

Coastal Science Serving Texans

The Texas Sea Grant College Program Strategic Plan 2002-2005

"Why, to promote the relationship between academic, state, federal and industrial institutions in fisheries, do we not do what wise men had done for the better cultivation of the land a century ago? Why not have 'Sea Grant Colleges?'"
—Athelstan Spilhaus, 1963

a message from the director

The document you now hold in your hands is a concise strategic plan that provides the goals upon which the Texas Sea Grant College Program intends to focus over the next four years. Just how we intend to achieve the goals delineated here is the subject of a companion document, our implementation plan, which contains performance metrics. The two are being produced separately as the implementation plan will be revisited and updated every two years. Those revisitations and updates will provide us opportunities to assess how we are doing and allow for mid-course corrections and refinements of the process to reach our strategic goals.

Much of the strength of our program lies among the extremely talented researchers who represent institutions of higher education across the state. In addition, Texas Sea Grant is fortunate to have a dedicated group of employees stationed both in College Station and along the coast. Both of these groups are key to the success of this plan.

Robert R. Stickney
Director

background

Texas A&M University was among the first four institutions to receive the title of Sea Grant College in 1971, though university investigators had been involved with grants awarded under the National Sea Grant College and Program Act since 1968. As a Sea Grant College, Texas A&M provides support to faculty involved in marine-related research not only at our parent institution, but at institutions of higher education throughout the state. These research grants are made through a competitive process. While the focus of the program, as embodied in our motto "Coastal Science Serving Texans," is on the citizens of our state, we are also dedicated to developing and disseminating information that is of interest more broadly to regional, national and even global audiences through our outreach, communication and education programs.

During the more than 30 years of the Texas Sea Grant College Program's existence, a considerable amount of evolution has taken place. While there continues to be a focus on fisheries-related issues, the diversity of activities with which the program is involved covers everything from marine business and coastal community development to environmental science and seafood safety. We continually look for opportunities to become engaged in new programs, to develop partnerships and to promote research that is innovative, productive and supportive of the fundamental goal of dedication to the wise use and conservation of marine resources. In pursuit of that goal, the Texas Sea Grant College Program has expanded its involvement in the social sciences while maintaining our emphasis on the traditional marine sciences.

the process

This is a revision of the Texas Sea Grant College Program's initial strategic planning document Charting Our Course that was developed in 1998. The initial plan was developed to compliment those of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO). Since then, Texas A&M University and the College of

Geosciences, our academic home, have developed strategic plans. In addition, the Texas Legislature conducted an interim study on opportunities and challenges in the coastal area. This plan for 2002-2005 recognizes and incorporates elements of the two University plans, the legislative study, as well as the NOAA and NSGO plans.

The revision process began with the selection of a blue ribbon panel (see Appendix A) representing state and federal legislative bodies, state agencies, academia, environmental organizations and the private sector. The panel was convened on July 31, 2001. After due deliberation, the panel concluded that the basic objectives outlined in Charting Our Course provided the foundation upon which the revision should be based. While considerable progress had been made in meeting many of the goals, new challenges and opportunities had arisen and have been incorporated into the revised strategic plan. The panel also recommended providing an indication of who would address each of the reformulated goals and to develop performance measures.

The next step in the process was to request the Texas Sea Grant Advisory Committee (see Appendix B) to examine the thematic areas being emphasized in the current funding cycle (March 1, 2001 through February 29, 2004) and determine if those same thematic areas should be retained, placed or expanded upon in the two-year proposal cycle that will begin on March 1, 2004. A draft revision was developed based on that opinion and circulated first to the blue ribbon panel and subsequently to all personnel within the Texas Sea Grant College Program for their input. The revised draft was circulated to the blue ribbon panel. Comments were incorporated into a second draft and that document was distributed broadly to the Texas Sea Grant Advisory Committee and others from academia and state and local government. All responses were considered as the final version of the plan was drafted.

overarching goals

The Texas coastal region continues to be a magnet that draws people from across the nation and the world for purposes of recreation, commerce, retirement and general quality of life. Considerable expansion in the number of residents of the Texas coastal region is predicted for the foreseeable future. With that expansion will come additional pressures on our marine resources. Each of those with an interest in and connection to the Texas coast is considered to be a Sea Grant stakeholder. One goal is to support research and interpret the results to our diverse stakeholders so that we can promote sustainable development and thereby help maintain and even improve the quality of our coastal environment. Demographic changes in Texas involve not only increased numbers of people along our coast, but also changes in the diversity of coastal dwellers. We see these changes as a strength. Sea Grant needs to seek opportunities to develop new and exciting programs for this fluctuating and more diverse group of stakeholders.

In research our goal is to support the highest quality proposals that address the priorities identified by our Advisory Committee. That support comes at the end of a two-tiered peer review process. The first tier involves submission of preproposals that are reviewed to determine if they fit within the priorities. That process involves primarily in-state mail reviews and final evaluation and recommendations to the Director by a panel of experts. The second tier involves submission of full proposals that are subjected to peer reviewers by experts located outside the state. Finally, a panel of experts prioritizes the full proposals and submits recommendations to the Director.

We believe all Texans have a stake in the state's coastal environment. Freshwater inflow to our estuaries is becoming an increasingly important issue. Sea Grant will play a major role in educating all our citizens and visitors about our coastal environment and how actions that are taken far inland can have profound impacts on the coast. In recent years, each funded researcher has been asked to include an extension/outreach component to aid in this educational effort.

The Texas Sea Grant College Program is dedicated to achieving the stature within the

state that will lead stakeholders to routinely make it the first point of contact for information about our coast and its resources. Progress has been made over the past few years and this goal is embedded in this strategic plan.

our vision

The issues and problems associated with the Texas coastal region are, with few exceptions, of such scope and complexity that they cannot be adequately addressed except through interdisciplinary, often multi-institutional collaborations. We encourage researchers across the state to work together and to incorporate Marine Advisory Service (outreach) and Marine Information Service (communications) personnel as integral members of their teams. We view the federal and state funding that is made available to our program as the base upon which we can leverage additional funding to enhance and expand the program. Finally, we view our continued success to be best served by maintaining a policy of being an objective source of the best available information on marine-related topics. To that end we will be tenacious in our pursuit of knowledge that we can pass along to those in decision-making roles and to all other stakeholders. In our view, our dedication to being an unbiased source of information is a key to our past, present and future success.

strategic goals for the texas sea grant college program

It is seldom possible to plan for the future without fully considering the past. Past and present programs and activities were evaluated and compared with the previously mentioned NOAA, NSGO, Texas A&M University and College of Geosciences strategic plans and the legislative study before this revision was developed. While Texas Sea Grant does not address all of the strategic goals in any of the other plans, our goals are either explicitly included in one or more of those plans or are in close juxtaposition with one or more goals in those documents.

The strategic goals for the Texas Sea Grant College Program are few in number yet broad in scope. They revolve around a continuing effort to perform the mission of the program satisfactorily and to strive for continued improvement in the performance of our research, education and outreach activities.

Research and Programmatic Goals have been developed that build upon the strategic goals outlined in Charting Our Course. The current blue ribbon committee judged these earlier goals to be of continued importance.

Texas Sea Grant is an active and enthusiastic supporter of the Sea Grant Association's theme team development activity. Administrative, Marine Advisory Service and Marine Information Service personnel are members or co-chairs of one or more theme teams. The Research Goals outlined in this document incorporate each of the theme team subject areas in which Texas Sea Grant, in the broadest sense, is or plans to become involved.

Research Goal: Maintain and expand a high-quality, targeted, yet flexible marine research program.

Subgoals will relate to:

1. Coastal Ecosystem Health
2. Coastal Ecosystem Development
3. Marine Education
4. Unanticipated Problems and Opportunities

Programmatic Goal: Improve effectiveness of Texas Sea Grant

Subgoals

1. Enhance the ability of the program to provide service to the citizens of Texas.
2. Achieve full integration of program elements.
3. Increase awareness of the Texas Sea Grant College Program.
4. Build upon existing program strengths.

The Thematic Goals include the research priorities that were established for the program in 1999 by the Texas Sea Grant College Program Advisory Committee (see Appendix B) and

confirmed as still being appropriate by a survey of the committee conducted in 2001. In addition, Texas Sea Grant attempts to fund at least one marine education project during each proposal cycle, an activity that is supported by the Advisory Committee. A modest amount of money is also retained to provide limited levels of support for what are generically known as rapid response initiatives.

research goal: maintain and expand a high-quality, targeted, yet flexible marine research program

subgoal 1: solicit and fund research proposals that relate to the coastal ecosystem health priority

Maintaining, at the least, and improving, if possible, Texas' coastal ecosystem is a primary programmatic goal of the Texas Sea Grant College's research program. As our coast becomes increasingly crowded, the pressures on the environment continue to multiply. While we consider humankind to be an integral part of the ecosystem, we also recognize that human activity can have significant environmental consequences. This goal is sufficiently broad to accommodate a wide range of research proposals. In general, the research supported under this goal should relate to responses to environmental change. The following list of focus areas provides examples of the research that is consistent with this goal, although it is not meant to be exhaustive.

Approach 1: Support research associated with biological, chemical, physical and/or geological processes that address issues related to the status and health of our natural environment.

Approach 2: Solicit proposals aimed at development of responsible aquaculture in land-based and offshore systems.

Approach 3: Seek out research proposals associated with relationships between upland activities in watersheds and subsequent effects on freshwater inflow to estuarine and coastal ecosystems.

subgoal 2: solicit and fund research proposals that relate to the coastal ecosystem development priority

Development along the Texas coast does not occur evenly. While the typical coastal communities (small towns supported largely by commercial fisheries, summer home and retirement developments, campgrounds, industrial complexes) are present in abundance, much of the coast is dedicated to ranch land or high-density human habitation. The land in two counties that comprised the original King Ranch is still largely held by private ranchers. In contrast is the Houston-Galveston megalopolis that now stretches virtually to Beaumont to the east and Brazosport to the west. The Corpus Christi-Port Aransas-Aransas Pass region can be seen as mirroring Houston-Galveston in development, although currently at a smaller scale. Each coastal ecosystem experiences its own unique set of socio-economic challenges and opportunities. Sea Grant is dedicated to funding research aimed at examining associated issues and helping develop alternatives that policymakers can consider as they cope with change.

Approach 1: Promote research on the socio-economic impacts of natural and human-induced hazards such as hurricanes and terrorism. Included would be studies related to providing updated floodplain information.

Approach 2: Seek out research proposals associated with the impacts of legislation and regulation on fishing communities.

Approach 3: Solicit proposals for research on demographic change along the Texas coast and projections associated with resulting user conflicts.

subgoal 3: solicit and fund at least one proposal during each funding cycle in the area of marine education

Marine education is a high priority for all elements of the Texas Sea Grant College Program. We conduct programs, prepare and distribute material, and support research targeting not only higher education, but also preschool, K-12 and elderhostel groups. Our

policy has been to solicit marine education research proposals and fund at least one such program during each funding cycle.

Approach 1: Solicit proposals for research aimed at curriculum development for K-12 students.

Approach 2: Support the development of various types of educational materials, including books, CD-ROMs and websites that relate to Texas Sea Grant's mission.

Approach 3: Provide support for symposia and workshops that emphasize Sea Grant goals and lead to publication of proceedings.

subgoal 4: be prepared to address unanticipated problems and take advantage of unanticipated opportunities

A modest amount of the funds expended each year on research supports small, peer-reviewed projects (usually less than \$10,000 each).

Approach 1: Provide modest amounts of funding to test concepts that may lead to development of more extensive proposals submitted to Sea Grant or some other funding agency.

Approach 2: Help new faculty in Texas institutions of higher education initiate their research programs.

Approach 3: Fund research demonstration projects for Marine Advisory Service agents and specialists.

programmatic goal: improve the effectiveness of texas sea grant

subgoal 1: enhance the ability of the program to provide service to the citizens of texas.

A large percentage of the residents of Texas live, work and recreate along our coast. That population is augmented by tourists from other states and abroad. Texas Sea Grant provides services to both residents and visitors in a wide variety of ways. The objective is to have the Texas Sea Grant College Program seen as a primary contact point for marine-related information. The Sea Grant network provides the linkage to more than 30 other states and the universities in those states that deal with marine issues. The challenge is to make the public and private sectors within the state aware of the wealth of talent and information that is readily available to them through the Sea Grant network.

Approach 1: Expand the number of seminars, symposia, workshops and training programs conducted.

Approach 2: Develop additional mechanisms for funding Texas Shores magazine and increase both the quantity produced and the distribution.

Approach 3: Develop innovative methods for developing and distributing information through the Marine Advisory Service and Marine Information Service.

subgoal 2: fully integrate and expand upon the research, outreach and educational components of the program.

Much of the effectiveness of the Texas Sea Grant College Program depends upon collaboration and cooperation among the three components upon which the program is based: research, outreach and education. None of these activities is fully compartmentalized. Scientific research is conducted by those investigators at institutions of higher education who seek funding through the competitive grant program. Marine Advisory Service personnel (both agents and specialists) conduct research-demonstration projects and have access to targeted research funding through the competitive rapid response mechanism. Marine Information Service personnel conduct research for their publications through personal interviews and library searches. Similarly, everyone affiliated with the program, both Sea Grant personnel and researchers supported by Sea Grant, are involved in outreach when they respond to inquiries from stakeholders. As interest and activity associated with the Texas coastal ecosystem increases, the job of Sea Grant grows. To meet current demands and provide an opportunity for Sea Grant to develop new initiatives, judicious expansion of the program's personnel will be required.

Approach 1: Further develop the interaction of MAS and MIS personnel with each funded research project.

Approach 2: Expand the Sea Grant staff by adding positions in the Marine Advisory Service and Marine Information Service.

Approach 3: Place increased emphasis on technology transfer and sustainability.

subgoal 3: serve as a primary link between government and higher education with respect to marine issues.

Texas Sea Grant has worked closely with a number of universities across the state in conjunction with our research program, and we have developed a diverse group of stakeholders throughout the state, largely because of the activities of the Marine Advisory Service and Marine Information Service. While the relationships with at least some governmental entities have developed considerably in recent years, the program is not yet seen as a primary source of information about marine issues and activities by the state and federal lawmakers and agencies. The goal is to achieve that stature, utilizing the network that has been developed, by providing information or access to information rapidly, ensuring the information provided is the best available scientifically and that the information is unbiased.

Approach 1: Establish a strong linkage between marine science administrators at institutions of higher education and the Coastal Coordination Council.

Approach 2: Work to increase the utilization of Sea Grant's resources by legislators and other decision makers.

Approach 3: Expand the Texas Sea Grant Fellows program to encourage future leaders to become involved in state and federal government.

subgoal 4: build upon existing program strengths

To continue being effective and efficient, the Texas Sea Grant College Program needs to maintain the unique structure that has been developed and has worked well for more than 30 years. Sea Grant must also continually assess the marine problem-oriented research needs that can best be addressed by academic scientists, develop research-demonstration projects to show stakeholders how to put the results of research into practice and be a leader in technology transfer. Publication of timely information in support of each of those activities is critical to the fulfillment of those activities. Texas Sea Grant cannot afford to rest upon the successes of the past, but must continue to develop new strengths and build upon those that exist.

Approach 1: Seek out and take advantage of opportunities to leverage state and federal funding for the program to enhance its ability to fulfill our mission.

Approach 2: Expand the network of stakeholders who interact with the Texas Sea Grant College Program and place an emphasis on incorporating the strengths offered by the changing diversity of the state's population.

Approach 3: Improve public awareness of the Texas Sea Grant College Program's capabilities, accomplishments, services and products.

implementing the texas sea grant strategic plan

This document sets forth the long-term objectives of the Texas Sea Grant College Program. Implementation will involve a series of steps in relation to each item listed under the research goal and programmatic goal presented. As progress will be achieved at variable rates, the steps taken to implement this strategic plan need to be revisited and revised more frequently than once every four years. Therefore, our implementation plan is a separate document that will be updated at least once each two years. Copies of the implementation plan and additional copies of this strategic plan are available by writing

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or by visiting our website:
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