One more step for the France–Texas partnership

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Fifty students from the Texas A&M University stayed in France this summer, as part of the study abroad partnership set up between the American Texas A&M University (TA&M) and the French École Nationale Supérieure d’Arts et Métiers (ENSAM).

Student exchange

In June 2018, 25 students from Texas A&M University went studying in immersion at the École nationale supérieure d’arts et métiers in Aix-en-Provence. This study abroad initiative was carried out by the two universities together with the support of the Office for Science and Technology of the French Embassy in the United States.

The experience was renewed this year with the departure of 50 American students and their teachers to France from May 15th to June 18th. While most students took courses on site, others found the opportunity to carry out research work at the ENISE in Saint-Etienne, and one of them even did an internship at the Henri-Fabre Technocentre, affiliated to ENSAM. Courses were held in English by Texas A&M teachers, and were structured around the main themes of this TA&M - ENSAM partnership: materials sciences, smart manufacturing, artificial intelligence, aeronautics and energy.

In addition to these courses provided by TA&M, the creation of mixed working groups (French/American) allowed young students to interact with each other and work on research projects in a multicultural environment.

Collaboration timeline

This study abroad program is the result of a collaboration initiated in 2017 with the establishment of a memorandum of understanding between ENSAM - Paris Tech on the one hand, and the Texas Engineering Experiment Station (TEES) - TA&M’s research and development platform - on the other hand. A previous article reported on the history between the two institutes and in particular the organization of a symposium on the TA&M campus along with the first study abroad program.

In the meantime, the French-American link was strengthened and led to the creation of a cluster called AM²
(as double reference to Arts et Métiers and (T)A&M). Formalized on November 30th 2018, this new entity reflects the will to merge the efforts of the two universities into a common entity, in order to increase the visibility of the initiative and promote partnership excellence among local companies and entrepreneurs. The approach will physically be shaped by the construction of a local office on the Aix-en-Provence site, scheduled for 2020.

Since then, a second workshop was held in Aix, from January 10th to 11th 2019. The event brought together the academic staff of the university tandem and benefited from the presence of many industrials and innovation stakeholders. The emulsion generated by this second symposium gave visibility to the TA&M-ENSAM partnership, a strategy designed to reach industries on the concept of the plant of tomorrow.

Future outcomes

On August 23rd, the Office for Science and Technology attended a series of meetings on the TA&M campus at College Station, scheduled with the return of the students (“Aggies”) back to Texas. The very positive assessment of the experience was complemented by a discussion with the Director for Engineering International Programs, Maria Alves, on the future of this French American partnership. In the long term, the university would like to increase the number of students going to ENSAM for longer periods of time. For instance, TEES plans exchanges over a semester by January 2020, and could extend the training to a full year (one year in the USA, followed by one year in France). In addition, the partnership will be endowed with a new dual degree in interdisciplinary engineering.

In addition to student considerations, a third workshop is planned for fall 2019 in College Station. It will bring together the multiple players in the AM² cluster around a consortium of companies (Airbus, STIL, Essilor, ExOne, Saint Gobain, etc.) whose various investments will fund research (via calls for projects) and promote student mobility.

As a result, the Scientific Service wishes to extend the spirit of this workshop by setting up a French American Innovation Day (FAID) in partnership with TA&M in spring 2020. With a focus on "Smart Manufacturing for the Factory of the Future", a conference involving keynotes, panel discussions and networking time with attendees is under way. A platform dedicated to this FAID will soon be online via the Office for Science and Technology website, similar to the 2019 edition held in Houston on "Procedural Medicine in the Digital Age".

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