Students presented all aspects of their research in poster sessions.

System faculty, students converge in South Texas

By Ann Kellett
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Nearly 100 faculty members and 400 students from across the A&M System’s universities, research agencies and health science center gathered in South Texas last month to network and share research results.

A Junior Faculty Workshop was held at the Harte Research Center at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi on Nov. 3-4 and a Pathways Symposium for undergraduate and graduate students to showcase their research was held at Texas A&M University-Kingsville Nov. 4-5.

“As far as I know, we’re the only university system in the nation that’s putting together these kinds of events for its faculty and students,” said Leo Sayavedra, vice chancellor for academic and student affairs. “This is one example of how we’re leading the way.”

Sayavedra said this double emphasis, on helping new faculty develop research collaborations and on strengthening students’ research skills, is especially important in the state’s “Closing the Gaps” efforts to produce enough faculty members to replace the generation that is nearing retirement and to meet the needs of the state’s growing college-age population.

The faculty workshop was developed and organized by Lee Peddicord and Tami Davis Sayko from the System Offices, Mike Cronan and the team from the Office of Proposal Development in the Office of the Vice President of Research at Texas A&M University, and Jorja Kimball and Karen Pilant from the Texas Engineering Experiment Station. Stoney Burke, from the System’s federal relations office in Washington, D.C., provided information on how faculty can build links with federal agencies.

“This first workshop was a big success,” said Lee Peddicord, vice chancellor for research and federal relations. “Several action items were identified that will be implemented, and a number of multidisciplinary, multi-institutional affinity groups emerged, which was one of our main goals.”

These action items include a proposal development seminar for junior faculty who are in engineering, hosted by the Texas Engineering Experiment Station at its regional division locations, and a seminar on “What PIs Should Know” scheduled...
Seven undergraduate students received awards.

More than 400 A&M System undergraduate and graduate students attended the event and 282 students presented posters that summarized their research, nearly double the number who participated in the first symposium at Texas A&M at Galveston in 2003. Texas A&M University-Kingsville Graduate Dean Alberto Olivares organized the event with the participation of A&M System Council of Graduate Deans and Leo Sayavedra, Mary Sherwood and Rohit Patil from the System Office of Academic and Student Affairs.

“The symposium’s growth each year is a result of the network that has developed among the A&M System’s graduate deans and faculty—especially many of our Regents Professors—who help by serving as judges,” said Sayavedra.

James Hallmark, dean of the Graduate School and Research at West Texas A&M University, coordinated this year’s judging.

“I consider the Pathways event particularly valuable because it welcomes and even encourages everything from works in progress to completed doctoral dissertations,” Hallmark said. “This breadth of exposure is particularly useful to the student unsure of his or her abilities. Second, students—particularly at schools like mine—often feel isolated from students at other universities. The Pathways conference brought them all together, breaking down those barriers of isolation.”

Don Beach, a professor of educational administration at Tarleton State University and Pathways Symposium judge, spent his birthday as a judge.

“As an undergraduate microbiology major at Texas Tech, I would have loved to have had the opportunity to engage in first-hand research,” Beach said. “Instead, I was on the fringe of work being done by my instructors. The System symposium provides students—both graduates and undergraduates—with the format to engage in their own research and present it. This is a rare and unique opportunity. It is one of the best things the A&M System Symposium does.”

Undergraduate students who received first-place awards for their research presentations were Karen Brown of West Texas A&M and Priscilla Pepper of Texas A&M. Graduate student awardees were Miriam Olivares for late 2006 for those who submitted proposals to the TEES regional divisions. The seminar will cover budgets and annual project reports for faculty who have secured or anticipate securing funding for the first time.

Several of the participants then went to Kingsville to serve as judges at the third annual Pathways Symposium. This event is part of the A&M System’s Pathways to the Doctorate program, established in 2002 to provide opportunities for undergraduates across the A&M System to continue their educations in graduate programs at A&M System universities.

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of Texas A&M, Jeffrey Brister of Tarleton and Jason Estrella of A&M-Kingsville.

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