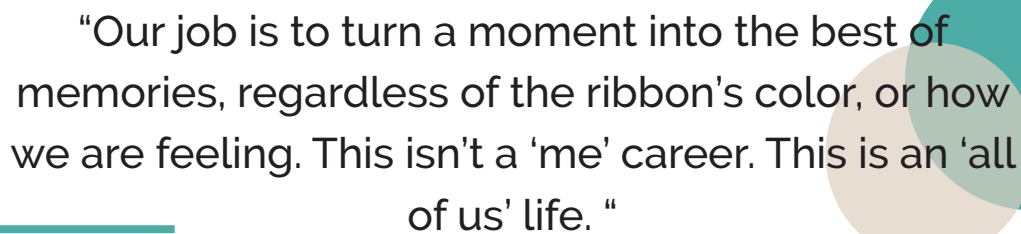
field is so saturated with talent. These kids are popping out of the woodwork left and right, knowing their cameras like I never could imagine. However, that doesn't mean there are enough people who are capable of putting their subjects truly first. There aren't enough photographers who understand the power they hold in their hands with that camera.

Yes, we need to know our cameras. Cool. YouTube it. And sure, knowing stock is VERY helpful. But again, you can YouTube that. But you can't teach passion. You can't teach an understanding of how much it means to that senior who just branded at a Texas major for the first time in their show career. You can't teach someone to sit and listen to the announcer go over

I walked up. The young man said, that's the first buckle he ever won. I said, I remember. He teared up, and said 'I remember you being there too, you gave me a high five and made me feel like a champion.'

That is why we do this. It is our job to make each and every single exhibitor feel like a champion. To remember that experience, that interaction with the photographer, and remember the joy they felt in that moment. Our job is to turn a moment into the best of memories, regardless of the ribbon's color, or how we are feeling. This isn't a 'me' career. This is an 'all of us' life.

In today's time, capturing and sharing moments is growing faster than ever. The



“Our job is to turn a moment into the best of memories, regardless of the ribbon's color, or how we are feeling. This isn't a 'me' career. This is an 'all of us' life. “

each exhibitor's name in a class, and then remember those names.

You don't learn humanity in a classroom. You can't buy a book that will make you a compassionate friend to the younger generations. It isn't taught. You either have that passion or you don't.

As I respond to these answers, I am looking at the pictures I took tonight of a senior I watched grow up right before my eyes. I am stuck on one image. It is his buckle. I knew the buckle the second

saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words” could not be more accurate, especially when it is captured with the intent of lasting a lifetime. Leaders like Rathmann are to thank for much of that.

Photos by: Joelynn Rathmann



SPOTLIGHT

Taking Talent to TV

By: Elizabeth Hord '22

From the outside he may look like just any other facilities manager in the agricultural engineering department, but once you get a closer look this Texas A&M University staff member has much more experience than you would expect.

Richard Epting is a facilities manager of five buildings in the Texas A&M Agriculture Engineering Research Lab & Shop center. This job consists of making sure everything is running smoothly for all the research that takes place in these buildings.

"You end up doing a lot more and learning a lot more," Epting said of what it is like working in the department of Agricultural Engineering at Texas A&M.

For 36 years Epting has called the campus a second home.

"I love my job. I am excited to get up every morning to come to work. We are like a big family here, and I think that is a part of what makes the job so great," Epting said.

Not only is Epting a favorite among students in the department, but he was also featured on the History Channels show *Forged in Fire* where he shows off his custom-made knives—a skill that came to him when he was not expecting it.

Self-taught, Epting walked into Hastings and found a magazine on blades. Since then, he has never stopped learning and creates incredible custom pieces.

"The experience I got on the show was incredible. I met some amazing people while there," Epting said.

Epting made it to the finale but ended up placing fourth in the competition.

Since being on the show—and when he has time away from his five children—Epting enjoys teaching classes on how to build knives. He says he has taught individuals as young as 11 and as old as 70.

While the show helped gain exposure, the Aggie Network can be one of the greatest things if you own a business.

"The Aggie Network is a great thing. I have a ton of old students and parents come back and purchase a custom piece off of me after they graduate," Epting said.

While Epting might not have graduated an Aggie, he embodies everything the school stands for. He leaves students with these simple words: "Never stop learning, ask questions and do what you love."

Photo provided by: Richard Epting

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Writing Her Own Story

By: Larissa Villegas '22

What started as a summer internship her junior year of college has turned into a 30-year career for Brenda Carlson, a 1988 Texas A&M University graduate. Her degree in agricultural journalism propelled her into a career with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) where she currently serves as the National Strategic Communications Coordinator for the Farm Production and Conservation Mission area under Secretary Robert Barney. Through a multitude of experiences and connections, Carlson

shares her advice with agricultural communications and journalism students today.

Question: How did you know agriculture communications was the major for you?

Answer: I knew from the time I started in the National FFA Organization in high school that I enjoyed feature writing, presenting, public speaking and leadership workshops. Once I found out agriculture journalism (that's what it was called at the time) encompassed everything like public affairs, media relations, the true hard news writing, I knew from jump street that's what I wanted to do, and I never wavered from that. I was fortunate to find my passion early and then find a major at a great university like Texas A&M that allowed me to pursue that passion.

Question: Tell us how you started your career with the USDA.

Answer: Between my junior and senior year, I moved to Nebraska for an internship with USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and my very first job was editing their soil service manuscript. When I graduated in December 1988, I knew I was going back to work for the USDA, but they didn't have an opening for a true public affairs specialist. I began a technical role for the agency, while building my skill set in public affairs. As a recent graduate,



Brenda Carlson



I was kind of bummed. I wanted to go straight into public affairs. In hindsight, the time that I spent working in the field, on the farms, on the ranch speaking directly with the farmers and ranchers, was invaluable to my career. It gave me a perspective of how producers receive and process information and their view on the media that they consume.

All of your life experiences make you who you are. As a communicator the more experiences that you have contribute to your success. Just making the most of every opportunity that you're provided and the ability to take away those nuggets of information and carry them with you throughout your career are super important.

Question: How has COVID-19 affected your job?

Answer: As a communications

whether that's through media, interviews, virtual presentations or events. We've made it work and we've made it work well.

Question: The Aggie Network is such a key component of Texas A&M. How has your experience been with Aggie connections?

Answer: I've had a lot of interns who were all agricultural communications majors that I am still close with today. The one thing I always tell them is that the agriculture industry is very much like being an Aggie. It is the smallest/largest industry you will work in; every day I connect with Aggies that work in the industry. I can't tell you the countless number of times I've gotten on a plane,

“The one thing I always tell them is that the agriculture industry is very much like being an Aggie. It is the smallest/largest industry you will work in; every day I connect with Aggies that work in the industry”

professional, I get my energy from interacting with people. Teams and Zoom have been a lifeline for me to continue to do my job and doing it well, but I miss the interaction with colleagues and people in the agriculture industry. You learn to adapt. I've learned to provide communications support to USDA leadership virtually,

and I make a connection with someone simply because I'm wearing my ring. You make lifelong relationships in this industry simply from being an Aggie.

Question: What advice would you give to students who feel lost in their major or those who feel like they don't know what to do after graduation?

Answer: It is all possible. Seek out that internship or job shadow. If you can get an idea of how what you're learning in the classroom could be applied in the real world and learn what your niche is, do it. You will have a much better idea of what you want to do after graduation and seek out that job of a lifetime. All the skill sets learned as an ag comm major are so marketable in the agriculture industry. The sky's the limit.

Question: What is your favorite memory as an agriculture journalism student?

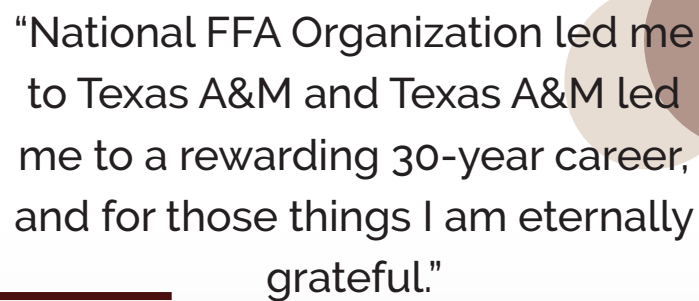
Answer: One of my favorite memories was with professor Dr. Howard Hesby. He took agriculture economic and animal science students on a spring break trip to Washington D.C. and New York City. That trip is when I learned that I wanted to be involved in the federal government. I wanted to be part of this amazing place where all these decisions

impact so many people on a daily basis. It is really the experience that took me down the path toward the USDA and ultimately a 30-year career with the department.

Question: What is your favorite memory at Texas A&M all together?

Answer: Yell Practice. Bonfire—I was still a student when we had Bonfire on campus. Game day Saturday's. All the pageantry and tradition that goes along with that; those are cherished memories for me. That made me feel special in such a huge setting of an amazing group of individuals that are Texas A&M Aggies.

National FFA Organization led me to Texas A&M and Texas A&M led me to a rewarding 30-year career, and for those things I am eternally grateful.



“National FFA Organization led me to Texas A&M and Texas A&M led me to a rewarding 30-year career, and for those things I am eternally grateful.”



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Educate, Exchange, Engage

By: Caydi Blaha '22



Virtual Exchange is becoming more popular as an innovative way to provide international experiences for students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In partnership with the School of Agriculture, Fertilization and Environmental Sciences at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University in Morocco, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University has developed a collaborative virtual exchange course that connects students from across the Atlantic Ocean to work together on agricultural projects.

"ENGAGE is an acronym that stands for Effectively Navigating Global Awareness through Guided Exchange," Ana Casas said. Casas serves as the program coordinator for ENGAGE, as well as helping facilitate the course lectures.

This course is a virtual exchange and does not require travel. Students have a unique opportunity to collaborate with international peers to learn more about culture and agriculture around the world. This type of program provides an equitable alternative to traditional study abroad experiences. Many students cannot afford to go abroad but need to gain cultural competencies for personal and professional benefit. Collaborating with international students provides participants real-world experiences and skills that enhance their abilities to solve problems in their communities.

"ENGAGE is a funded grant program through the Aspen Institute, which is a private

organization that funds a lot of virtual exchanges in the Middle Eastern countries and Northern African countries," Casas said.

The Stevens Initiative is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, with funding provided by the U.S. Government, and is administered by the Aspen Institute. It is also supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and the governments of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.

According to the Stevens Initiative, ENGAGE immerses both graduate and undergraduate participants in a virtual environment of diverse teamwork, active listening, conflict management, leadership/followership, critical thinking, problem solving and effective communication through positive dialogue. Through these facilitated dialogues and intentional activities, participants develop critical skills that are relevant in today's global workforce. Up until the fall semester of 2021, the ENGAGE program and ALEC 350 course were completely virtual from August of 2020. In the fall, the class was able to meet in person and chat through Zoom with the students in Morocco.

"ENGAGE ties into ALEC 350, which is Global Agricultural Issues, because at one point in your life you will encounter someone who is not from the United States, from a different culture or celebrates a different holiday," Casas said.

In the Global Agricultural Issues class a main focus is on sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals made by the United Nations. The fourth sustainable development goal is ensuring inclusive and

equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

"Utilizing that virtual exchange and digital portion of class is a great way to make education more accessible to a greater number of students, not just here but other places as well," Casas said.

The ENGAGE portion of the course focuses on intercultural dialogue and how to be globally minded.

"We focus a lot on digital literacy, empathetic communication, understanding different cultures and how to integrate working with different groups of people," Casas said. She explains that once a student graduates from college and they have participated in a program like this they are able to work with different groups of people and it makes them a very understanding and culturally sensitive member of society.

Jack Elliot, PhD, serves as the professor for the ALEC 350 course, along with two graduate teaching assistants Megan Gould and Olawunmi Ilesanmi for the Spring 2022 semester. "I think Dr. Elliot is a fantastic instructor and I think students really learned a lot," Gould said.

The teaching assistants serve as the communication between students in the course and Casas serves as the program director. "We also worked with merging the ENGAGE topics with what we were discussing in class," Gould said.

For students wanting to pursue a career in international agriculture or just international studies in general, this course can be very beneficial.

"For someone who has never really traveled or studied abroad or had to work through language barriers with other people



Ana Casas, serves as the program director for the ENGAGE program.



Jack Elliot, PhD, is the professor of the ALEC 350 course that is the host for ENGAGE.

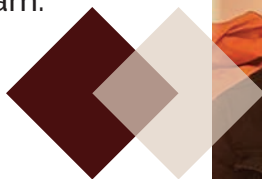
from different places, it's really important to have these conversations and interactions with people who don't speak English well or did not speak English as their first language," Casas said.

The program is a great way to not only interact with others from different places, but also to be able to learn and understand their culture and gain a new perspective on how to view others.

"Being able to work with these people that don't speak the same language as us and are equally as brilliant, getting masters and PhD's in different agriculture topics it gives people the opportunity on how to work through language barriers, how to ask someone how to repeat themselves, and being empathetic toward people who don't understand what Christmas is and how to be respectful of different holidays," Casas said.

Gould said one of her favorite topics covered in the course was comparing agriculture leadership and organizations that we have in the United States with the Morocco students. "I think that is something really special about the United States agriculture education system, is the involvement that organization and leadership has in it," Gould said.

Students from Mohammed VI Polytechnic University in Morocco were able to participate in the ENGAGE program.



While most of the course focuses on students communicating with each other, they still have assignments and reflections to help them understand the bigger picture.

"A lot of the learning outcomes came from the reflections and learning activities done in class," Gould said. She said that the course instructors and program leaders really wanted the students to understand that these issues are bigger than themselves or what we are learning here in the United States. These are global issues that need to be addressed.

"Texas A&M does a really great job at teaching students the whole picture, and saying 'let's put it all in perspective'," Gould said.

The class and program will be available to join for the fall semester of 2022, and the instructors are already working on improvements to start back up again. "If we can get students to be more globally minded and more aware of what is happening around the world, I think we will raise better students," Gould said.



Photos provided by: Ana Casas



The Poultry Science Club is dedicated to building a relationship between students and industry professionals through club meetings and service projects. Members get to learn hands on about poultry through events like wing bandings, one of our biggest service projects. We hold several big social events through the year including softball games, crawfish boil, and steak fry. Our club is open to all majors!

Want to learn more about poultry?

Find us on our website <https://posc.tamu.edu/students/poultry-science-club/>



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