Almost 2,500 years ago, Plato, the philosopher who helped lay the foundations of Western philosophy and science said, “People are like dirt. They can either nourish you and help you grow as person, or they can stunt your growth and make you wilt and die.” Dr. Joe B. Dixon, Texas A&M University emeritus professor, is one of those people who nourishes others—especially students—as he continues to mentor and do research even though he has been retired for more than a decade.

In honor of his many significant contributions in soil and clay mineralogy, the Joe B. Dixon Soil Mineralogy Program Excellence Fund was established by friends of Dr. and Mrs. Dixon to not only enhance soil mineralogy professional programs, but also to recognize Dr. Dixon’s impact on the profession as well as the contributions of his many graduate students. The fund supports two awards—one for graduate students making presentations about soil mineralogy at the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting and another that serves as a travel grant for a student from a developing country such as Mexico or other Central or South American countries to attend the meeting. Because Dr. Dixon’s teaching career has taken him to Mexico, he learned firsthand about the importance of providing students from developing countries with opportunities to participate and contribute at the Annual Meeting.

Dr. Dixon began his studies in 1952 at the University of Kentucky where he earned a bachelor of science with high distinction in agriculture. Two years of military service interrupted his studies, but he returned to graduate from the school in 1956 with a master of science in agronomy, focusing on the clay mineralogy of Kentucky soils. Earning his Ph.D. in soil science at the University of Wisconsin in 1958, he continued refining his techniques to characterize clay mineralogy in soils for a year as a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow. In 1959, he joined the faculty of Auburn University in Alabama where he taught soil mineralogy, soil taxonomy, and geology until 1968 when he moved to College Station, TX, to become a professor of soil science in the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences at Texas A&M University.

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