

Author Thomas Wolfe may have believed you can never go home again, but don't tell that to Dr. Priscilla Chaffe-Stengel.

A professor in the Department of Information Systems and Decision Sciences, Dr. Chaffe-Stengel came back to her roots when she accepted her current position. A native of Clovis, she went away twice for her education, only to return home each time.

"I grew up here," she explains. "I'm one of the few who left here and came back. By the time I went to Stanford for my Ph.D., I realized you can't take the country out of the girl. There's open space here, a view of the mountains, fields and orchards. I feel really lucky to be back."

While being home is important to Dr. Chaffe-Stengel, there is more to her contentment than geography. There is something special about California State University, Fresno. It's an exciting place to teach, she says.

"There are a number of things in concert, really. It's the university, the community, the students. They all work together. It's a great example of what a regional university ought to be. There's a real sense of embedding our work at the university in the wider community. Many of our community leaders have come from CSU, Fresno."

"We are a growing, developing university. It's a wonderful place for people who enjoy teaching. The students are more sensitive to good instruction, and have the opportunity to

work one-on-one with their instructors. There is a closeness between the students and the instructors I believe uncharacteristic of other universities."

As one who obviously enjoys her work, Dr. Chaffe-Stengel likens the art of teaching to the performance of a symphony.

"There is an orchestration to teaching," she says. "When I teach, I watch the students to see if what I am saying lands, whether what I am trying to get across is integrating with what they already know. It's different semester to semester, section to section, because of the students. They're different, so the 'tune' comes out differently."

Dr. Chaffe-Stengel's expertise is the field of decision sciences, whereby students study quantitative methods for analyzing business data as a support tool for management decisions. A relatively young field, the art of utilizing decision sciences is quickly becoming standard practice in today's business world, she explains.

"I'm working with a couple of local businesses, building quantitative models that address problems in their current operations. With the complexity and rapid change in business, people can no longer afford to manage businesses based on intuition or past practices."

"While working with local business is rewarding in itself, it also strengthens the ties between the university and the community, giving our students an insight into the kinds of



problems they may face as managers."

Should you believe in doubter's wisdom that computers are only as good as the person who uses them, consider Dr. Chaffe-Stengel's view of the future.

"With the tremendous strides in computer technology, our limitations are going to be set by our imaginations," she states. "Expert systems and decision support systems are becoming more viable to decision-makers. Computers will be a definite presence as a tool of the decision-maker."

"Creativity favors an informed mind. Computers can keep together the details affecting a decision that you simply cannot keep straight in your mind."

Priscilla Chaffe-Stengel

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