MLA students redesign Beaumont public housing site

With national media attention focused on the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, the Texas victims of Hurricane Rita were often overlooked. Although cities and towns in East Texas did not suffer the same level of damage as New Orleans, many crucial community facilities were damaged beyond cost-effective repair. Such was the case for Magnolia Gardens, a 50-year old Beaumont Housing Authority community. The already aging facility suffered extensive damage from Rita, including trees crashing into the community’s townhouses and widespread roof damage.

Realizing the need for extensive renovations, BHA sought funding to completely rebuild the Magnolia Gardens facility to the modern standards outlined in the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Hope VI grant program. To assist with their funding application, the BHA called upon the graduate students in Texas A&M University’s LAND 621 class to develop revised site plans and suggest building styles.

The students’ 10 highly varied final solutions proposed alternative types of multifamily housing, diverse image concepts, and different site planning approaches. The proposed site plans ranged from centralized courtyards that created clearly defined semi-private areas for residents in the surrounding buildings, to New Urbanist-inspired compact solutions, and solutions stressing such sustainable development approaches as use of bioswales — landscape elements designed to remove silt and pollution from surface runoff water.

The class project presentation, held in...
Team assesses affordable housing needs

Center for Housing and Urban Development team eyes rural Brazos Valley housing market

A team of researchers from the College of Architecture’s Center for Housing and Urban Development (CHUD) recently spent several spring Fridays driving around the Brazos Valley countryside, picking the brains of local officials about how and where to build quality, affordable homes for families barely earning a living wage.

Hired by the Brazos Valley Affordable Housing Corporation (BVACH), the team of Drs. Cecilia Giusti, Dawn Jourdan and Shannan Van Zandt, along with June Martin, CHUD assistant director, was charged with assessing need and demand for high-quality, low-cost housing in the rural communities of the seven counties that make up the Brazos Valley.

The BVACH builds 3-bedroom, 2-bath single-family homes using prison and youth labor to keep costs low. The BVACH can construct these 1250 to 1450-square foot homes for around $85,000, about half of the typical cost of a new home in the area. In addition, the BVACH offers low-interest loans and down payment assistance to income-qualified buyers, and provides no-interest home rehab loans to existing homeowners.

Students from Dr. Van Zandt’s planning methods course conducted much of the secondary data collection and preliminary analysis, which included forecasts for the number of housing units that will be needed in each of the seven counties over the next 10 years. In addition to analyzing the secondary data, the team solicited community input through focus groups and phone interviews with local residents in each of the seven counties to learn about their preferences for housing types and amenities, as well as locations where they would or would not like to live. While most residents considered $85,000 a reasonable home price, the cost was too high for many.

The project highlighted the differences between providing affordable housing in urban versus rural areas. Among the study’s most surprising findings was the lack of diversity in housing type. In most counties, single-family homes make up more than 65 percent of the housing stock, with a high level of manufactured homes — up to 30 percent in some counties, and very little multi-family housing available.

“Very few housing options exist in this area for lower-income families,” said Van Zandt. “Rather than renting an apartment or buying something smaller, like a townhome, rural families opt to rent or buy manufactured homes or older homes with lots of structural problems, rather than renting an apartment or buying a smaller home.”

Preparing for the inevitable, citizens and community leaders of Key West, Fla., took a progressive look at innovative hurricane preparedness and post-hurricane recovery options developed by faculty and students at Texas A&M University during a special two-day summit held July 20-21 at Key West High School.

The city invited a team of architects, landscape architects, urban planners, disaster mitigation specialists and students from Texas A&M’s College of Architecture to share the latest thinking for empowering communities in the aftermath of a major hurricane. The LAND321 students, led by professor Jody Naderi, presented a post-disaster plan for Key West that entailed the speedy transformation of pre-defined relief areas into small and large livable communities with amenities addressing the entire spectrum of post-disaster needs — physical, as well as emotional. Their plans call for portable, off-the-grid housing, “surge” health care centers to alleviate potentially overwhelming hospitals, communication and infrastructure hubs, and even shaded “pop-up” parks, supervised playground facilities and planned activities for children and families — components which can be quickly set up and operated in the wake of a devastating event.

A poster exhibit showcasing the A&M team’s post-disaster solutions for the Key West community was displayed at the summit, and a book highlighting summit proceedings was prepared and distributed to participants after the event.

“What makes Key West unique,” said Rosenblatt Naderi, who is a native of the Florida Keys, “is a cultural attitude that favors riding out a storm over evacuating. Research shows that many coastal cultures view hurricanes as both a creative and destructive force. Our post-disaster strategy

Beaumont

Continued from Page 1

Beaumont, attracted a large audience including staff, grant writing consultants, city planners, Magnolia Gardens residents and other local stakeholders, and Beaumont Mayor Guy N. Goodson. The students’ plans were extremely well received and sparked effective discussions among participants about their wants and expectations. The student work will be used as part of a local information program, as well as for preparing grant applications.

The Magnolia Gardens Redevelopment project was the first of what is anticipated to be many future projects in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning’s Partnership for Community Outreach program. “Projects like this demonstrate to the public that landscape architecture is about a lot more than flowers and pretty places — it addresses the quality of life for all people,” said professor Nancy Volkmann, who led the class with graduate assistant Jun Hyun Kim.
Key West Summit  ■ Continued from previous page

takes advantage of this concept by focusing on community recovery, and even individual healing, as a transformative experience that can be supported by recovery sites designed to encourage this renewal process.”

As problems addressed by Na- den’s design studio, was developing a strat- egy to avoid the mishaps that occurred in the aftermath of Wilma — a Category 2 hurri- cane that brushed Key West late last Octo-
ber, causing considerable wind damage and widespread flooding.

There were no appropriate community sites then for staging relief efforts, recalled Ty Symonski, then city planner for Key West, “just hot and shade-less lines for everything from water to insurance information.”

The federal recovery support (workers) shuffled everyone through a system designed to give out FEMA information and supplies but [the effort] was not designed to handle the needs with dignity or to consider that our community might need places to come together as a community.”

Working with Symonski, the Texas A&M landscape architecture students developed plans for directing relief trucks, workers and the initial flood of disaster response person- nel to 27 pre-defined staging areas, such as schools, parking lots and municipal build- ings, which would be prepared to contend with the many facets of disaster relief. “We knew if a hurricane hit, people would all have to live cut off from the main- land for up to a month or longer,” said Tra- vis Hawkins, a senior landscape architecture student whose work on the project signaled a great deal of research into the history, geography and culture of the Florida Keys, which are exclusively attached to the main- land by U.S. Highway 1. “That meant food, materials, water and communications all had to be provided for on site or imported via air and water.”

The project also detailed the possible conversion of the 37-acre Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park into a “Village of Renewal,” a project that would be more likely to participate in the recovery and preparation efforts, said Don- na Flowers, an assistant to the mayor and member of the committee that is organizing the summit. “We joke about partying during the hurricane because none of us leave, but we also need to understand that no one will help us more than we can help ourselves.”

MUP initiates e-mail list

For more details, read the story online: http://archone.tamu.edu/college/news/newsletters/51265/news.html.

Urbana and Region Planning Ph.D. students Sudhu Arkaliki and Himanshu Grover inter- view tsunami survivors in an Indian coastal village that was seriously damaged by the di- saster as part of the HRRC team’s social vulnerability mapping project.

HRC team maps social vulnerability of tsunami-ravaged Indian communities

In the wake of the devastating December 26, 2004 tsunami that ravaged the coastal communities on the Indian Ocean, research scientists from the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center (HRRC) at Texas A&M Uni- versity’s College of Architecture traveled to the hard-hit district of Tamil Nadu, on the southeastern coast of India, to assess re- gional response to the disaster and develop a social vulnerability profile, or map, that could ultimately assist disaster response ini- tiatives throughout the world.

A social vulnerability map utilizes Geo- graphic Information System (GIS) technolo- gy to merge geographical and government census data with information gathered through field observations and surveys, to relate the social characteristics of the target

Other Texas A&M faculty working with the students, included Pliny Fisk, an archi- tecture professor and director of the Center for Maximum Building Potential, who fo- cused on portable housing solutions and is- sues of sustainability; Carla Prater, associate director of Texas A&M’s Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center, who directed disas- ter planning and mitigation initiatives; and Nancy Volkman, a professor in the Depart- ment of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning.

Key West community leaders who par- ticipated in the summit included the mayor, city council members, the chamber of com- merce, local architects and urban planners, representatives from the local electric and water authorities, and even members of the Key West arts community.

“In people know what is going on, they’ll be more likely to participate in the preparation and recovery efforts,” said Don- na Flowers. "If people know what is going on, they’ll be more likely to participate in the preparation and recovery efforts,” said Don- na Flowers. Children in Chandrapadi, India, encountered by the HRRC research team during their field work in Nagapatinam.
Scholarships and other awards valued at more than $10,000 were presented last April at the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning’s annual awards banquet.

BLA and MLA Scholarships

Gene Schickel Jr. ’50 Endowed Scholarship

Endowed Scholarship in Landscape Architecture

Anthony Farhage
Sheena Arora
Russell Thomman
Jonathan West
Samuel E. Garrett Jr. Endowed Memorial Scholarship

Russell Thomman
Robert F. & Florence H. White Endowed Scholarship in Landscape Architecture

Jason Hayes
Antonio F. Sarabando Jr.

ASLA Texas Chapter Maurice Memorial Scholarship

MSSD Gibson Scholarship

David Guiness

URSC Scholarships

Wolfgang Roeseier Scholarships

In Urban and Regional Science
Sarah Bernhardt

Jesus Hinojosa

Endowed Scholarship

Minam Olivares

Departmental and College Scholarships and Awards

Colonel James E. Ray ’63 Endowed Scholarship

Bret Elder

Ralph Deans Endowed Memorial Scholarship

Shan Gao

Center of Heritage Conservation Fellows Scholarship

Michelle Audenart

Department Head Awards

Michelle Audenart

The Honor Roll Award

Lindsay Landers – BLA
Gail Kucat – BLA
Bethany Hopkins – BLA
Travis Peiffer – MLA
Bret Elder – MLA
Amint Singh – MLSD
Hohyun Jang – MLSD
Tony Topping – MUP
Kristina Harp – MUP
Yang Zhang – URSC
Zhenhong Tang – URSC
Miriam Olivares – URSC

The Honorable Mention Award

Ryan Petree – BLA

Third-Party Awards

The Park People Annual Award

Bo Yang

Park People is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the importance of parks and green space and to providing recreational services, education, and support in our community.

U.S. EPA Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Fellowship

Wes Highfield

First place: Texas A&M Student Research Week 2005 and the Texas A&M University System’s Pathways to the Doctorate Symposium

Minam Olivares

Praeven Magheal

The project dealt with developing risk management strategies for sex-related crimes also received local and national recognition. Doug Wursterbarger was their advisor in the project.

Faculty Achievements

Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement Award in Teaching

Jon Rodiek

This award recognizes, encourages, and rewards superior classroom teachers—individuals whose command of their respective discipline, teaching methodologies, and school and classroom management skills contribute to the learning process exemplify the meaning of teacher/mentor in its highest sense.

Tenure

Sam Broady, associate professor

President-elect of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA)

Chris Ellis

Elected Regional Director of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture CEAA and to the TAMU Faculty Senate.

Nancy Volkmann

Former students earn multiple Texas ASLA awards

Texas A&M University’s landscape architecture program was in the limelight at the March 2006 Texas State ASLA Conference, with many former students receiving awards for their professional work.

The Kay Tiller Chapter Service Award went to the ASLA Chapter Web Site Commit- tee comprised of Aggies Brent Baker, Randy Phillips, and Janna Tidwell, along with four other committee members.

TIB Partners, represented by former student Mark Meyer, received a Merit Award for their work on the Harris County Flood Control District’s Saddle of the Conroe area.

Another Merit Award went to the Harris County Flood Control District’s Saddle of the Conroe area.

Other awards for projects with heavy Aggie involvement included the Honor Award presented by the SWA Group Houston, which was represented by Forster’s. The award honored the firm’s Luiz Landport and Station Train in Shenzhen, China.

Aggie Mark Meyer received the Award of Excellence for TIB Partners Dallas for its Heartland Trails project in Crandall, Texas. An award was also received by SWA Group Houston, represented by former student Erin Cannon, for its plan of Cyfair College in Cypress, Texas.

Department initiates report card

Department Head Forster Nudisai has initiated an annual departmental “report card” that is intended to identify the concrete achievements made during an academic year in working toward seven strategic di- rections identified for the department:

• Offer the best learning experience
• Strengthen academic program quality and delivery
• Lead in the creation and dissemination of knowledge
• Lead in the integration and application of knowledge
• Renewed research and achievements
• Provide a supportive climate through communication and shared governance
• Build and sustain partnerships

Research continues to be a vital aspect of departmental operations. For 2006, more than $1.7 million in grants were awarded to faculty and in 2005 almost $3 million was awarded. Current applications for $9 million are currently pending. Much of both the funded and pending research is related to hazard mitigation and the creation of healthy, walkable cities.
Perspectives: Spring 2007 — Newsletter for the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning

FACULTY PUBLISH RESEARCH RESULTS

Retail Land Use, Neighborhood Satisfaction, and the Urban Forest: An investigation into the moderating and mediating effects of trees
by Christopher C. Ellis, S. Lee, and Byoung-Suk Kweon.
Published in Landscape and Urban Planning, 2006

The authors studied the relationship between retail land use and neighborhood satisfaction along with the moderating and mediating effects of trees and shrubs. Neighborhood satisfaction has been related to a number of environmental factors including land uses; however, no other research has reported the potential moderating and mediating effects of trees on these relationships. This study included residents in single-family housing located in typical suburban-type subdivisions with adjacent commercial strip development. Mail-in survey responses were geo-referenced to land parcel centroids in a GIS-based analysis, and compared to the amount of retail land use and tree and shrub cover existing within 1500 feet.

Results indicated that the amount of tree and shrub cover within a 1500 foot radius of single-family households significantly moderated and mediated the negative relationship between the amount of nearby retail land use and neighborhood satisfaction. These results have important implications for urban planners and landscape architects. Specifically, the findings suggest that communities should increase provisions for protecting and establishing trees and shrubs in neighborhoods near retail land uses.

Planning the City Without Plans
by Michael Neuman
Published in Agora, 2005

In Texas, many towns and one large city, Houston, do not have general plans or comprehensive zoning. Many other Texas municipalities have only recently adopted plans and zoning. Yet Texas is full of wonderful older towns and cities, many of them county seats that were laid out and developed without a statutory comprehensive plan. After spending time enjoying Houston's presence, planning pioneer, how can it help us forge the next generation of natural urbanism? How can we say that it matters whether a large city has a plan, maybe with comprehensive zoning? Or will it continue to blaze a new trail, one studied with planning innovations that re-verbener worldwide? How is a planning pioneer, how can it help us forge the new urban form?

Learning from Streambank Failures at Bridge Crossings: A Biotechnical Streambank Stabilization Project in Warm Regions
by Ming-Han Li
Published in Landscape and Urban Planning, 2006

In a biotechnical streambank stabilization project, Dr. Ming-Han Li visited and assessed 22 bridge and stream crossings in the east half of Texas. Numerous streambank failures were observed and documented. A primary problem noted was the treatment of the edge between the bridge and natural environments. Failure sites almost always have rigid treatments such as concrete armor on the boundary between the bridge structure and the stream. Such a fixed, ridge treatment could not allow for any self-adjustment of stream dimension or profile, which in turn resulted in failures on the bridge structure, including piers and abutments.

Biotechnical engineering offers an alternative to treat the edge between built and natural environments and provides a buffer to absorb erosive forces from the flow onto built structure. While these techniques are often used in the cooler areas of the United States, there are significant challenges to the application of this technology in warm regions, specifically in the Plant Hardiness Zones 8, 9, and 10, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This is primarily because short dormant periods in warm regions restrict the construction periods for implementing the live cutting technique, an important method in biotechnical engineering. This paper describes a streambank stabilization project implemented in Texas, where Dr. Li assessed and analyzed streambank failure causes at bridge crossings in warm regions, and addressed warm region construction issues encountered during the project. The paper further discusses the design process, implemented result, and monitoring of the biotechnical streambank stabilization project.

Social Vulnerability Mapping and GIS in Tsunami Impact Analysis
by Carla Prater, Walter G. Peacock, Michael K. Lindell, Raghavan Srinivasan, Robert T. Sniglov, Himatsinh Grover and Sudha Alikkati
Published in Earthquake Spectra

The Hazard Reduction & Recovery Center and the Spatial Sciences Laboratory at Texas A&M University conducted interviews with local, national, and international officials and others in southern India to assess community capacity and emergency response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

The results of the team’s field research shows that the district government did have an emergency plan in place, but it was modified on a neighboring district’s plan, which focused almost exclusively on floods and droughts, rather than other earthquake-related events. The local governmental actual response, therefore, was dominated by skilled improvisation, as the district government does not have comprehensive zoning that likely would have mandated a plan. In response to the Indian Ocean tsunami, the government organization response was massive, and an attempt was made by the local government to organize and structure this voluntary response.

Surveys of 1000 households were also distributed to determine the results of this tsunami. These surveys were analyzed to find out patterns in the ways social and economic factors contributed to the variations in disaster impacts within the community.

Leaning from Lao Tsu: Daoism and Sustainability
by Nancy J. Volkman
Published in Landscape Review, 2005

Many scholars and practitioners have observed that the concept of sustainability, as a process of human interaction with the natural world, requires a radical paradigmatic change in worldview. This is particularly true in so-called “Western” thought, which has historically had a mechanistic, top-down view of the relationship between people and their world, be it cultural or natural. This paper proposes that we must look beyond traditional European philosophies to search for a paradigm sufficiently revolutionary to allow the achievement of real sustainability. Such a dramatic change is necessary as it is largely these European philosophies that have caused the environmental problems faced by humanity worldwide. How can we solve our problems and create a better city? Is our current system of thought, which historically has had a mechanistic, top-down view of the world, be it cultural or natural. This paper explores these and other challenging planning questions. As Houston gets bigger, more complex, more diverse, more polluted, and more congested, can it solve its problems and create a better city by relying on its current tools? Or will it need a plan, maybe with comprehensive zoning? Or will it continue to blaze a new trail, one studied with planning innovations that reverbener worldwide? Is Houston a planning pioneer, how can it help us forge the new urban form?
A&M Master of Urban Planning program celebrates 40 years

About 50 students, faculty, former students, and friends of the Master of Urban Planning program gathered at the Texas A&M University to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the MUP program. Attendees signed a sheet of birthday paper, sang “Happy Birthday,” and enjoyed birthday cake and balloons.

The MUP program at Texas A&M, one of the oldest such programs in the United States, was founded by Professor Lisa McGraw and led by such memorable professors as Don Sweeney, Chuy Hinojosa, Wolf Roeseler and David Pugh. The program played a leading role in the development of the Texas Chapter of the APA and the evolution of a planning ethic and profession in Texas. There are now more than 500 former students from the MUP program, and more than a dozen current faculty.

MUP program well-represented at the Lone Star Diversity Fair

The Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning’s Master of Urban Planning program was well represented in the inaugural Lone Star Graduate Diversity Colloquium held at Texas A&M University. Student participants attended workshops on a variety of topics, with results made available for use in the CTE faculty development programs.

A tree falls at Santa Chiara

Study center’s beloved Cedar of Lebanon dies of thirst; students redesign courtyard

There is sad news to report to those who have participated in the seminar-award event at the Santa Chiara Study Center in Italy. The great Cedar of Lebanon that dominated the center’s courtyard died during the summer of 2005. This magnificent tree, under which lots of “socializing” took place for many groups of Texas A&M students, apparently lost its major water source when the cistern beneath it cracked and no longer held water. Paula and Sharon Barucchieri reported that the tree died very quickly after the cistern problem was discovered — far too quickly for the cistern to be repaired before damage to the cedar was irreparable.

Although the tree was in a difficult situation it, achieved a height of about 50 feet in the 50 or so years that it grew. A local man with expertise in working in tight spaces like the courtyard cut the tree down. Its segments were so large and the space so tight that it had to be removed by a large crane set on the street below the study center. Watching the large pieces of trunk being removed proved fascinating, professor Nancy Volkman observed, because of the skill required to maneuver them around the building and courtyard walls. The wood is going to be used in furniture making, so visitors to Castiglion Fiorentino might soon be able to buy a chair made from Santa Chiara wood.

With the tree gone, the courtyard is a very different place, said Volkman. On the bright side, Paula pointed out, the view to the valley below, once obscured by the tree, has been improved. Most, though, seem to miss the tree which “made” the courtyard.

In response to this dramatic development, the study center sponsored a multi-school competition to redesign the courtyard without the cedar. The results varied from very traditional solutions, to those that included less of a tree, such as a faux tree executed in metal. Landscape architecture students last advanced the project, developing courtyard redesigns inspired by famous works of art. To date, due to limited funds, no additional changes have been made to the space, however, donations for courtyard renovations would be appreciated.

Florence White, wife of department’s founder, laid to rest last October

Aggie landscape architects were saddened to learn of the death of Florence White, the wife of the Department of Landscape Architecture’s first department head, Robert F. White. Florence died on October 16, and a memorial service was held in Bryan the next day. Florence was fondly remembered by former students for her many contributions to the 1969 founding of Texas’ first independent landscape architecture department, and for her personal attention to students in the MUP program.

Florence was born in Pittsburgh in 1914. She and Bob married in 1939 and came to Texas after World War II. Since Bob’s death in 2003, Florence had resided in a local extended care facility in Bryan and was frequently visited by faculty, former students and survivors, son Hans Ross of Richardson, two granddaughters, as well as nieces and nephews. Until her health began to decline, she was a regular attendee at the department’s spring awards banquet, where she handed out the annual Robert F. and Florence H. White Endowed Scholarship in Landscape Architecture.

Former department head Don Austin remembered her as “one of the most gracious women I have ever had the privilege of knowing and loving. She has been for all of us a shining and radiant example of knowing and loving,” continued by everyone who knew her. From the days of her caring for landscape architecture students (class of ’52) to times when she and Bob shared Thanksgiving and Christmas with my family, our lives have been blessed and enriched.

“In recent years,” Austin continued, “Ma and I helped her adjust to retirement and finally nursing home living. Times were difficult but she never complained and always sought to cheer those around her. Florence did manage to keep up with life in this world and with those dear to her — even commanded email up until age 90. She is the last of an era. She is sorely missed.”
Perspectives Newsletter

Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning

College of Architecture: http://archone.tamu.edu • 979-845-1221
Dean: Thomas Regan • 979-845-1222 • reganjt@archone.tamu.edu
Department Head: Forster Ndubisi • 979-845-1019 • fndubisi@archone.tamu.edu
Dept. of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning • 979-845-1019
LAUP Web site • http://archweb.tamu.edu/laup/
Editor: Nancy Volkman • 979-845-5041 • nvolkman@archone.tamu.edu
Co-Editor: Ming-Han Li • 979-845-7571 • minghan@tamu.edu
Layout: Phillip Rollfing • 979-458-0442 • prollfing@archone.tamu.edu

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LAUP gains endowed scholarships, professorships

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the new academic year. In the past issues of Perspectives, I addressed our teaching, service and outreach programs, as well as our strategic planning initiatives. In this issue, I will update you on those initiatives and elaborate on our research and creative scholarship programs.

Fall 2006 we had approximately 310 full-time students in the department, representing a 10 percent increase from last year’s enrollment. We reached our enrollment cap for the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture program for the first time, with an undergraduate enrollment of 150, comprised of increasingly talented students. Many students graduated in the spring and summer semesters including nine students in our Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Science program. A significant majority of our professional program graduates were recruited by reputable private firms and public sector agencies in Texas and across the United States.

We now have both strategic and curriculums plans for most of the departmental programs. The strategic plans establish each program’s priorities and drive resource allocation. The curricula plans articulate a clearly defined mission and a strengthened curriculum for each program positioning us to effectively educate leaders who can make a difference in shaping the evolution of neighborhoods, cities and regions. In many instances, our efforts led to major curriculum changes, such as in the URSC program, which has not had a major curriculum revision since the 1980s. I thank students, faculty, and our Professional Advisory Board members who participated in our strategic and curriculum initiatives. Please visit our new departmental Web site at http://archone.tamu.edu/laup/ for the latest changes.

Establishing endowed scholarships and professorships to attract and retain the best students and faculty is one of LAUP’s major priorities.

— FORSTER NDUBISI
Department Head

See Ndubisi, Page 4