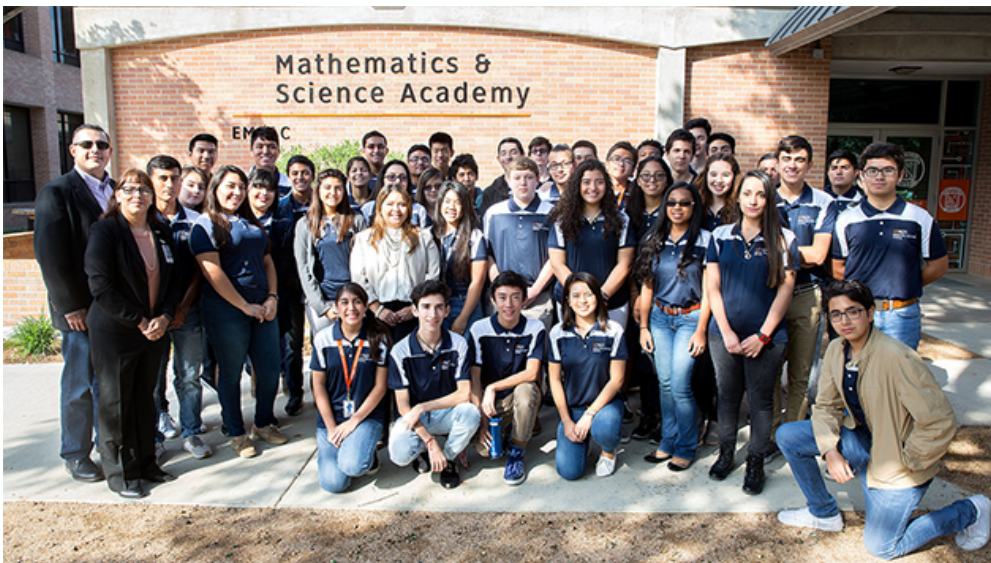




UTRGV Math and Science Academy celebrates expansion to Edinburg Campus with ribbon-cutting, reception



UTRGV Mathematics & Science Academy students attended a reception on Friday, Oct. 21, 2016, on the Edinburg Campus, to celebrate the expansion of the MSA program from the UTRGV Brownsville Campus to the Edinburg Campus. MSA is an accelerated education program for high school students interested in pursuing college credits in a mathematics and science curriculum. (UTRGV Photo by Paul Chouy)

By Jennifer L. Berghom

EDINBURG, TEXAS – OCT. 21, 2016 – Referring to the Robert Frost poem, “The Road Not Taken,” 16-year-old Andrea Morrison said she and her classmates at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Mathematics and Science Academy (MSA) had to decide which path they wanted to follow.

They could either stay at the high schools they were attending, or leave behind all that they knew to enroll in the MSA, now available at UTRGV’s Edinburg Campus. It was about getting a head start on college and on a career.



“We all looked at each choice as far as we could, to see what would lie ahead ... but, deep down, we all knew which one was best for us,” said Morrison, a high school junior and first-year college student. “Each of us took the road less traveled, and that has made – and will make – all the difference.”

On Friday, Oct. 21, the MSA’s first class in Edinburg and UTRGV officials celebrated the grand opening of MSA’s expansion onto the Edinburg Campus. MSA had been available at legacy institution UT Brownsville/Texas Southmost College since its inception in 2007.

The Edinburg Math and Science Academy Center – what used to be the Research and Innovation Building located behind the Maryalice Shary Shivers Building on campus – opened this fall to 48 juniors and four seniors, representing 14 high schools from across the Upper Valley, said Dr. Wilma Smetter, the MSA’s principal.

There are 111 students enrolled in the MSA on the UTRGV Brownsville Campus, and the program plans to enroll another 50 students or more each year to each campus, she said.

Students enrolled at the MSA wear two hats – as high school upperclassmen and university undergraduates. They take classes alongside UTRGV students and are taught by UTRGV professors, but receive more supervision and guidance than college students. By the time they graduate, they earn between 60 and 68 college credits, Smetter said.

“The university is their campus,” she said.

To make sure the students don’t miss out on a high school experience, the MSA has a Student Government Association and a National Honor Society chapter, and has a prom for its students, Smetter said.

The MSA was established in 2005 to provide high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to earn college credit while wrapping up their final two years of high school. It opened to students in fall 2007 and graduated its first cohort in 2009. It is the only program of its kind within The University of Texas System, Smetter said.

MSA differs from other state-supported math and science schools in that the academy offers students the opportunity to complete two years of college concurrently with the last two years of high school.

Since 2009, the MSA has graduated 321 students. Of those, about 69 percent have gone on to complete their bachelor’s degrees at UTRGV and its legacy institution, UT Brownsville/Texas Southmost College. The rest have gone on to complete their undergraduate degrees at other colleges and universities nationwide.

MSA graduates who choose to complete a bachelor’s degree at UTRGV and who have at least a 3.0 GPA are eligible for a scholarship to pay for their final two years of undergraduate education.

Those who attended Friday’s celebration also were able to tour the renovated building.



For more information on the MSA, visit www.utrgv.edu/msa.



Dr. Wilma Smetter (far left) and Dr. Havidán Rodríguez (far right) and students from the UTRGV Mathematics and Science Academy cut the ceremonial ribbon on Friday, Oct. 21, 2016, commemorating the academy's expansion from the UTRGV Brownsville Campus to the Edinburg Campus. (UTRGV Photo by Paul Chouy)

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