



# UTRGV's Mathematics and Science Academy expanding to Edinburg Campus in fall 2016



By Karen Perez

**RIO GRANDE VALLEY, TEXAS – JAN. 13, 2016** – When Stephanie Hernandez's mother first told her that she could complete two years of college concurrently with her last two years of high school tuition-free at the [Mathematics and Science Academy](#) (MSA), she knew it was an opportunity she couldn't pass up.

Now 19 and a biomedicine major with 60 credit hours under her belt, Hernandez is a biology tutor for MSA students and is on the fast track to medical school as a member of the university's A-PRIME TIME program.

"If I wouldn't have come to the Academy, I would not be where I am right now," the Brownsville native said. "It opened doors for me and I gained the opportunity to learn and grow professionally. The Academy helped me mature and take things



more seriously, and that helped me realize who I wanted to be as a professional.”

Beginning fall 2016, high school students in the Upper Valley will have the same opportunity to jump-start their college career, at no cost.

The MSA, established in 2007 under The University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College, has expanded its program to the UTRGV Edinburg Campus to accommodate the growth of the program.

“The expansion alleviates the burden of students traveling from the Upper Valley to Brownsville – saving them time, money and other resources,” said Dr. Wilma Smetter, principal of the Mathematics and Science Academy.

Parents and students are invited to attend informational sessions Jan. 30, Feb. 13, March 5 and April 2. All presentations will be at 10 a.m. on the Edinburg Campus, in MAGC 2.208, and on the Brownsville Campus in Main 2.112.

The MSA has produced more than 270 graduates who have gone on to colleges and universities nationwide. Students who choose to complete a bachelor’s degree at UTRGV and have a 3.0 GPA or higher might be eligible for a full scholarship.

The cost of tuition, fees and books is covered by the academy, which is funded by UTRGV and the [Foundation School Fund](#). The financial responsibilities for parents and students are meals and transportation.

Camilla Montoya, MSA program coordinator, said the academy’s purpose is to close the gap between the need for people with STEM skills and the number of jobs available to them.

“We want to make sure we accelerate the opportunity for students and bring that set of skills to the Valley at a higher speed and quality,” she said.

Although most students come in with an interest in math and science, they are allowed to major in any given discipline. Montoya said they are looking to recruit 50 sophomore students for each of the 2016-17 junior cohorts at the Brownsville and Edinburg campuses.

“They do need to be disciplined, and be able to take a full college load and be willing to spend a lot of hours studying to get that done,” she said.

Montoya said the MSA allows students to experience the college life and participate in campus activities.

“Students here are a lot more independent than high school students are in their regular schools, but they are more supervised than a regular college student is, so it’s really a hybrid program,” Montoya said.

Hernandez encourages students interested in MSA to not be intimidated and to “go for it.”

“Even though it was challenging, I did get a lot of support,” she said. “They have tutors here who help with the coursework, so students are not alone. It’s definitely



a doable thing, and it's to the students' advantage to get ahead.”

All items required for the MSA application for fall 2016 entrance are due April 30.

For the MSA application checklist or directions on how to apply, visit [www.utrgv.edu/msa](http://www.utrgv.edu/msa) or call (956) 882-7573.

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