

STEM Day draws more than 400

Outside instructor Margene Lenamon's classroom last week at Lee College, a masking-tape outline on the floor — mimicking the chalk outlines of bodies found at grisly crime scenes — welcomed high school students into a lesson centered on forensic science.

Inside the classroom, students found laboratory tables piled high with bone fragments, x-rays, microscopes and kits to be used for collecting and examining DNA. College students stood close by, ready to offer a helping hand.

"We want you to interact, we want you to pick up, we want you to look at, we want you to do," Lenamon told the students, who were among more than 400 registered participants of the college's STEM Day event held Friday, Feb. 28, to encourage exploration of science, technology, engineering and math.

Sophomores, juniors and seniors from eight nearby school districts were invited to Lee for STEM Day, which was funded through a federal STEM grant for Hispanic-serving institutions. The students rotated through the Gray Science Building and had their pick from a wide variety of interactive, informational sessions created and led by college instructors.

In one room, a group of sophomores shared their career aspirations with instructor Yinfen Yen in a session about microbes. In another, students donned safety goggles and mixed glue, borax and water to create a bouncy, rubbery "slime" in a session about chemistry and polymers. There were also sessions about the harmonic structure of music as sound waves, forensic ballistics, the human body, environmental science and even the process of refining oil.

"Our goal is to inspire students to look at STEM fields and show them what's really out there," said instructor Evan Richards, who coordinated the event and taught a popular session where students used computer software to program robots. "I really want to awaken their minds to all that is possible."