



Gulf Coast Process Technology Alliance

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“Can I use makeup?”

“Do I have to wear this hardhat? It’s messing up my hair.”

Those were frequently heard comments at one university and two colleges recently where more than 50 females from Texas and Louisiana got the chance to explore careers in science and technology.

The Gulf Coast Process Technology Alliance (GCPTA) made awards to all three schools to hold summer institutes to familiarize female students in the 11th and 12th grades of high schools about the career opportunities that await them in science and mathematics, particular in the field of Process Technology.

The awards are made available through a grant from the Center for the Advancement of Process Technology (CAPT) in Texas City, TX. CAPT is a National Center of Excellence of the National Science Foundation. They pay all expenses of the institutes, including the salaries of instructors and breakfast and lunch for the students.

Eleventh and twelfth graders from high schools in North East Texas attended week-long classes at Texas State Technical College in Marshall. In

Southeast Texas, girls participated in activities and made tours of chemical plants from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Brazosport College in Lake Jackson.



And in Louisiana, the high schoolers built aluminum boats and constructed items from Legos in experiments that were part of the workshop at McNeese University in Lake Charles.

It is all a part of the GCPTA's efforts to attract more students – particularly females – to process technology jobs. “Process operating is a non-traditional field for females,” said Steve Ames, president of GCPTA and process training coordinator of the ExxonMobil plant in Baytown, TX. “The summer institutes are intended to introduce the career opportunities to females in the 11th and 12th grades.”

More than a half dozen of the attendees at McNeese in Lake Charles, LA, were won over after exercises which pointed out the advantages of a career in process technology. “We visited our future goals and wishes and then compared them to the job salary of what we are thinking of doing,” said Dorothy Ortego, department head and assistant professor at McNeese.

“At the start of the week, we had one girl who was there because she had heard about PTEC (process technology) and thought that was what she wanted to do,” said Ortego. “At the end of the week, two girls planned to definitely enroll in a PTEC course and six more are seriously considering it as a career that they

are interested in.”

In Texas and Louisiana, the 13 endorsed colleges of GCPTA recruit high schools in their regions to offer process technology classes on their campuses that will give students college credit.

A total of 14 females registered for the classes at McNeese, but Ortego said conflicts took their toll, and by the end of the week the number dwindled to 11. Those 11 experienced a week of varied activities – in the class rooms, in the McNeese labs and at Lake Charles area plants such as Entergy, Grace Davison, SASOL and Westlake Chemical.

The largest attendance of the three institutes was at TSTC – Marshall which opened its doors to both females and males. Robert Smith, the process technology instructor, said the school also needs to bolster its enrollment from both genders.



The American Petroleum Institute in a Workforce Initiative Study has estimated that 50 percent of the technicians in process technology will retire by 2008. In addition, companies undergoing expansion on the Gulf Coast are pressuring colleges to graduate more process technicians to fill the \$50,000 a year jobs becoming available soon.

Smith said the demand for his students at TSTC-Marshall is great. The 51 students were from 28 different high schools. Twenty-three of the attendees were females.

A part of each camp is an activity section which includes science experiments. Students at the TSTC institute also participated in a ROPES course and got hands-on experience in the TSTC laboratories.

Company officials from Eastman Chemical, Pilgrim's Pride, Plastipak and Centerpoint Energy discussed the process technology industry and its career opportunities with the students.

The students also toured Eastman Chemical in Longview, Sabine Mining, and American Electric Power Company-SWEPCO Pirkey Power plant.

Process operators work not only in chemical and refining plants and at oil and gas production facilities but also in food processing, electrical generation, pulp and paper production and pharmaceutical process. Part of GCPTA's role through its education committee is to develop a curriculum for colleges to instruct classes to benefit all of the process industries.

The week was not all work and no play for the 14 young ladies at

Brazosport College in Lake Jackson, TX. One of the fun activities was to construct a marshmallow blow gun, according to Gary Hicks, physical sciences and process technologies division chair at BC.



“At Dow (the Dow Chemical facility in Freeport, TX), we were able to tour the wastewater treatment plant and visited the marine terminal where the girls were able to climb to the top of an observation deck overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway,” said Hicks. “The girls were able to see the skimmer nesting area, dolphins swimming in the canal and brown pelicans, which impressed them about Dow being very responsive to environmental concerns.”

Ames said that GCPTA intends to continue the summer institutes. “The need for more females in this field is there,” he said, “and this is one way we can make an impact on that need.”

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