Texas State University System Acquires Texas’ Largest Open Air Classroom!

The Christmas Mountains, a rugged 9,269-acre tract of land 12 miles northeast of Terlingua in Brewster County, will now serve as Texas’ largest open-air classroom. The Texas General Land Office announced the transfer of the property to the Texas State University System in September 2011.

Texas State University System will receive the land at no cost. Commissioner Patterson of the Texas General Land Office said “The value of the Christmas Mountains was offset by the value of the university system’s educational goals and commitment to conserving the property. In fact, I think the college students of Texas will be richer for the opportunity to study in a Texas-sized open-air classroom.”

Texas State University System will be responsible for managing the property, ensuring that the land remains open to the public, forever preserved in its present state.

All eight institutions included in the Texas State University System will be given access to the Christmas Mountains for recreation and research. The primary uses and benefits to Sul Ross include: bear corridor studies, diversity of plant species, mule deer and bighorn sheep population management and assessment, bird life, and volcanic history and activity. It will add to existing studies in geology, biology, herpetology, wildlife management, and more. In geology, for example, an igneous exposure had already been detected dating to 42 million years old and the new acquisition will lead to further studies in economic geology, exploration of structural geology, sedimentary petrology, and hydrology studies.

For more detailed information on the Christmas Mountains, go to the SRSU Outdoor Learning website (http://www.sulross.edu/pages/6696.asp) and click on Christmas Mountains under Area Attractions.

On the last day of Lobo Days, a four-day new student orientation, Helen Crane, Project Director for Title V, was joined by approximately 100 new students and pack leaders on a long and windy hike up Hancock Hill.

The goal was to provide new students with activities as well as important information regarding campus resources. Crane stated, “We were trying to incorporate an outdoor activity to highlight Alpine, the surrounding area, and our new marketing theme ‘the University of the Big Bend.’”

Student Miguel Pena, leading the hike, came up with the “spirit walk” idea. He carried an ocotillo-wood stick adorned with wild turkey feathers as he guided the hikers with cheers of encouragement.

The hikers trekked to the top of the mountain to the desk, a historical Sul Ross landmark first placed there in 1984, and after signing the notebook kept in the desk, wound their way back down the mountain to campus.

Earlier in the day the new students participated in “The Amazing Race,” a scavenger hunt activity that literally sent them all over the campus (and off) on a very long, hot afternoon. Crane was surprised when so many of them showed up later for the hike. There were so many on the rugged mountain trail that the students in front were at least one-fourth mile ahead of those bringing up the rear. Most of them were wearing the red Sul Ross t-shirts given to new students. From the perspective of the base of the mountain, the hikers looked like a long red line weaving through the rocks and yuccas.

When the hike was over the new students received a beanie with the Bar SR Bar symbol from their Lobo Pack leaders (mentors).

Crane stated, “Our goal was to engage students and build spirit and new traditions.”
Five Lobo Stars Awards given at Fall Faculty Meeting by President Maestas

SRSU President Ricardo Maestas presented five Lobo Stars Innovation awards to two students and three faculty members during the opening fall faculty meeting. The awards are given to those who have been inspirational in helping to further goals of the SRSU Quality Enhancement Plan. The QEP, beginning its third year, encourages using our location for hands-on, experiential learning as a strategy to increase student engagement with the university, the area, classes, and with learning in general.

Faculty receiving awards included Louis Harveson in recognition of the Pronghorn Restoration Project, which brought together West Texas landowners, civic leaders, Texas Parks and Wildlife biologists, concerned citizens, and students into a common cause toward research that matters.

Kareva Mulholland was recognized for moving her spring dance festival, “Fiesta Primavera,” outside to Kokernot Lodge where it has become an all-day affair.

Bill Green was recognized for his suggestion to market SRSU as the University of the Big Bend. The tag is inspired and highly significant not only in terms of capturing a sense of the vast outdoors that is our setting, but also in terms of a positive impact on our marketing and recruitment.

Students receiving awards included Marilyne Dieckert for her beautiful original compositions of music inspired by local nature, especially her piano and wind ensembles “Masada Canyon” and “Masada Storm” named for music she composed while camping in one of the Big Bend area canyons that she and her late husband named “Masada Canyon.”

Also receiving an award was Justin Hoffman for his outstanding McNair project in undergraduate research entitled: “Assessing The Success of Pronghorn Restoration in the Trans-Pecos, Texas.”

According to Maestas, “The idea that our location is not a handicap but our greatest asset seems to finally be taking on a life of its own. Everything from recruiting to serious nationally recognized research depends on this beautiful Big Bend country.”

The awards are chosen by the QEP Advisory Committee members with input from the academic deans.

New Logo Touts Our Location!

One of the most hopeful steps toward permanently imbedding into the SRSU culture a focus on outdoor learning is a new “branding” project being conducted by Sosa & Sosa Advertising Agency. They have created a recruiting logo with an emphasis on our location. New posters feature scenery and a positive view of our remoteness.
Critical Thinking Refresher Course

Marilyn McGee provided a source from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that is excellent for anyone who needs brushing up on defining or teaching critical thinking—our learning goal for the QEP.

Marilyn’s message read as follows: The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has supported the creation of four online professional development modules for educators across Texas that are now available 24/7 for full-time and adjunct faculty members to use on demand. These are in the areas of:

- Critical Thinking
- Foreign Language Teaching Methods
- Reading Comprehension
- Online Teaching

These modules can be found at http://www.txprofdev.org.

If you go to the site and explore the critical thinking part, please list it on your FE3 as QEP “critical thinking training.”

Need a Critical Thinking Rubric?

Here are three sources for many different Critical Thinking rubrics (but don’t plagiarize, design your own!):

http://www.uni.edu/adp/documents/LinksforCriticalThinkingRubrics.pdf
http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/critical%20thinking%203.pdf
http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/Critical%20Thinking-short.pdf

More support information is available on the Center for Outdoor Learning and Faculty Development website.

Next Webinar noon Oct 13 + lunch!
“Best Practices in College Teaching: Designing Effective Rubrics”

Student leaders have been piloting a student version of faculty seminar called “Lobo Stars.” Some of the issues have been: “How does this differ from Student Government?” (not fighting over money) Do freshmen enjoy orientations? (yes!) Students need a hangout place (maybe one floor of library?). How can we get a pavilion on the mall? ($$$).

Lobo Stars Student Seminar Group Meets
Outdoor Classroom Wars!
Both Kathy Stein and Chris Ritzi have been using the outdoor classroom regularly. Chris Ritzi’s BIOL 5307 class used it two class days one week and tried to book it the next, but Stein already had it booked for her ENG 1302 class. So the BIOL 5307 class used the benches under the big deodar cedar.
Ritzi says students in his BIOL 5307 class “Have gotten spoiled to being outside.”

More Math Outside!
Kris Jorgenson also took his Math 1310 class outside. His explanation: “Instructor and students measure shadows and use the mathematics of similar triangles in order to estimate the heights of trees and lamp posts.”

Climbing Ropes and Math
Mathematics major Fernando Galindo gave a presentation entitled “The Mountaineer’s Rope” for a Math Colloquium. In his abstract he said, “Rope is one of the essential pieces of mountain climbing equipment that must be tested carefully to ensure the safety of the climber. One might wonder how math is applied to an ordinary climbing rope, but the rope requires more than the usual addition and subtraction. Differential equations and a little physics are required to check the amount of force that is going to be delivered to the climber. In this discussion, we will derive a formula, review the testing requirements, and cover a few examples using the derived formula.”

QEP for SACS
If you already include or plan to add an assignment or field trip or anything connecting students to this region, be sure to help us make it “visible” to SACS. Here are a few suggestions for ways to do that:

Newsletter: be sure to send Donna Greene photos and information about your activities to include in our newsletter.

Syllabi: If you already include or plan to add a QEP connected activity, field trip, etc. to your class, please add a simple course goal (e.g., Students will analyze connections between course material and this region).

FE-3: Be sure to list any QEP connected activity on your FE-3 forms.

All of the above!
Moving Education Outside

Scarlet Anderson presented “What I Do in Education.” She teaches a three-week classroom management course, emphasizing the importance of movement and technology to help decrease disruption and increase motivation. Her student teachers develop wikis and websites where they share information and collaborate. Outdoor learning and lessons can be enriched by the use of available, low- to no-cost technologies. She encourages taking children outside to apply what they've learned in class.

Two books Anderson recommends are: Taking Inquiry Outdoors: Reading, Writing, and Science Beyond the Classroom and Moving the Classroom Outdoors

Scarlet Anderson

Butler touts “Real” assignments

Brad Butler’s Technical Writing class students prepare outdoor proposals (either out of the building or away from campus) and target an audience other than him. He attempts to prepare students for the life awaiting them after college years. Examples of projects from Butler’s Technical Writing class include:
• Burning in Boquillas: Experiencing Fire in a Riparian Ecosystem
• Training Obstacle Course for Criminal Justice and SRSU
• School Lunch Nutritional Analysis and Education
• Ride-Along: Real-Life Policing Experience

All his classes use real problems from the local area for projects that include a multi-modal presentation.

Faculty Seminar Tours Parts of ANRS

Paul Will began the tour by giving each attendee a packet of jerky he had prepared. Hamburgers cooked on the grill outside the facility were also served in the Commons area where members assembled. The Commons is a place for students and student clubs to meet. During orientation parents meet there as well. A stuffed Kodiak bear is the centerpiece of the room.

The National Intercollegiate Rodeo started at Sul Ross in 1947 and a large trophy case adorns the east side of the room. Across the room is the Range Animal Science Hall of Fame.

A bird collection donated by Bill Adams is housed within the Natural Resource Management area of the building. The Map Room is a multi-media classroom featuring different maps and is WIFI accessible as are all classrooms in the building.

Students are taught to prepare meat from conception to consumption and the facility includes a complete meat plant. Students learn about breeding, birth of an animal, feed lot finishing, and harvesting. Meat is vacuum packed and put in boxes and sold at the retail outlet there in the building. The meat is flash frozen to reduce cell damage. The retail outlet does take custom orders. Hickory wood is used in the smoke house.

The Animal Health wing contains an operating room and x-ray machine. A new vet has just been hired. Students rehab small animals and put them up for adoption.

When students graduate they know how to do things and are readily employable. Meats is a highly successful career market. Sul Ross has the highest percentage of meat graders across the country.

Growth seems limited only by the size of the room!
We worked outside as often as we could for several reasons. The class was so large that we needed the space to move around in and it was easier for me to work with the different teams. Another advantage/disadvantage was that they had to really get their foot work correct. The ground outside is not as flat as the stage, but it’s easier to land on.

We also had an impromptu audience and that spurred some of the teams to do their best for their peers who were watching. It was good to watch them try to concentrate while they were performing their fights.

We mainly stayed between the Fine Arts and Science building but one or two teams got a little more courageous towards the end of the semester and used the Mall and its benches as a place to create levels. They took the fight they had choreographed and adapted it to the new area.

It was fun watching them think though the process of using the space. There were students watching them as they passed along the sidewalks.