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KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Office of Governmental Relations

Success by degree: Nearly 3,400 graduating from Kansas State University

It's graduation time at Kansas State University with commencement ceremonies Saturday, May 5 at Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus in Salina and Friday, May 11, and Saturday, May 12, on the main campus in Manhattan.

Nearly 3,400 students are candidates for graduation. To be awarded will be more than 2,700 bachelor's, nearly 660 master's, about 90 doctorates and 106 Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degrees. More than 330 students are earning degrees through K-State Global Campus distance programs.

This is the 151st class to graduate from Kansas State University.

G.P. "Bud" Peterson, the president of Georgia Institute of Technology and a K-State alumnus, will receive anhonorary doctorate at the Graduate School ceremony for his active role in helping establish the national research and education agendas. Peterson will also serve as the ceremony's commencement speaker.

"Since earning his bachelor's degrees in mechanical engineering and mathematics and a master's degree in industrial engineering from K-State, Dr. Peterson has gone on to distinguish himself nationally both as a scientist and as an educator," said April Mason, the university's provost and senior vice president. "His work has earned him appointments by two United States presidents to serve on national scientific and engineering boards, and he also serves on the executive committee of the Association of American Universities board of directors."

The awarding of the honorary doctorate follows approval by the Kansas Board of Regents and is the highest honor the university can give.

University researchers, industry leaders work together to advance irrigation technology

Kansas State University is part of a $5 million grant from the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) to launch the Irrigation Innovation Consortium, a collaborative research effort to accelerate the development and adoption of efficient irrigation technologies and practices through public-private partnerships.

K-State, in partnership with four other universities and several industry partners, will match the FFAR grant money for a total initial investment of $10 million to support irrigation technology research and collaboration costs over five

years.

Consortium funds will enable public sector researchers and industry partners to co-develop, test and improve cutting-edge innovation, equipment, technology, and decision and information systems designed to equip and enhance "farms of the future," according to a news release from FFAR.

Initial research priorities include water and energy efficiency, remote sensing and big data applications for improving water management, irrigation technology acceleration, and technology transfer. An executive committee, with representation from FFAR and academic and industry consortium participants, will determine specific research priorities.

University's Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative making education more affordable

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, based on 2017 data, textbook inflation has risen three times the rate of normal inflation, while The College Board finds that a full-time student at a public university shells out approximately $1,298 per year for books and supplies. But an initiative at Kansas State University is turning the page on high textbook costs, saving the university's students more than $5.5 million since its launch in 2013.

The Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative has benefited more than 38,000 Kansas State University students since its creation by offering affordable alternatives to expensive traditional textbooks. The initiative is projected to save 26,000 students an estimated $2.25 million in 2018.

The Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative provides financial incentives to instructors who convert their university courses from traditional textbooks to open/alternative textbooks. Kansas State University faculty can receive up to $5,000 for investing their time and research to make the switch. So far, more than 81 courses from 38 academic departments and units have been converted.

How does it work? As long as the students are not required to purchase any materials for the course, faculty who participate in the initiative have a great deal of flexibility with how they select, arrange and distribute their course content. For example, a professor could use a textbook with an open copyright license written by another expert in the field, or they could create their own. The open copyright allows students to freely access and share the material. Faculty could also use library and university resources, such as scholarly journal articles, or create interactive online quizzes. Some use a combination of all of these.

In 2015, the open/alternative textbook team worked with the Kansas State University Student Government Association to introduce an open/alternative textbook student fee. Now, university departments receive a $10 fee from students who take courses that utilize approved open/alternative materials. Nearly 90 percent of the fee supports the instructor's department, while a small percent is reinvested in the initiative. The fee entices departments to convert high-enrollment classes to open/alternative textbooks; it encourages faculty and departments to retain those less costly materials; and it provides stable funding for the Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative.

Kansas

K-State researcher part of $3.9 million NASA lava caves study

When lava flows down the slope of a volcano, it can leave behind an extreme environment ideal for unusual microbial life and potential clues to answering the life on Mars question.

K-State geology professor Saugata Datta is one of the primary investigators of a new NASA study that will use a robotic vehicle to explore and collect data inside caves at Lava Beds National Monument in Northern California. The interiors of lava caves are home to bacterial films and coral-like mineral structures - called mineral biomarkers - that could help identify similar features that would provide evidence for extraterrestrial life on Mars or another planet.

The multi-institutional team of scientists and engineers recently received $3.9 million from NASA's Planetary Science and Technology for Analog Research program to support a three-year project in the lava caves. The team will use a four-wheeled rover, called CaveR, to explore the earthly lava caves and produce a detailed map of the inside of the caves. It will collect directed, high-magnification images to give the researchers information about the chemical makeup of features on the cave walls.

"Lava tubes and collapsed lava structures are quite common on the surface of Mars," Datta said. "Orbiter missions currently observing the red planet can see them. A terrestrial cave on Earth can be explored and really studies to its extreme end to understand such a situation or environment that can form on the surface of Mars."

According to Datta, the earthly lava caves are home to microbial life that thrive in the dark and interact with water dripping from the cave ceiling and seeping through cracks in the walls. By understanding Earth's caves, researchers can create preliminary findings to better detect any possible Marian biosignatures - evidence of past or present life - that may have been preserved in Mars' lava caves, which are better protected form the elements than areas on the surface.

Entrepreneurship Challenge awards $75,000 to student entrepreneurs

A student entrepreneurship competition featuring 44 high school and 11 collegiate teams from across the state has awarded entrepreneurial-minded students with $75,000 in prize money.

The Kansas Entrepreneurship Challenge gave students from around the state experience in the process of making a business proposal. The fifth annual event is organized by the Kansas State University Center for the Advancement of Entrepreneurship and was sponsored by the Kansas Masonic Foundation.

In the opening round of the competition, teams delivered a four-minute quick pitch of their business to a panel of judges that consisted of entrepreneurs, bankers and investment experts. From those pitches, the judges selected four high school finalists and four collegiate finalists, who each then had the opportunity to give another pitch, followed by a question-and-answer session with the judges.

In the collegiate division, Kansas State University's Austin Chauncey, senior in mathematics and computer science, Manhattan, and Melanie Swertzberger, senior in finance, Hiawatha, Iowa, were awarded the $15,000 grand prize for their pitch of AdviseMe, a computer application that looks to improve the academic advising process at colleges and universities.

In the high school division, Nicholas Flores from Wichita East High School, Wichita, was awarded the $5,000 grand prize. His business, Kestral Aerial, uses drone technology to take aerial photos and videos for real estate and other commercial uses.

DID YOU KNOW?

Kansas State University won the 2018 Big 12 recycling competition in Recyclemania 2018. During the eight weeks of the competition, K-Staters recycled 486,286,000 pounds of recyclable material.

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