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TEXAS A&M
INTERNATIONAL
UNIVERSITY



TAMIU'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

**PART 11 OF 12:
DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

TAMIU 50th Anniversary

TAMIU's 50th anniversary Diversity in Higher Education

By Christian Alejandro Ocampo
Laredo Morning Times

According to the American Council on Education, diversity enriches the educational experience, and the different perspectives found on campuses may lead to lessons that can only be taught best by a diverse and social environment. Additionally, it promotes growth and a healthy

society and strengthens communities and the workplace.

At Texas A&M International University, a great emphasis has been placed on not only educating students from the region and the world but also helping them become global citizens. In September, TAMIU ranked eighth in the nation in racial diversity among faculty members. It also has an average of over 100 international students and over 300 international faculty members every semester.

“Our international students and our international faculty bring a diversity to this campus and it’s a great diversity,” TAMIU president Dr. Pablo Arenaz said. “(They) bring a diversity that has a positive impact on everybody, and it brings a richness to the university experience, both for students and faculty; it’s a great thing that we have on this campus ... and that our international students really do become integrated as a part of this campus. They impart their culture to the stu-

dents, and I think that’s an important part of all of that.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Laredo holds a 95.4% Hispanic population, with a white population of 3.6% and Black, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, etc. all below 1%. However, TAMIU’s focus on international studies allows students from around the world to learn and teach about their culture to those who may have never traveled outside the U.S. and Mexico.



Photo by Christian Alejandro Ocampo / Laredo Morning Times

A globe sits atop TAMIU's Trailblazers Tower, built in 2020 alongside the Academic Innovation Center.

TAMIU 50th Anniversary



Dr. Irma Cantu

Each facet of university life is improved by a vast set of multiple perspectives that give others a chance to grow. By understanding the struggles of one culture, others can learn ways to help and prevent those struggles from exacerbating, especially during the current Black Lives Matter Movement, struggles the LGBTQ+ community faces, violence against women and other divisive and withstanding issues around the world. A current online petition written by Xavier College Preparatory in Phoenix demands for a review and advancement to school district curriculums and objectives to include more social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion. It also states that education is the most valuable tool to dismantle racism and create a more equitable society.

So, whether it's diversity of race, gender and/or sexual orientation, a community that upholds the true values of multiculturalism and works together towards them can lead to better global society and prepare students for the real world.

Diverse Minds, Diverse Experience

TAMIU's cast of professors and students is a boon that provides multiple perspectives around the different fields of study. With professors from around the world, Laredo students can ask questions and learn from one another with first-hand experience



Dr. Alfred Addo-Mensah



Dr. Marivic Torregosa

about a location or culture of their interest. In college, this opportunity may lead a student to travel abroad or perhaps change their entire future to experience the world through their career goal. Peer-to-peer cooperation also benefits as students



Dr. Mehnaaz Momen

learn more about their classmates and each other's culture.

Dr. Marivic Torregosa, TAMIU College of Nursing and Health Sciences Dean, was born in Bohol, an island in the Philippines. According to her, the Asian Pacific American culture has a great emphasis on education, and she said that a college education is the greatest inheritance parents can provide to their children.

"I think we just need to continue to embrace, celebrate and practice our values, culture and traditions as these have made us strong and remain united throughout the decades to overcome

struggles and challenges and brought us to where we are today."

Alumnus, LGBTQ+ member and children's book author Alejandro Maza said that it is important that an LGBTQ+ member can be themselves without facing repercussions anywhere. As he and his husband work to raise their daughter, they also advocate for equal rights for all LGBTQ+ members and are a shining example of a loving and diverse family.

"Having a diverse community within the workplace, university campuses and in general is always important," Maza said. "There is so much we can contribute to this society. As we all know, diversity is fundamental in an inclusive society which we are aiming to be."

A Woman's Rights ac-

TAMIU 50th Anniversary



Photos by Christian Alejandro Ocampo / Laredo Morning Times

Students marched through TAMU in commemoration of International Women's Day

tivist and a Spanish professor, Dr. Irma Cantu has organized marches and has written about female writers and their struggles. As the world is made up of 51% women, Cantu said that there needs to be more women in power and a greater understanding of the unfairness in the current system.

“We all have to acknowledge that we live in a system that tends to be unfair to women. It will require many steps to reach a non-biased gender community,” Cantu said. “It is a long journey, so empathy, solidarity and strength are the qualities we need to develop in order to succeed.”

“Currently, I am writing an article on three female poets from our



A 2019 TAMU Dance Recital showcases multiple groups dancing folklorico, hip-hop and more.

region who have written about violence from a very different perspective than more visible male narrators. It is a topic of major importance to all as female voices have systematically been ignored. These voices should join other representations to really reveal a more complex understanding of the phenomena.”

Dr. Conchita Hickey, Dean Emerita and Senior Lecturer, believes that young women look to other women in leadership positions for direction, inspiration and clarity of vision for their own lives. Women everywhere deserve to be taught as young girls that they can achieve anything and to be empowered through education, politics, finances and more.

She said that diverse ideas, opin-

TAMIU 50th Anniversary



Courtesy of Andrea Valdes

As a part of TAMIU's Study Abroad program, Andrea Valdes visits Germany.

ions, skill sets and visions are necessary to grow and excel at whatever one undertakes.

"Oftentimes our limited experiences, due to our gender or our culture, don't allow us to imagine a better solution for resolving problems or creating ideas that can improve the lives of others," Hickey said.

From Ghana, Chemistry Professor Dr. Alfred Addo-Mensah believes his work of teaching and mentoring his students is significant and impactful. Aside from his work as a professor, he also helps children who struggle in math and science during summer camps. As a member of the science community, he believes that diversity allows for multiple perspectives in problem solving, which is very important to science.

Born in Bangladesh, TAMIU Associate Professor of Public Administrations Dr. Mehnaaz Momen said that diversity, especially diversity of thoughts and opinions, is an essen-

tial part of a university campus. And despite living in a country where ethnicities afford different privileges, a university is a space for all kinds of diversity that can be valued and appreciated.

"I am Bengali. We celebrate the Bengali New Year with color and splendor. I always miss that celebration, though I try to be in Austin where the Bengali community celebrate Pohela Boishakh with a cultural program and a food feast," Momen said. "I am also Muslim. This is the month of fasting or Ramzan. I do not fast but do participate in the 'Eid' where people get together and have food together at the end of the month-long fasting. This year it will be lonely, but I will cook biriyani and celebrate with my husband."

Read the Globe

The Read the Globe program provides first-year students an opportunity to learn and experience

an international topic through reading. For over 12 years, students have engaged with authors to discuss serious issues around the world and prepare them to become responsible global citizens. TAMIU states that the program introduces narratives about events of the highest global importance, promotes discussions of international issues across the campus and connects the broader world to the Laredo community.

"Over the last 12 years, more than 10,000 freshmen have engaged with 'Reading the Globe' memoirs about war, immigration, social justice and human trafficking, and over 170 Ambassadors have traveled to Cambodia, Chile, China, Eastern Europe, Ghana, India, South Africa, Poland, Russia and, most recently, Brazil," Arenaz said. "Each semester, we find ourselves as inspired as our students, and this creates a truly transformative international experience that colors their remain-

ing years here. Investing in student learning about global issues is not only part of our mission statement but a most worthy goal."

According Hickey, Read the Globe focuses on building tolerance of other cultures and the importance of service and leadership. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, any trip by the university was canceled.

In the case of Julio Cesar Obscura, who traveled to Ghana for his study abroad program, not only did it expand his mind of the world around him but changed his life for the better. Prior to the trip, he bought a camera, learned the ins and outs of it and captured life in Ghana and throughout his other three trips.

"I tried to capture what I could and share these stories when I came back to Laredo," Obscura said.

He mentioned that despite schools touching up on subjects such as the transatlantic slave trade, little information is relayed to students to



Courtesy of Julio Obscuro

Nancy Pelosi at the Door of No Return in Dakar, Senegal

TAMIU 50th Anniversary



Courtesy of Rebekah Rodriguez

Rebekah Rodriguez traveled to both South Africa and Spain learning about her heritage.

give them a better grasp on the subject. The experience of hearing the stories and seeing the “Door of No Return” was life changing, Obscura said.

During the trip, he recalled passing by Jubilee House, the Presidential Palace in Accra, and was told that he was not allowed to take photos of it. Ten years passed and he returned to Jubilee House as a member of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s Congressional Delegation, where he was one of two photographers allowed in the palace.

“My experience started in Ghana,” he added. “It was a full circle for me. It’s kind of reassured me of what I am doing.”

Morocco, Turkey and the United Kingdom were other study abroad trips Obscura went to. He would capture what life was about through his photos and learn about each culture. As a first-generation college student and Laredoan, the opportunity to see

the world and learn more about these cultures was achieved through hard work and the opportunity presented by the Read the Globe program and Hickey.

“Having the ‘I’ of International in TAMIU is definitely, in my opinion, one of the most important aspects to that institution because it creates that idea of culture and international idea, the idea) that we are not alone. We are welcoming everybody,” he said.

Student Experiences

Rebekah Rodriguez, TAMIU Writing Center instructor and former student, said that growing up in Laredo left a lot to be desired when it comes to interacting with different cultures. With a passionate interest in learning more about the world around her, she managed to land the opportunity to travel abroad to both South Africa and Spain.

Her experiences out in the world helped her learn more about herself,



Courtesy of Itzamara De La Cruz

As a part of TAMIU’s Study Abroad program, Itza De La Cruz visits Rio De Janeiro.

and the pride she saw in others gave her a deeper sense of pride in her own Mexican heritage.

From learning about the different customs and values to improving her Spanish in Spain, the trip opened the door to meeting people from Germany, Italy, Ukraine and more. She also learned about how different culture inside a country can change as her travels through Spain did not prepare her for Catalonia, where the culture is vastly different.

In South Africa, she realized how much cultures have in common regardless of distance. Even 9,000 miles from home, she saw parallels in African and Hispanic cultures and was inspired by how the people overcame apartheid. By sharing their stories and Rodriguez sharing her experience of living on the Mexico-U.S. border, two cultures learned more about each other and better understood a unique perspective.

In Peru, Yvette Garza, Speech

Language Pathologist and former TAMIU student, experienced the Peruvian lifestyle while living with a local family on her trip. She also saw parallels with Mexican culture, such as greeting with a kiss on the cheek. The family spoke about their culture, the Incas and the terrorism that plagued their life in the past. Despite the trove of information that can be found on the internet, experiencing history through the stories of those that were present impact one’s life far more.

Aside from some serious topics discussed during the trip, there was a lot of fun as well. Garza added that she has also studied in China and visited landmarks such as The Great Wall and Machu Picchu. She visited museums, ate pastel (a sandwich in Peru) and took photos throughout her trip. All this created an unforgettable experience that only a diverse world mindset could provide.

TAMIU 50th Anniversary

On-Campus Multiculturalism

Multiple organizations, courses and experiences also benefit from a diverse touch including Greek Life, language, religion, pop culture, LG-BTQ+, etc. All allow students of different backgrounds to come together and learn more about each other through community service, personal interests and cooperation.

With a week dedicated to the diverse world culture, a brilliant staff of experienced and multicultural educators and multiple opportunities for students to travel the world,

one may not need to travel outside the country but just visit their local university to experience the world. Whether it's food, celebrations, music or art, working to understand any other culture is a benefit that will impact a person's entire life.

With 95% of Laredo's population being Hispanic, the Black community is small, and Dr. Peter Haruna said he has helped increase awareness of other cultures by organizing activities around the campus as part of the TAMIU Intercultural Events and Education Committee.

“The idea is that even if our student body is not as diverse as other campuses, our students are able to travel outside and to gain different perspectives which they can in turn share with the rest of the community when they come back,” Haruna said.

During the month of November, TAMIU hosts multiple events to celebrate and bring awareness to multiculturalism. Throughout the year, each heritage month is celebrated through multiple presentations that invite students, staff and the community to learn more about different cultures. Events like the 2019 Mayan Archeoastronomy: Observers of the Universe are held at the university.

So whether its on-campus organizations, recreational activities or visiting a country far away, TAMIU is a Laredo hotspot for education



Dr. Peter Haruna

and diversity. It is a place where one who strives to be a global citizen can thrive and anyone interested in a new perspective can participate.

50
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STORY!**

Your story is our story – and now it's time to share that story! We're inviting individuals who have been impacted by the University to share a memory or moment that's forever changed their lives.

VISIT us at <http://50.tamiau.edu/yourstory>.

UPLOAD your story, photos, and videos.

SUBMIT your story.

FOLLOW TXAMIU on our official social media channels.

According to Haruna, the committee works to commemorate each heritage month such as Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Indigenous People's History Month, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and Woman's History Month.

“The idea is that even if our student body is not as diverse as other campuses, our students are able to travel outside and to gain different perspectives



Yvette Garza overlooks a cliff in Peru

Courtesy of Yvette Garza

For more information on TAMIU's 50th anniversary, follow TXAMIU on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Spotify, use the hashtag #TAMIU50 and visit the school's website at 50.tamiau.edu.

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- If you're worried about **TRANSFERABILITY** of core courses...don't be.
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