MARS AGRICULTURE CENTER

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Students listen to business instructor Brett Burke in the computer lab in the new Mars Agriculture Center at Sheridan College. The room features a stock and commodities ticker on three walls.

Mars Agriculture Center evolves with industry trends

BY MIKE DUNN
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SHERIDAN — Agriculture has become big business, and it requires the next generation to have a strong grasp on the science of crops and livestock.

Sheridan College staff members believe their curriculum should keep up with the newest trends. Now, they believe the college has a building that can do just that.

The Mars Agriculture Center opened its doors to students and faculty Jan. 17 — just in time for the spring semester.

While the new building creates room for more students, the features the building has to offer impress college officials the most.

The 16,500-square-foot building includes two flexible labs, one herbarium, five classroom and learning spaces, a commodities trading room and 2,880 square feet of greenhouse space outside the main building. Several faculty offices will be hosted within the building, as well.

"The Mars Agriculture Center will play a central role in our growing agriculture programs," Sheridan College facilities director Kent Andersen said.

"It is true that agriculture classes of today don't resemble the classes from years ago," he added. "The herbarium, greenhouses, flexible labs and commodities training classrooms are state-of-the-art learning spaces."

Wendy Smith noted the new labs as key features of the building.

The director of marketing and public information said they not only have all of the traditional features of a science lab, but they are considered a mobile classroom, meaning chairs, desks and tables are all movable. She said that this allows faculty and students to mold the classroom in accordance with the lecture or lab.

"What was missing (from the old agriculture classrooms) was the flexibility," Smith said. "We were limited in size before, but the theme that runs true for this whole building is flexibility."

Many of the classrooms also have movable dividers between them. Instructors can now use a larger classroom space if needed, or divide the room in half to hold two lectures at opposite sides of the room.

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Kent Anderson
Sheridan College facilities director

Several classrooms also have what is called Daylight Board, which is considered one of the newest and most advanced smart boards on the market.

The new commodities training classroom gives students a practical, hands-on look at commodities trading using simulated computer programs and a ticker tape surrounding the classroom that displays stocks, commodities and news in real time.

Both agriculture business students, as well as regular business students, could utilize the classroom, Smith said.

The agriculture program remains one of the fastest growing programs at Sheridan College. In 2010, approximately 60 students participated in the agriculture program. That grew to 91 by the end of the spring 2015 semester.

"I think our students are really excited about this new classroom," Smith said. "I know are staff is really excited about what this building has to offer."

The Mars Agriculture Center is an $8 million building. Half of those funds came from the Jacomien and Forrest E. Mars Jr. Foundation, the state contributed $2.7 million and Whitney Benefits put $1.3 million toward the project.

The building is one of the several building projects the college has completed in recent years.

The college finished the Whitney Center for the Arts in 2016 and the Technical Education Center renovation project will be completed in 2017.

By the numbers

16,123 total square feet in facility

4 labs

4 classrooms

JAN. 19, 2016
When work began on the project

13 offices

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The Mars Agriculture Center is the newest facility at Sheridan College.

DEC. 19, 2016
When SC moved into the new building; landscaping will be completed by June 30

$8 million
The cost of the new facility: $4 million from the Jacomien and Forrest E. Mars Jr. Foundation, $2.7 million from state, $1.3 million from Whitney Benefits

A LOOK INSIDE THE MARS AGRICULTURE CENTER

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Convenient gathering spaces

Students walk across the lobby of the new Mars Agriculture Center at Sheridan College.

COURTESY PHOTO | DENNIS JACOBS/SHERIDAN COLLEGE

High-tech teaching space

Students gather for class in the commodities computer lab in the new facility. The classroom features a stock ticker around the room, allowing students to track stock prices.

Flexible lab space for students, teachers

Agriculture and science instructor Rick Landeis works with students in one of the new laboratories in the Mars Agriculture Center.

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Study space with a view

A student reclines in a chair with a view of the Bighorn Mountains in the new Mars Agriculture Center at Sheridan College.

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Room to grow

Jarred Wolney waters herbs and vegetable plants during a horticulture class in the new Mars Agriculture Center at Sheridan College.

PROGRAM OVERVIEWS |

COURTESY PHOTOS |

Rangeland management

According to the Bureau of Land Management, there are more than 700 million acres of rangeland in the U.S. Worldwide, it accounts for 40 percent of our land mass. Students in the Sheridan College rangeland management program learn about the different types of rangelands; from deserts and tundra, to grasslands and prairies, and forests and wetlands. Students get hands-on learning regarding management of our natural resources for the short-term benefit and long-term sustainability.

Sheridan College faculty have developed working relationships with local agencies from which students learn. These agencies include: USDA Forest Service, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department and Sheridan County Conservation District.

Agricultural business

The agricultural business program combines elements of technical agriculture, business and economics. Students build practical business skills and explore topics in commodity trading, policy, marketing, finance, global markets, communication and other areas as they relate to the agriculture and food industry. The agriculture business program is the largest ag program at SC, and serves over half of the ag students.

Agricultural science education

This program is designed to provide students a solid foundation in general agriculture, and it provides a clear path for students interested in a career teaching in the agriculture field. Most students will be preparing to transfer to a four-year college or university to finish their agriculture education bachelor's degree. While many students seek this degree for ag education, it does emphasize each area of agriculture that Sheridan College offers. This program is a starting point for students not sure which direction within agriculture they want to explore.

Animal science

A career in animal science makes students a part of the biggest industry in the world. U.S. agriculture alone is a $157 billion business. Animal agriculture is the biggest component of U.S. agriculture, employing large numbers of animal science graduates. Students interested in animal science degrees (A.S. and A.A.S.) work to develop better, more efficient ways of producing and processing meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products. They study genetics, nutrition, production, management, reproduction and growth and development of domesticated farm animals. The program offers students a study plan that includes classes in reproduction, artificial insemination and livestock diseases (pathology).

Horticulture science

The hands-on curriculum of the SC horticulture program provides students the opportunity to work with plants in state-of-the-art facilities and greenhouses. Sheridan College students engage in classroom studies, practical labs, and greenhouse activities. On-campus greenhouses, small class sizes and instructors that help students achieve their academic goals. Courses include agroecology, agriculture economics, range plant identification, and horticulture science. SC also has several elective courses from which to choose. Students learn the foundations, principles and practices related to horticulture science and production.

Farrier science

If SC students want a full-time career or part-time supplemental career, farriers have a physically demanding but equally rewarding job. A farrier is equipped with knowledge and the specialized training necessary to clean and trim horses' hooves in preparation for shoes, and to properly fit the horseshoes to the hooves. A skilled farrier understands how to fit shoes to all types of horses, including temperamental horses, working horses, performance horses and horses that require special shoes to correct foot or gait problems. At Sheridan College, our students in the farrier program go beyond just shoeing horses. Instructors stress the importance of horsemanship and horse handling and students implement those practices in their studies. Graduates from the SC farrier science program are prepared to take the National Farrier Exam.

Sheridan College students earn top honors at International Society for Range Management contest

FROM STAFF REPORTS

SHERIDAN — Three Sheridan College students were tasked with taking on one of today's controversial political topics — the possible transfer of federal land management to the states — and were asked to set aside their own opinions.

The students studied the issue with academic discipline.

They objectively examined it from all sides, and presented their results to their peers and judges from across the West — in this case, at the International Society for Range Management meeting in St. George, Utah.

Though they were the only two-year college students up against others from 20 four-year universities, Sheridan College sophomores Jake Disney, Jaycie Arndt and Jordan Skovgard took third place in the grueling three-hour poster competition.

"It is important that, as students, we are learning about real-world issues," Arndt said. "And during the contest, we had experts from other states coming up to us to tell us their perspective, and it was just this huge learning opportunity."

All three students study rangeland management/animal sciences at Sheridan College. For the Jan. 31 competition, students were given the following question:

Multiple candidates for local and national political offices have proposed transferring the management of federal lands to the states in which those lands occur. If such a transfer of responsibility were to take place, there are potential broad-reaching impacts on rangelands and the communities that depend upon them.

• Describe how such a transfer would affect multiple-use rangelands from an ecological perspective.

• Discuss the potential socio-economic impacts that this would have on a) rural communities and b) large metropolitan areas in the western U.S.

After months of preparation, the Sheridan College students took questions from unknown judges and the general audience during the academic poster session in Utah. They placed third in the Rangeland Cup Team Poster Competition, where they competed against 13 other teams.

'It is important that, as students, we are learning about real-world issues. And during the contest, we had experts from other states coming up to us to tell us their perspective, and it was just this huge learning opportunity.'

Jaycie Arndt
Sheridan College sophomore

"The whole experience creates an open-mindedness, hearing information from people who are from different areas of the country," Disney said. "This issue, federal land management, has direct implications to so many people in Wyoming, and whether it happens or not, it is something we need to be aware of."

The students excelled in the competition, but were edged ever-so-slightly in points by Texas A&M, which took first place, and Colorado State University in second place, said Keith Klement, SC ag director.

"These students had the drive and the ambition to take on a real-world issue and really succeed," Klement said.

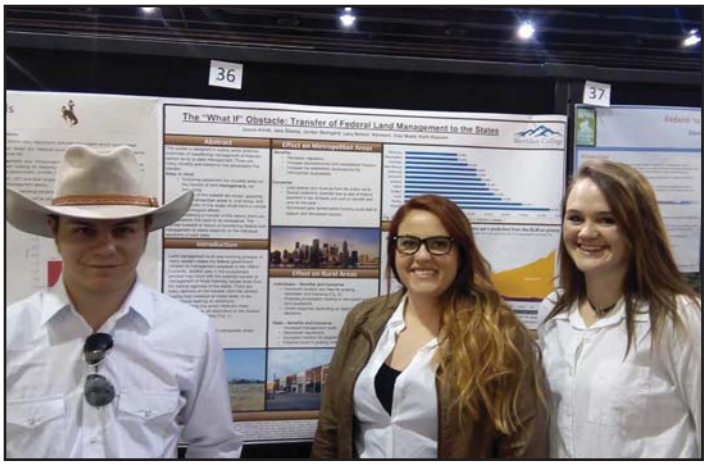
According to Klement, Sheridan College is in a very fortunate position to have donors like the Mars Foundation, which fund academic pursuits and real-world participation in activities like the St. George competition. These kinds of competitions are open to all students, but often only available to university students because of funding, Klement said.

Skovgard graduated from Sheridan College in December and has transferred to the University of Wyoming for further study. Jaycie Arndt plans to attend UW as well, and hopes to return to the Sheridan area one day to work for the Forest Service, the BLM or even the NRCS.

"I want to give back to the community and bridge that gap between agriculture and government," she said. "I grew up on a family-run ranch taking care of animals.

"This field seemed like the best fit, and I chose Sheridan College because it was close to home," she continued. "I could go to college during the week and work on the ranch over the weekends. Sheridan College is a great campus, and the ag department is amazing."

Disney said he is not sure what he will do — he may continue with school after he receives his associate degree in animal science and rangeland management, and he might one day work in land management.



COURTESY PHOTO |

From left, Sheridan College students Jake Disney of Sundance, Jaycie Arndt of Arvada/Buffalo and Jordan Skovgard of Buffalo took third in the Rangeland Cup Poster competition in St. George, Utah. The three were the only community college students to compete, beating out university students from across the West.

CURRENT CLASSES OFFERED THROUGH AGRICULTURE PROGAMS |

Ag Business Related:

Introduction to ag economics
Agricultural microeconomics
Computers in agriculture
Agriculture sales
Agriculture marketing
Ag communications
Farm and ranch business management

Animal Science:

Livestock pathology
Livestock production
Beef production
Artificial insemination
Livestock reproduction
Animal biology
Feeds and feeding

Farrier Science:

Equine anatomy and locomotion
Introduction to farrier science
Practical farrier science

Rangeland and Horticulture Science:

Agroecology
Introduction to soils
Greenhouse management
Landscape management
Herbaceous perennials
Woody ornamentals
Horticulture science
Turfgrass management
Plant and fungal biology
Range plant identification
Principles of rangeland management
Survey of natural resources management
Range and pasture monitoring
Cornerstone in natural resources and ranchland management

Shaping future leaders in ag

Sheridan College students listen to an instructor during a field day for an agriculture and natural resources class.

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