

NEWS

UT's Oldest Research Institution Focused on Oil Gets a New Leader

Lorena Moscardelli says she's hopeful about sustainable energy

BY MATTEA GALLAWAY, FRI., APRIL 18, 2025

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At the Austin Core Research Center, right across the street from Moscardelli's office, rock material spans from floor to ceiling (photo by Mattea Gallaway)

When Lorena Moscardelli attended a geology lecture as an undergrad, she was mesmerized and never turned back. Now, she's the newest director of the University of Texas' Bureau of Economic Geology.

The Bureau of Economic Geology, established in 1909, is UT's oldest research institution. For over a century, staff has researched oil production and the environment.

One significant research program within the bureau is the State of Texas Advanced Resource Recovery program, which Moscardelli led before becoming the bureau's director. STARR's mission is to increase the productivity of oil and natural gas, as Texas is the **top fossil fuel-producing state**.

But, like many other researchers, Moscardelli's career path wasn't linear. After graduating from Central University of Venezuela, she was an exploration geologist, assessing mineral deposits in the field. Then, she went to UT's Jackson School of Geosciences for her Ph.D. This introduced her to the bureau, where she stayed as a researcher for six years before working for **Equinor**, a Norwegian energy company focused on oil.

In 2021, she returned to the bureau to direct STARR. Now directing the Bureau of Economic Geology, she views all of these projects through a wider lens.

"One of the reasons that motivated me to apply to this job was to have the opportunity to be part of lifting efforts that are already in place, and also collaborating with them in defining what the future is going to look like," Moscardelli said. "Right now, we have several challenges in the energy and environmental realm of things. One of them is access to energy resources in a way that is sustainable."

Though she has only been director for a month, she has many sustainability-related projects she's looking forward to, from exploring geothermal potential in a West Texas county to partnering with an Australian research institution to find naturally occurring hydrogen and helium. Although sustainable energy sources are growing, each ecosystem, even within Texas, is different, which is why numerous projects are in pursuit.

"I think the solution is not to buy into one solution," Moscardelli said. "Wind power is not going to work everywhere. Solar power is not going to work everywhere ... but there are places where it works."

Moscardelli is fascinated with the intricacies of geoscience, especially within the bureau's massive rock collection, which organizes rocks by categories like depth and location. The storage facilities in Houston, Austin, and Midland combined are believed to be the **world's largest rock archive**. At the **Austin Core Research Center**, right across the street from Moscardelli's office, rock material spans from floor to ceiling.

But maintaining this collection is not a one-woman job. Everything from the archive to the bureau's projects requires scientists, engineers, and other experts committed to effective research.

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— Lorena Moscardelli, new

"The bureau is not about the director or the director office," Moscardelli said. "It's really about the amazing people and researchers and students and staff."

director of UT's Bureau of Economic Geology

That teamwork requires numbers, she says, and the number of geologists is **declining**.

"Not that many young people are getting into the field anymore, because [there's] this misconception about geosciences being only about oil and gas," Moscardelli said. "We need more oil and gas, so we need more people working on these things ... [but] if you're a geologist, you don't need to work on oil and gas. You can work on all kinds of programs."

In a world that's becoming more and more affected by climate change, Moscardelli is choosing to be hopeful.

"I'm worried about people kind of taking extreme views on problems," Moscardelli said. "I think that we need to be a little bit optimistic ... and as long as we are smart enough to frame the problems properly, we will be able to keep doing our work."

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