Long-awaited Outdoor Classroom Finally Rises on The Mall!!!

Here are a few of the first responses to the news that the classroom was ready for use.

“How wonderful! Please let me know when a class is scheduled to use the outdoor 'room' -- I’d love to get a photo/story for the Skyline! Congrats!” Cheryl Zinsmeyer

“May I reserve the outdoor classroom for Wednesday Nov 17th? I will be conducting an air pollution lab from 3:30 to 5:30 that day.” Dr. Chris Ritzi

“That is very very cool! What a gift to the university!! Thanks to your team!” Mary Schwartze, Library

“That is awesome! I saw them working on the construction of the table earlier this week and wondered what it was. What a marvelous thing for Sul Ross. We need more.” Sue Zukowski, Human Resources

“Congratulations!” Gwen Sullivan, Administrative Secretary, STEM Grant

“Now, if the classroom had a piano, it’d be perfect! It's impossible to combine outdoor learning and vocal music ... I still feel like a fish out of water. Thanks and have a good day,” Donald Freed, Music

“I sure hope the “desk” withstands the weather better than the tables did over here at the library. They are slightly cracked already, which doesn’t make me feel good about their lasting durability.” Barbara Williams, Library

“I’d like to use the outdoor classroom for my Comm 1101 freshman seminar class from 1-1:50 on Monday, November 1st. weather permitting of course. Is it available? Thanks. P.S. Do you have any plans to put any outdoor benches, tables on the Lawrence Hall end of campus? Everything looks so nice on the other end and I really like the tables at the UC. Thanks.” Helen Crane, Lobo Den, Title V
State of the QEP

By Barney Nelson, QEP Director

So how are we doing after three years of implementing our Quality Enhancement Plan?

Perhaps much of what appears to be an increasing momentum may be serendipitous, subliminal, or just coincidental. Local businesses seem to be using more connections to our natural surroundings in their advertising; we are beautifying our downtown; Texas Parks & Wildlife is forging more alliances with SRSU through wildlife and photography; more and more local restaurants are adding outdoor tables; we've had a revival of summer baseball; we see increased use of the Kokernot Lodge area and more ways to use it; the music department is choosing and creating more selections connected to nature; Kareva Mulholland has moved her Fiesta Primivera from Marshall Auditorium to the Kokernot Amphitheatre and Lodge; and The Skyline now has an environment page. We also seem to be attracting and retaining more students interested in the sciences.

It might all be coincidence, but it could also be power of suggestion? If Sul Ross, Alpine, and the Big Bend/Davis Mountains area has a “hot lick,” it must at least include our location and the cultures, art, politics, jobs, and businesses that depend on that location.

Several of our commitments seem to have gone amazingly well. Perhaps our biggest success, Faculty Seminar, has attracted 15, 20, and 25% of our faculty. Those attending have experienced a range of topics from available resources, to using Google Earth to plan trips, to assessment. Participants seem to have bonded and become supportive of one another.

Our Center for Outdoor Learning and Faculty Development has hosted a student conference, an Outdoor Teaching/Learning Conference that attracted 16 excellent presentations, and hosted two Outdoor EXPOs. The Center has brought in five different speakers to inspire multi-disciplinary use of our regional outdoor laboratory and other facilities. The Center has also organized ___ webinars, created a website, administered CLA testing, funded several faculty members to attend various teaching conferences and workshops, and justified the purchase of outdoor furniture and construction of an outdoor classroom. Donna Greene, Center Coordinator, also spends considerable time sending out a recruiting flyer about outdoor learning to prospective students.

What is not so good? Although all Pilot Project proposals have been creative and seemingly successful, they don’t seem to be building momentum. Participation has dropped.

Undergraduate travel is seldom used, and we are still struggling to find ways to involve students other than through their classes.

SACS is vitally interested in assessment and data-driven improvement, yet it still seems “impossible” to produce.

Future plans? As a way to get more student involvement, we hope to create two new QEP student committees for activities and assessment. Perhaps students will have some fresh ideas.
Brain and Brawn behind the event, Dr. Kathy Stein, and her gang get the cotton candy machine ready to roll.

Faculty After Five

Yo, Doc, did you really write all those books? We thought you just watched us play basketball after 5:00 and ate a little popcorn?

A female math teacher who rides motorcycles? No way!

Paul Will’s jerkey and Mazie Will’s jewelry inspired intense engagement.

Best hats!

A computer scientist who...duh, assembles computers after 5:00. Why are we not surprised?

Math and yoyos?

A knitting scientist and a bike-racer scientist? Whoa!
Dr. Jill Mulholland, lecturer at the College of Architecture at Texas A & M University, presented “Explorations in Light” March 29 to a small but appreciative audience.

Mulholland’s presentation spanned light as spectacle during world’s fairs, as power under Hitler, as a way to create moods around public buildings, and more.

Mulholland’s dissertation, Light Celebrating Place, West Texas Road Trip, resulted in four installations of light art, one of which was temporarily installed at Big Bend National Park. Her presentation included these installations.

Her experiments with the brilliant Texas sun inspired her to visualize her work as an art form, and, as she comments, she “came out as a light artist.”

Another section showed photographs of student installations as art, background for dance, and architectural enhancement.

Lauded for her creativity that envelopes objects as diverse as wind turbines, weeds, and trains, Mulholland weaves her work with perceptions of what she terms “speaking in light”; she continues to delve into this research with her examination of the mirrors used by the native peoples of Texas and the Southwest region as both message system and personal decoration. Her interest in “mirror imagery” led her to realize that “reflections take (one) to another place”—a notion she recalls is also reflected in Mayan and Aztec historical cultural perceptions of the underworld.

Mulholland received a BA in Mayan Archaeology from Rutgers College; a Masters in Interior Architecture from the University of Oregon; and a PhD in Architecture from Texas A & M. She also holds a part-time position at the International Association of Lighting Designers where she promotes and coordinates a volunteer board that furthers lighting education and works primarily with students.

For the past two years, the Fiesta Primavera has been held at our beautiful Kokernot Lodge amphitheater. Formerly held in Marshall Auditorium, director Kareva Mulholland has moved the music and dance event outside where it has also become an all day affair with arts, crafts, food, and activities for children. All proceeds go to Relay for Life.

This year’s event, April 9, will include Ranger Canyon with Charles Maxwell, The Border Blasters, Rubber Revolver with Richard Fallon and Co. (covering Beatles’ songs), The Doodlin’ Hogwallops, 432 with Rick and Jimmy, Lobos del Desierto Mariachi band, DanceTahiti, TAHTITI ITI, Mystic Gitanas bellydancers, Baile Folklorico Dancers, AHS Flag Girls, Eclectic Voyager, The Bent LoveHandles, and more! Headlining are C.W. Ayon from Las Cruces, NM and S.H.I.L.O. from Artesia, NM.

Dr. Rayford Ball demonstrates the solar telescope during Sully Super Saturday, February 19. The telescope is one of several used in Dr. Ball’s astronomy course, and this one permits the direct viewing of the Sun’s features. (Photo by Dave Rohr)
We were not impressed!

We were not impressed with the webcast “Creating Tests That Assess Higher Order Thinking Skills.” The speaker spent most of her time on lower-level testing. Several long minutes were spent on explaining how students can “out guess” multiple-choice tests and still make a passing grade, even for graduate school! Some of her “tips” for better m-c questions included avoiding the words only, never, always, and underlining the negative in any question stated negatively (EX: Which of the following should not be included?)

A synthesis sample question given was “Rearrange the amendments to the U.S. Constitution in order from least to most important in everyday life” and justify.

Perhaps one somewhat useful idea was to assign half the class one set of essay questions and the other half another set of questions, then have them grade each other’s papers and justify their grading.

Some webcasts are pretty good, some are not so good. We never know in advance. Our best programs seem to be presented by our own faculty!

Faculty Seminarites Share Secrets

One week Faculty Seminar members were asked to share teaching strategies for increasing student self-motivation.

Grant has students take notes using an outline. They’re allowed to use their notes while taking tests.

Holt spends class time tutoring rather than lecturing. Students watch instructional videos outside of class and during class are assigned a random partner to work with.

Velasco posts a question of the day on Blackboard for each class and students discuss it via Blackboard before class meets. Every Friday students fill out a Learning Self Evaluation. He finds that students now take notes without being prompted.

Nelson issues a mid-semester grade check in the form of a handout rather than Blackboard. She marks areas that need improving as well as words of encouragement.

Salazar makes students accountable for their own grade by stating on the syllabus which date the product is due for an “A”, what date merits a “B”, etc.

Jorgenson offers students extra points to put math problems on the board that they cannot answer on their own. Sometimes other students help with the solutions.

Kalam encourages students to use analytical thinking to seek information that requires asking several questions. He teaches them how to go step by step to find solutions.

Selk teaches students how to find and use good sources for their research.

Zamora asks questions in Spanish and students have to answer in Spanish. He tries to be dynamic and imbue a sense of urgency for learning.

Faculty Find Technology Is Shading UTEP’s Sun Conference

Linda McAnally, Roger Grant, and Rafael Azuaje, members of the QEP Faculty Seminar, attended the 2011 Sun Conference on Teaching and Learning in El Paso and presented their reactions to the seminar with handouts, and demonstrated related web links.

Grant presented a PowerPoint and stated that there were many good sessions and a good turnout for the conference. McAnally sent a typed report as she was out of town.

Azuaje cautioned that some ideas would not work. He said one speaker allowed students to bring any type of technology into the classroom believing students were multi-taskers and could handle it. But Azuaje said research has shown that although students seem more engaged when using technology, their learning does not increase. Although Azuaje teaches computer science, he recommends concentrating on fundamentals because technology changes so rapidly.

Robbie Ray Speaks on Critical Fractions

Remedial math professor, Robbie Ray, gave an overall summary of various QEP-related projects she’s piloted with her math students to the Faculty Seminar. Her presentation was entitled “Critical Fractions: The War on Fractions and Other Battles of Engagement.” She explained her innovative ideas to use chocolate bars, softball statistics, and the fountain area for interesting assignments and thanked the Center for the funding to make her experiments possible.
Faculty Seminar Evaluates NSSE Results

Barney Nelson presented “NSSE is Messy”, a discussion of data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). She began the presentation by handing out a sample of data from NSSE asking what the data meant. Members presented their various interpretations of the test results which was shown in graph form.

Nelson assigned a different page with four different test question data to each seminar member. Each was asked to interpret results they thought important for the group.

The group summarized that based on the accumulation of these test results SRSU seniors are not being challenged enough. McAnally thinks that NSSE does not use enough clear language on the test, that students could easily misinterpret the question, and therefore results could be skewed.

Salazar’s choice stated: “Comes to class without reading assignments or completing work.” Both Salazar and Fairlie stated that they find that Art students come unprepared for class but those students think they are prepared.

Fairlie’s choice stated: “Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.” Fairlie observed that freshmen might be answering based on their first year in school. Upper classmen are probably looking at the whole experience. There could be a breakdown in vocabulary—freshmen give different meanings to words simply from lack of experience.

Zamora’s choice stated: “Used an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment.” The results showed that SRSU freshmen and seniors use less than others. Zamora asks his students to not use internet for research because it is so unreliable.

Anderson pointed out that there are some good spoof programs online to help students learn real internet information from false.

Anderson’s choice stated: “Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class.” Anderson responded that it is not necessarily imperative to student success that they visit with faculty outside of class in order to be successful.

McAnally’s choice stated: “Number of assigned textbooks, or book-length packs of course reading.” McAnally thought the question was misleading and the student’s responses would depend on how the student interpreted the question itself. She thought the question should have been stated differently.

Ray’s choice stated: “Coursework emphasizes memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings.” Ray noted that the results showed that SRSU freshmen rate memorization time low and SRSU seniors rate time spent on memorization high.

Holt’s choice stated: “Coursework emphasizes analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory.” Holt concluded from the results that SRSU freshmen and seniors rate their opportunities for this experience lower than students rated it at all other schools.

Faculty Seminar Hikes to “The Desk” for Inspiration & Picnic

Members enjoyed reading a journal at “The Desk,” writing some of their own thoughts inspired by the view, and hearing the desk’s history from geology professor, Dr. Kevin Urbanczyk, himself a Sul Ross grad. The excursion was digitally videoed and recorded by Title V’s Sandy Bogus, and an on-line copy will hopefully be linked to the Center’s website as soon as the sound and West Texas winds are separated. The wind gives “authentic” but excessive flavor to the production.