



Field trip helps UTRGV's Math & Science Academy seniors explore higher-ed options



By Cheryl Taylor

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS – SEPT. 15, 2015 – Before the start of the fall semester at [The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Mathematics and Science Academy](#), 30 second-year MSA students boarded a bus early on the morning of Monday, Aug. 17, and set off on a field trip.

Among the group were Nicole Cavazos and Alexis Gonzalez, both from Brownsville. Like their MSA classmates and other high school seniors around the country, Cavazos and Gonzalez will be applying to colleges starting this month, and this was to be a fact-finding mission – with some fun and sight-seeing in the mix.

The bus rolled into the first destination, [The University of Texas San Antonio](#), where the group was ready for lunch at the campus café, followed by a campus tour.

“Even though school was not in session, things were pretty lively; we saw a lot of students attending orientation,” Cavazos said.

Day two began with a tour of [Natural Bridge Caverns](#), an experience that drew lots of “oohs and aahs” from the group. Then came a visit to [Our Lady of the Lake](#)



University.

“Our guide at OLLU was animated and talked about the university’s history, and he had us participate in some activities, so we really felt welcome,” Gonzalez said.

“Not too many students were on campus, but it was still nice, and we had another great lunch at the campus cafeteria.”

MSA Coordinator Camilla Montoya, MSA Counselor Michelle Burkott, and MSA Administrative Assistant Brenda Valero traveled with the students.

“This trip was organized to familiarize students with schools in several cities – public universities as well as private, church-affiliated institutions – all having differing student populations, cultural diversity, physical layouts, dining options and amenities,” Montoya said.

One of the goals of the trip was to help foster a strong bond among the students, bringing them together in a setting outside of their normal academic environment, she said. The schedule was designed to give students an opportunity to swim at the hotel pool and enjoy some “hang out” time with one another.

“These strong friendships can help them work together more closely and be each other’s support throughout their senior year, when they are not only trying to excel in their classes, but also as they prepare for the changes that will come following graduation,” Montoya said.

Day three included visits to [Texas State University](#) in San Marcos and [St. Edward’s University](#) in Austin.

The guide at TSU told the group about the school culture, its traditions – such as jumping into the river after graduation – and said freshmen rarely gained the “freshman 15” because of all the walking on the hilly campus.

“I was delighted with the culture of the city and the campus itself. The guide told us about the free speech area, and about how open and diverse the whole community was,” Gonzalez said.

“It was beautiful, nearly breath-taking.”

Cavazos, who plans to major in computer information systems with a minor in computer science, felt equally enchanted.

“There were a lot of students on campus, and they were so friendly and answered questions, and they helped us make our waffles in the dining hall. It just felt so comfortable,” Cavazos said. “The campus and town area with shops and restaurants are close together, and everyone walks back and forth.”

After the TSA tour and lunch in the Harris Dining Hall, the group continued to St. Edward’s on the south side of Austin.

“The campus was very peaceful, and everyone we met was so kind and exhibited school pride. Our guide was really nice and we learned about the school’s traditions,” Gonzalez said.

[Dr. Wilma Smetter](#), MSA principal, said most of the UTRGV MSA students earn two



years of college credits concurrently as they finish high school. Generally, MSA students bring in 60 college credit hours and need only two more years to graduate with a bachelor's degree.

“Although we would love for our students to choose to continue their studies at UTRGV,” Smetter said, “we also believe it is important for them to know what options they might have elsewhere, to finish what they started at MSA.”



UTRGV Math and Science Academy seniors took a field trip recently to explore their higher education options for college. (Courtesy Photo)

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