

**Eric Turpen, #25**  
**TALL XIV**  
**Session 1 – College Station, TX**  
**July 8-11, 2014**

**Tuesday, July 8, 2014**

***Welcome/Opening Remarks/Orientation/Evaluation—Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz, Dr. Douglas Steele***

I was fortunate to have had a coworker that had recently been through the TALL program, so I had gotten to hear a little about Dr. Jim and the Program. Even though I had heard some about the program I did not know what to fully expect. I was immediately impressed By Dr. Jim’s professionalism and dedication to this program. Hearing from Dt. Steele made us aware of the support of the Texas A&M System with this program.

The orientation was very beneficial in hearing the house keeping items, and what would be expected of us over the course of the two year program. I am honored to be a part of such a distinguished program. Throughout the orientation, I could tell that this program was going to expect a lot, but was going to offer even more. I am very humbled to be a part of this great program.

It is a great feeling to be involved with great leaders and individuals involved in Texas Agriculture. I could tell when people started walking in, that there was going to be a room of very highly qualified people. After the personal introductions of my classmates, I knew I was sitting in a room of very influential people. I hope to develop many great relationships with my classmates over the course of the program.

***Texas Department of Criminal Justice Agriculture Today—Mr. Todd Swick***

In all my experience and travels throughout the ag industry, I had no idea that the TDCJ was so involved in agriculture. It was impressive to hear what a large scale agribusiness operation TDCJ conducts. They truly take a sustainable approach to the prison system. Not only are they involved in production agriculture, but also are so vertically integrated that they turn commodities into products to support the prison system. It makes me proud to know that Texas is utilizing their inmate population to produce products that save the taxpayers money, while giving the inmates job training, a skillset, and something positive to be involved in.

***Texas A&M Forest Service—Mr. Tom Boggus, Mr. Don Galloway, Mr. Don Hanneman, Mr. Curt Stipling, Mr. Hughes Simpson***

Being from a small town, I knew that the Texas Forest Service has provided grants and equipment to rural fire departments. However, what I did not know, was how large of a scope of services that they provided. It was very impressive to see that the Texas A&M Forest Service is helping lead the nation in disaster response, because of their strong management systems and innovations. I was mistaken to think that they just were responsible in managing forest fires. They are actually involved in all types of natural disasters and emergency management. It was apparent to me, that they relied heavily on management systems and technology in their operations, and that these management systems must be

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effective and highly regarded due to the Texas A&M Forest Service being involved in many national events.

***Etiquette Training and Meal—Dr. Susan Quiring***

I can say that the only etiquette training I have had other than my mother, has been through a part of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. The first being in the 4-H EXCEL program, and the most recent being through the TALL Program. Dr. Quiring was very graceful and proper, and did a great job of teaching and reinforcing proper table etiquette. I personally, do a great deal of business over mealtime, and it was a great experience to learn more proper etiquette. By learning the rules of proper etiquette we can go out into our communities and be an example of good table etiquette to a society that is not as well trained.

**Wednesday, July 9, 2014**

***AG Media Training—Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications Department, Texas A&M University***

This was a great program. I have been interviewed in the past by media, but never on a confrontational or critical issue. The media training was a great workshop. It was one of my favorite programs of the week and I am very happy that my team did not have to go first.

The professors and staff did an excellent job with this workshop. They themselves knew enough about the topics to really catch you off guard. They were also well trained in asking questions and trying to get a rise out of the speakers. It was almost easy to take offense to the reporters, but we learned that we may not always be talking to people that are educated in the subject. After the exercise was over they were all very helpful in giving hints and discussing the process with us, which helped us not be so offended by them. Most of them were agriculturalists as well.

We were put on the spot very quickly about an issue we may have or have not known much about. This allowed us to improvise, but also learn not to just make things up. All the groups did well for not being prepared or knowing much about a topic. There was value in not being prepared. By the end of the exercise I, as well as others, had learned some important tips on how to manage and control the dialogue of an interview, as well as effective ways to follow up with unknown items.

***“A Different Kind of Career: Under Cover in the CIA”—Jim Olson***

This lecture covered so many things that we never think of. The speaker spoke of issues facing the United States by other foreign powers and what we have to be concerned about as a nation and as agriculturalist guarding against risks. It opened my eyes to the importance of being aware in the ag industry, of potential terrorist threats or critical outbreaks that we should be on guard for. The presentation tied well into the media workshop, because, God forbid we might have to make a statement to the media one day after a threat to agricultural security.

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Another aspect of this lecture was working under pressure. We all deal with different types of stress in our careers and life, but I for certain have never had anyone actively trying to kill me or my family. That is a different kind of stress all together.

Mr. Olson's presentation was definitely one of my favorites of the week. I bleed red, white and blue, and this was one of three lectures of the week that had me debating between joining the CIA, joining the special forces, or making a bid for the White House.

***Lunch and Program—John & Carrie Giesenschlag, Tri-county Extension Field Crops Committee, (Citizens State Bank) Mr. John Smith, (Monsanto) Mr. Lynn Angell***

This was a great opportunity to see the agricultural productivity of the Bravos Valley, and the great people who work in this region. At lunch we had a room full of people who are very passionate about agriculture and the TALL Program. The hospitality of Mr. & Mrs. Giesenschlag was amazing. I have the opportunity to travel and eat at many great locations, but I found it hard to practice the proper etiquette that we had learned the night previous as I ate the food we were served that day. The food was awesome, rarely have I had the opportunity to eat meals like that when traveling. It was truly what I call "home-country cooking". I made it a point to tell Mr. Giesenschlag after lunch how much I enjoyed lunch. He said, "I just wanted to offer ya'll something a little different than the usual meeting food."

***Wiggins LLP-Watermelon Warehouse, Inc. Tour—Jody Wiggins***

This was a great opportunity to further see the agricultural diversity of the Brazos Valley. We got to see firsthand the labor intensive side of the production of fruits and vegetables. While, we did not get to see much of the 1,500 acres of watermelon production, we did get to see the 36,000 sq.ft. packing facility in Snook, TX in operation. Mr. Wiggins told us about the production process and who they market their fresh watermelons to. It was interesting to me to see how the production of fruits and vegetables varies from row crop production, and the different and same issues that we both face.

***Tour Blue Bell Creameries—Mr. Paul Kruse***

The tour of Blue Bell gave us another opportunity to see the actual food production side of agriculture. It was very interesting to be able to see an ice cream factory that creates such a large volume and well known product. The class got to tour the facility and see the operations. After that we sat down and enjoyed a bowl of ice cream. The last part of this tour, and the part that I found most interesting, was sitting down with Mr. Kruse and his management team. They were able to tell us about the operations of the business, their management structure, and how they competed on a large scale.

***Brazos Valley Recycling—Mr. Charlie Mancuso***

The tour of Brazos Valley Recycling did not necessarily fit into the agriculture sector directly, but it was interesting none the less. This company was a great model of how thinking outside the box can make for a large business. They are able to take many different types of garbage and rubbish, and turn them

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into reusable things. It was impressive to see how they created a business around garbage, have developed their processes to handle different sorts of trash, and how they actively seek alternative uses and markets for their recycled materials.

**Thursday, July 10, 2014**

***“Challenge Works”—Mr. Bob Gantt***

I was a little apprehensive when I saw this on the agenda. I thought, “Seriously, what are we going to get out of this.” I expected that we would get a good break from all the programs with a little friendly intense competition. Well, I was wrong. This program was excellent, and the activities were strategically designed to teach us the importance of working as a team, problem solving, collaborative decision making, and trusting other people.

It was not so much a competition; however, our team did take the opportunity to try to beat any course records when we could. This was a fun and physically exhausting day. I learned many great points and exercises that I can take back and put into effect with the many different teams that I work with.

***Texas Engineering Extension Service – Emergency Services Training Institute—Mr. Mike Wisby***

We were very fortunate to be able to tour the Emergency Services Training Institute when we did. While we were there, emergency personnel from South America were at the fire school. We got to see them do several different drills, and see up close how much management and planning has to go into this operation to make it run as smooth and safe as it does.

Mr. Wisby took the first part of the tour to explain to us TEES’s event management plan. They have a detailed plan identifying everything from personal, golf cart list, safety information, and more. Their event coordination plan is truly amazing. They have everything so planned out, that in the rare event something did go wrong, there is a plan for that too.

After he explained their management style, we walked around a portion of the property and saw some firefighters in action. After watching a few drills we loaded the bus, and Mr. Wisby showed us all the different training operations in the facility. We are very lucky to have the world’s largest emergency services training center here in Texas.

***TALL Social and Reception - Dinner with Mr. Tim Rabroker and Ms. Laura Duskocil of Slovacek’s***

The reception was held in the AgriLife Center where we had the opportunity to meet many of the great people that are involved in the AgriLife Extension Service, TALL Alumni, and TALL Supporters. I really enjoyed the opportunity to visit with many great people that are passionate about the agriculture industry. I met a few TALL Alumni and many supporters of the TALL Program.

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Dr. Mazurkiewicz gave some opening remarks, followed by a greeting from the President of the TALL Foundation, Mr. Jim Pewitt. Dr. Bill Dugas introduced the Keynote Speaker for the evening, Texas A&M Interim President Dr. Mark Hussey. After Dr. Hussey's address, each member of TALL XIV introduced themselves, and then were sent off with their dinner host for the evening.

I was sent to dinner with Mr. Tim Rabroker and Ms. Laura Doscocil of Slovacek's Sausage of Snook, Texas. I was given the choice to go eat at a steak house in Snook and tour their processing facility, or to go to downtown Bryan and eat at the Bavarian Brauhaus. I told them both that I would very much like to see their facility, but the Bavarian Brauhaus sounded very interesting. I have had the opportunity to travel quite a lot and eat many different kinds of food. In all my travels, I have never had authentic German Cuisine. It was a very interesting place, and the food was excellent. We all had a different type of schnitzel, and then we topped it off with a wonderful crepe. It was a great dining experience, but most importantly, the conversation was excellent. I told them both about myself, and they told me about each of them. They talked about their business and the area. We had great conversation for about two hours, and then they returned me to the hotel. The following day, when class concluded, I drove to Snook and toured their facility. They were gracious enough to have prepared a sample package for me to take home with all their different products inside.

**Friday, July 11, 2014**

***“How the World Works and Why it Doesn't”—Dr. David McIntyre***

Dr. McIntyre has an extensive background in education, military training, strategy, and homeland security. His presentation was one of my favorites of the week. It was very informative, and got my patriotic juices flowing. His stories were great, but his message also provided insight to problems we face as a nation.

The core of his presentation circled around Strategy, Policy, and Operations; how they are used or not used in the federal government, and how they relate to each other. It was very easy to see how these three items are important to business and business management. It helped me understand how all three are required to get effective and desired results.

I could have listened to him easily for several more hours. It was nice to be able to ask him questions at the end. Many questions came up about the current border problems our nation is having. It was very interesting to hear his perspective.

***Brigadier General Joe Ramirez Jr.***

This was also one of my favorite lectures of the week. If you will notice my favorites have been the extraordinary leadership and sacrifice of some of the members of the military and security forces. I have been to leadership trainings and seminars from instructors that quote phrases from presidents and generals and have read lots of books. However, if you ever want a firsthand account of true leadership,

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you should listen to an officer in the armed services. Brigadier General Joe Ramirez gave a great presentation on leadership.

***“Responsibilities of the TVMDL”—Mr. Terry Hensley DVM***

This presentation gave a great overview into TVMDL’s role in animal agriculture. Dr. Hensley gave a very comprehensive look at all the different aspects and services that they provide. It was interesting to hear all the different ways that the TMVDL helps to keep American Agriculture safe, and the ways that they help the local veterinarians and public with animal disease testing. This was a very informative session.

***“Behind the Scenes” Tour of the George Bush Presidential Archives—Dr. Robert Holzweiss***

We had the opportunity to see the remarkable George Bush Museum and Presidential Archives. Mr. Holzweiss gave us a behind the scenes look at the Presidential Archives. I have never been to a presidential library, so this was a new experience.

It was remarkable to see the amount of items stored and processed in the archives. There were many priceless artifacts, millions of pages of documents, and some junk given to the president. It was interesting to see how they sorted everything and stored it safely. The most interesting thing was in regards to all the documents. Mr. Holzweiss explained the different levels of classified materials, and the process by which they went through everything to make what they could available to the public. He mentioned how important their job was in letting history be told and not disrupting it. The tour was fantastic.

After the class was over I took several hours and walked through the George Bush Museum. It was very interesting to see all the items from the Presidency and to revisit the history around them. This optional tour was well worth the time it took to go through it. The only regret I have is that I did not have one of the volunteers take my picture in the chair of the Oval Office replica.