JOHN KOLDUS TO RETIRE IN AUGUST

By Jerry C. Cooper '63

"The people that associate with Texas A&M are super in every way."

Dr. John Koldus III

If one phrase could sum up the philosophy of Dr. John J. Koldus III, it might be: “Reach out. Don’t wait for problems to come to you.”

In 38 years of teaching and working with students — the last two decades as Vice President for Student Services at Texas A&M University — this has been his watchword.

In August, John Koldus will retire after 20 years of guiding myriad programs that involve virtually every area of student life at Texas A&M — housing, health care, recreational sports, student achievement recognition, student government, the Corps of Cadets, off-campus programs, Fish Camp, T-Camp, personal counseling, legal assistance, vocal music, fraternities and sororities, All Faiths Chapel, etc.

As a teacher of history and civics at high schools in Arkansas and Amarillo and then a psychology professor and Vice President for Student Affairs at East Texas State, John Koldus’ entire existence has been geared to one goal — making the learning experience of each and every student the best it can be.

When East Texas State President Whitney Haliday approached him about the student affairs job in 1967, Koldus was reticent. “I was not into administration,” he recalls, “but I liked working with young people.” He took the job when he realized: “It gave me the chance to work with a lot more students than I could as a faculty member.”

A&M President Dr. Jack K. Williams called “from out of the blue” in 1973, to say Dean of Students James P. Hannigan was retiring and would Koldus come for a visit?

Koldus always suspected Williams had been in touch with Haliday, but he never found out for sure. He had already “looked around the country and found..."
that A&M tied in well with my philosophy regarding students." As an Army veteran (he served two years as a 1st lieutenant in the 847th Field Artillery Battalion) and a Little All-America football player at Arkansas State, he was impressed with A&M's esprit de corps, camaraderie and family values.

"And," he noted, "the resources were better. A&M had an opportunity for growth and development that no other school had. It was a sleeping giant."

At that time, A&M had begun growing and had an enrollment of 18,500. Koldus spent the fall of 1973 getting acquainted with A&M's traditions and history while observing the student life programs.

After using the Christmas holidays to think through the programs and develop plans, he presented a proposal to Dr. Williams in January 1974 for what would be a landmark year in A&M history.

He established the Student Affairs office, consolidating the dean of men and dean of women positions and creating an office to support students living off-campus. "I looked for voids in our program and then we created things to fill those voids," he remarked, noting that the Corps of Cadets and Student Health Services are the only parts of the division that didn't undergo a major restructuring. Of course, women were integrated into the Corps his second year at A&M and the Drill & Ceremonies (non-contract cadet) program has gotten larger as the demand for military officers has decreased.

The Memoriol Student Center under the direction of J. Wayne Stark '39 had broadened through the years and included a wide range of activities not directly related to the MSC. Hiring Carolyn Adair '69, he launched the Student Activities Office with two advisors counseling 130 student organizations and overseeing the vocal music programs. The MSC continued to maintain its active program schedule that included 20 standing committees. Today, 10 advisors and 8 support staff members work with over 700 student organizations.

With Koldus' backing, fraternities were recognized in 1985 and sororities in 1990. A Black Pan-Hellenic Council was formed in 1989. Koldus has carefully monitored Greek organization activities and helped ensure that they make significant contributions to the campus community.

By September of '74 he had hired a full-time director to establish the Student Counseling Service. Previously, only academic and career counseling were offered by a half-time staff member. Currently, 16 doctoral psychologists and professional counselors, 4 interns and 2 part-time psychiatrists offer a wide range of assistance to students.

Student Legal Services, now known as the Conflict Resolution Center, was established to help students understand their legal responsibilities and rights while assisting them in negotiations with landlords, roommates and the business community.

To help students learn to relate better to each other on race and gender matters, he hired A&M's first multi-cultural services director and established the Multi-Cultural Services Office. He notes that another "big area that has required a lot of effort is Support Programs for Students with Disabilities (formerly known as Handicapped Student Services).

While Koldus certainly doesn't fit the typical administrator stereotype, he has shown a unique ability to create an organization that is responsive, caring and pro-active. "I avoid the adversarial role in administration," he says and he chooses staff members who feel the same way.

"One person can't deal with 35,000 to 40,000 people," he notes while pointing out that he searches for the right people to head the various operations and then steps back and lets them exercise their own judgement and imagination in solving problems before they happen. He typically credits his staff with building the programs that have been so successful.

When confronted with difficulties, Koldus is noted for keeping a cool head. "During my six years as Commandant of the Corps," says Gen. Thomas Darliing '54, "Dr. Koldus has been a tower of strength, always remaining collected and calm, even during periods of crisis and disappointment. His even-handed treatment of people and unchanging disposition (friendly and positive) are as predictable as the sunrise. His smile, warm-
ness, energy and good human relations skills set a remarkable example on this campus. Amazingly, he never varies from these qualities in times of controversy and adversity."

One thing Koldus particularly liked when he arrived on campus was a program the late J. Gordon Gay had originated at the "Y" Association. Future members of the "Y" arrived early in the fall and traveled to a forest camp for an orientation program on Aggie traditions, student life and "Y" programs.

"We saw the value of this type of program and adapted it to the university-wide community," Koldus says with a smile, noting that Fish Camp is now a distinct organization. Counseling positions at Fish Camp are highly coveted by upperclassmen.

"No one in the country has a program like Fish Camp," Koldus says proudly. The 4-day summer camp program held at Lakeview Methodist Assembly near Elkhart now includes presentations on study methods, student activity programs, counseling help and techniques for relating to others. Other colleges and universities regularly send staff members to observe A&M's Fish Camp.

Graduating seniors and graduate students applaud the recognition given to retiring A&M Vice President Dr. John Koldus. In his 20 years of service to A&M, Koldus has positively influenced the lives of 100,000 students.

Six years ago Koldus supported funding to establish T-Camp, a program for transfer students that is similar to Fish Camp. When the new students get to campus, they don't become faceless numbers in the system. To maintain contact, Koldus established the First-time Aggie Contact Team (FACT) after learning about a Florida community college program in which faculty members call whenever a student misses class.

Organized by Assistant Vice President for Student Services Jan Winniford, FACT enlists faculty, staff, upperclassmen and campus VIP's (including A&M President William H. Mobley and his wife Jayne '85) to call freshmen several times during a two-week period. Each caller contacts students on a computer listing to ask how they are doing and see if they have problems that should be referred to the proper department. Calls are made from 5 to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

Koldus said an accreditation team visiting Texas A&M last year called A&M's Student Services program "State-of-the-Art" and noted "that's pretty much the feeling around the state and nation."

"We tried to take all the things that were good and keep them going and improve on them," he said.

Koldus has utilized every resource at his disposal to improve the campus experience for Aggies. In addition to working closely with A&M faculty and staff members, he cultivated local business and community contacts, serving as Brazos County chairman for the United Way and as president of the Bryan-College Station Chamber of Commerce.

He strives for face-to-face contact and doesn't like to conduct business over the phone. "I try to get out to others' offices," he said. "So, I schedule meetings at their place. That way I see students as I cross
the campus and I get to see people in all those offices. People are more comfortable in their own offices."

For 20 years Koldus has had lunch with 20 freshmen every other week and with upperclassmen and an occasional faculty or staff member on alternate weeks. It’s a practice he started at East Texas State nearly a third of a century ago. He began with the upperclassman lunch program at A&M divided evenly between students and faculty/staff, but over the years he decreased the staff and added more students.

The lunch wasn’t exactly free to the students. They had to tell why they chose Texas A&M, explain what they liked about the university and tell what they would change if they were university president.

“You can talk about anything except parking,” Koldus joked with the upperclassmen attending his final luncheon in May. “If we talk about parking, we won’t have time for anything else.”

“The whole idea of the luncheon is to find out what students are thinking about and what is bothering them,” Koldus said. Primary support for the more than 10,000 “free” lunches served over the past 20 years came from the Association of Former Students with additional support provided by the Federation of Texas A&M Mothers’ Clubs. The consensus among alumni and parents is that the money was very well spent.

Koldus’ wife, Mary Dell, says he knows more people than anyone on campus. Some may debate that, but no one can claim to work any harder than Koldus at trying to know everyone. He prides himself on remembering names, but admits to keeping a handwritten file of some 30,000 index cards that he updates after each student contact. If he couldn’t remember a student’s name, it was an automatic invitation to the next student lunch.

John Koldus has touched the lives of more than 100,000 students who have attended Texas A&M during the past two decades and his positive impact can never be fully measured.

“The wonderful part,” he says with a characteristic smile, “has been my association with students, former students, Mothers’ Clubs, A&M Clubs and other organizations that help A&M. The people who associate with Texas A&M are super in every way. We couldn’t have done what we’ve done without the alumni, the Association of Former Students and the Mothers’ Clubs.”

“John Koldus is an institution,” notes A&M President William H. Mobley. “He has a well-deserved reputation for being pro-student. Mobley cites the magnitude of the challenge of finding a successor with Koldus’ unique skills and talents. ‘He will be tough to replace.’

A search committee of a dozen faculty, students, administrators and individuals from outside the university has been appointed to survey candidates. Mobley hoped to have a replacement by August.
when Koldus moves from the old chancellor’s home on campus (where he and his family have shared their lives with Texas A&M since 1976) to a new house at Pebble Creek in South College Station. Koldus says he hopes to get in some golf at least twice a week, travel the North American continent and go to Europe for a second time. He’s anxious to visit England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and attend Wimbledon and the Masters Golf Tournament.

Portions of this story were adapted from articles by Rene A. Henry and Lane B. Stephenson. Many thanks to Jan Winniford for her help in gathering information for this article.

Traveling Aggies Visit Sunny Canary Islands, Morocco & Spain

The happy participants on the March 3-16 cruise were (on floor) Margaret Ann Zipp, Olive DeLucia and Joan Foster; (seated) Sue Dubbelde, Manet Schepps, Jean Richardson, Mattie Ruth Williams, Frances Herzig, Melba Scurlock and June Brown; (standing) Ray Portlock ’48, Tom Foster ’45, Charlie Brown ’45, Rad Gibson ’40, Ray Scurlock ’45, A.I. Schepps ’32, Joe Hickerson ’38, Bernard Richardson ’41, Pat Ferguson ’43, Don Williams ’38, Jim Kershaw ’48 and Gus Herzig ’34. Not pictured: Anne Hickerson and Pat Portlock.