



photo by JD Taylor

by KATE DARSEY '24

With a current student population of 70,000 at Texas A&M University, more than 8,000 in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and 1,400 in the incoming freshman class, navigating the campus can feel intimidating at first.

To combat this challenge, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Freshman Experience, or COALS FX, began in fall of 2023.

COALS FX provides students with hands-on experiences beyond the classroom, opportunities to volunteer within the College and mentors to assist with shifting to their new home.

Robert Sturdivant, the adviser for COALS FX, was instrumental in its creation. He recognized the need for a strong freshman organization in the College and seized the opportunity.

"We knew if we created an organization where freshmen were a part of our College more, there would be more of a sense of belonging," Sturdivant said.

The fall 2023 freshman class reached the largest number yet, and as the College aims to increase enrollment each year, organizations will have to adjust to the growth.

With 140 applicants for COALS FX, the College invited 61 freshmen instead of the intended 40.

"These are the best of the best from our College, and these students are going to do incredible things," Sturdivant said. "What I love is it's college kids, sophomores and juniors, who are mentors pouring into this family atmosphere, pouring into a group of freshmen."

The freshmen members were divided into six "families," each consisting of two mentors to assist and provide guidance. Twelve sophomores and juniors within the College were carefully selected to fill these mentor positions.

"One of the best things COALS FX does is having peer mentors," Zoe Meeks, a freshman majoring in agricultural economics from Dalhart, Texas, said. "So in each group, there are two peer mentors, and mine are Charlie and Kyle. They are always willing to lend a helping hand and check up on us."

COALS FX is unique from other organizations as it strives to bring together students from all departments in the College, each with various passions, ideas and backgrounds.

"A really cool aspect of the College is it is not just the College of Agriculture," Meeks said. "It is the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, so you have a lot of unique majors."

Serving as a launching pad, students can invest the skills, knowledge and leadership they acquire through COALS FX into other organizations, and ultimately, real life.

"You are here for four years, what is the impact you can make at this institution?" Sturdivant said. "If we can get that in a freshman's mind, then their trajectory of where they are going will look a lot different because their purpose of why they do it is different." 🍀