African Students Association brings Africa to A-State with Culture Night

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The African Students Association (ASA) showcased traditional African food, music and art with its first-ever Culture Night.

Queyonoh Kweh, a Higher Education Institution (HEI) program coordinator, advises the ASA.

"This particular event focuses on engaging people in African culture. There's a lot of stigma and a lot of ignorance and we just want to be able to share our culture with other people and have an opportunity for people to come and learn and to experience African culture," Kweh said.

ASA members led stations comprising bead-making, music, dancing, art and food.

The first table provided space for attendees to create traditional African accessories, such as ankle and waist beads.

At the next station, participants could scan Spotify URIs, which directed them to curated playlists with African music.

"(The station was) designed for people to preview a couple of different African playlists from different cultures, more traditional stuff: Afrobeat, East Africa, South African," Kweh said.

The middle of the room was left open for attendees to dance along with African music.

The event also included an art exhibit with traditional African garments, instruments and cooking tools.

Kweh encouraged participants to try traditional African dishes, such as chicken and Jollof rice, after completing the other stations.

Fahema Nambafu, a first-year mechanical engineering major from Uganda, is a member of the ASA. She said her favorite part of the event was the Jollof rice and the music.

Many ASA members wore African-inspired outfits to the event. Kweh said much of the clothing reimagined traditional West African prints.

Kweh said she was pleased with how the event turned out.

"We wanted to do a couple of more things but I am really happy with what we have. I think next year we will probably have more stations, more dancing and really just perfect what we have now," Kweh said.

Claire Umeora, a junior marketing major from Jonesboro, serves as the ASA president. She said ASA aims to create an African community on campus.

"A lot of people are coming straight from Africa. They don't really know anybody here and it's completely different in America. I just wanted to make them feel at home by having events," Umeora said.

Photo by Caroline Averitt | Life Editor

Students, faculty and staff at African Students Association at Culture Night.

Kweh said she felt alone throughout her education due to her Liberian descent, which inspires her work with the ASA.

"I always stuck out, there's the presumption of being an immigrant. To be able to share with the students and support them in this way, many of them are internationals who don't have their families here, and to help in creating a community for them means the world to me," she said.

STRESS, CONTINUED

"Every professor is trying to get everything done before break. That has made my stress level for the FE very high because I can't just focus on the FE, I have to focus on passing my classes as well."Hessling said.

Students use a variety of methods to help manage their stress levels. Madison Walker, a senior civil engineering major from Tuckerman, Arkansas, said she exercises and does hot yoga to relieve stress.

"It's just kind of a quiet time. You get to go and be by yourself and honestly, you're so hot and you can just forget about the FE and the stressors that you may have, or if you're worried at all or whatever, just a little break from what you're dealing with," Walker said.

In addition to attending senior seminar review sessions, students have been studying on their own using online review materials.

Nicolas Palacios, a senior electrical engineering major from Cabot, Arkansas, said he's been using FE prep guides on the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying website.

There are two review manuals: a bigger workbook with examples and solutions and a smaller book for just diagnostic exams. He bought the bigger book and studies when he has time.

Engineering professors recognize the stress the exams can cause students.

Haran said he tells students to prioritize studying for the FE and then to come back and complete his assignments.

Yeonsang Hwang, who serves as associate dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science and has a doctorate in civil engineering, said students should not stress themselves out trying to get a perfect score.

"We acknowledge and understand it can be a big stressor. We're trying to do the best we can to help students manage that and to encourage them," Stewart said. "The other thing is you want to go in with a positive attitude. It's a long test, so it's not something you're gonna knock out in five minutes. So try to just manage expectations for what that full day of testing is gonna be like."

Mechanical engineering students host robotics competition

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Annie Camp Junior High School students won the second annual Red Wolf Robotics Competition hosted by Arkansas State University mechanical engineering students.

The winning team consisted of seventh grader Cooper Hunt and eighth graders Caleb Hirsch,

Victoria Flores and Keagan Hicks. They said winning was an accomplishment. Annie Camp won for the second year in a row with 62 points.

The competition aimed to introduce fifth through eighth graders to engineering and robotics.

"There are so many kids who are interested in engineering, but don't know where to start. This is a damn good starting point for them," said Shivan Haran, director of mechanical engineering, who has a doctorate in mechanical engineering. "We find that several of the younger kids keep coming back."

Participants controlled their robots through an obstacle course. Scattered across the course were green blocks, which the robots grabbed and then placed into two baskets in the course. Each team member had to deliver at least one block to a basket.

Any damage to the arena or knocking over Pokémon statues littered throughout the course resulted in penalties. Each team got one round in the arena, with the round lasting 12 minutes.

The team's winning robot, named Meko after the "Transformers" character of the same name, used a clutch design. The design used a claw to grab blocks, but the claw was mounted vertically using a crane-like design instead of horizontally.

While some team members will age out of the competition next year, they are still working on improving their robot design. They said they are taking inspiration from the final robot to compete.

"They had a spinning mechanism that could intake (blocks) really fast and maybe we could add a smaller version of that," Hunt said.

The mechanical engineering students sent VEX Robotics kits to participating schools before the contest. Students could use pre-made designs included in the kit instructions or create their own designs.

The kits require no programming knowledge and use plastic pins and other components to fit together easily.

The schools invited to compete comprised of Annie Camp Junior High School, Buffalo Island Central Junior High, Highland Middle School, Marked Tree Elementary, East Poinsett County High School, and Jonesboro Visual and Performing Arts School. Annie Camp and Marked Tree sent two teams and Visual and Performing Arts could not attend due to travel issues.

Highland scored 49 points, East Poinsett County scored 39, Buffalo Island Central scored 38, Group Two from Marked Tree scored 28 and Group One 25, and Group One from Annie Camp scored 19.

Morgan Diamond, a senior mechanical engineering major from Jonesboro and president of the A-State chapter of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, ASME, said they geared the contest toward fifth through eighth graders because it is an easy time to get them interested in robotics and engineering.

"They can get started working on engineering now and then they'll get to high school, take some shop classes, or maybe do some more higher-level robotics stuff," Diamond said. "After that, they come to college and they already have a background in robotics and they have an interest in engineering. They've already been practicing."

The obstacle course was completely redesigned from last year. Instead of using textbooks and red Solo cups as obstacles, official VEX arena pieces served as barriers, towers and more.

In addition, trophies were given out to all teams who came in first, second and third place. Last year, only the team who came in first place got trophies. Funding for the event came from the Student Government Association's Action Fund Commission and the Kays Foundation.

Photo by Rachel Rudd | Editor-in-Chief

From left to right: Caleb Hirsch, Cooper Hunt, Victoria Flores and Keagan Hicks, run their robot through the obstacle course. They made up Group Two of Annie Camp, which won with 62 points.

In addition to exposing young kids to engineering, Haran said the contest helped the college kids running the event.

"This kind of works into the leadership role. They essentially know how to run such events. They get to learn how to address a crowd, they learn how to teach some of these kids how to do some of those little engineering projects and so on," Haran said. "Overall, it gives them the exposure of being out there as leaders in engineering."