



# First UTRGV Math and Science Academy graduates prepare for next exciting chapter



Members of the May 13, 2016, graduating class of the UTRGV Math and Science Academy. (UTRGV Photo by David Pike)

**By Vicky Brito**

**BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS – MAY 9, 2016** – As the school year was winding down at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, 49 students graduating from the Math and Science Academy on the Brownsville Campus reflected on what makes them successful students.

Class of 2016 salutatorian Alexis Gonzalez, 18, wasn't feeling the educational burn at his regular high school, so he decided to enroll at MSA.

"I was looking for a challenge," Gonzalez said. "Coming here to UTRGV and MSA



really allowed me to get the education and the skills that I needed to be a professional, and to develop as an individual.”

High school juniors and seniors complete their final two years of high school at the academy, taking courses at UTRGV and gaining two years of both high school and university credits.

The MSA program, which began in fall 2007, has since graduated 270 students.

The newest 49 MSA graduates will walk with UTRGV seniors during the regular UTRGV commencement ceremony, 6 p.m. May 13 on the Student Union Lawn on the Brownsville Campus.

Gonzalez in the fall will attend the McCombs School of Business at UT Austin, where he plans to major in accounting and pursue a Master’s of Business Administration.

At 18, and with two full years of college under his belt, Gonzalez is on track to have an MBA in about three years. He hopes to become a certified public accountant.

He has built character over the past two years at MSA, he said, and credits the academy with molding him into the professional he is today.

“You would be out of your mind if you didn’t take this opportunity,” he said. “MSA is definitely the best. I have created so many friendships and it has given me so many experiences into college. And it saves a lot of time and money. While other people are barely starting their career, you’re already two years ahead of them.”

Senior Gabriela Garcia, 18, will continue her undergraduate education at UTRGV under an MSA scholarship, which covers tuition so MSA students can finish their remaining two years at UTRGV. MSA scholarship students must maintain a 3.0 GPA and be enrolled in at least 15 credit hours per semester. The students also are given \$500 for books and supplies.

Garcia said that, without MSA, college didn’t even seem possible.

“I went to a very college-oriented high school, but I didn’t see myself going to college because they would kind of force it on you. So, I didn’t see myself going,” she said. “I came here hoping to have a plan, and first semester, I really didn’t have a plan. But, I was excelling in all my classes.”

By her second semester, she had changed her tune and decided college was, in fact, for her.

“It makes me so happy to say I have a plan,” Garcia said. “I wouldn’t have had it without MSA.”

She plans to major in English and become an English teacher.

MSA Principal Dr. Wilma Smetter said the students adjust well to academic life.

This year’s graduating class is made up of scholars from 15 different high schools in the Valley.

“If there is one thing I can say about this class, it is that they are each other’s



support team,” Smetter said.

“Throughout the past two years, they held study sessions at each other’s homes. Brought baked goodies for each other. It is evident that they have created lifelong friendships,” she said.

MSA will expand to the Edinburg Campus in the fall.

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