



# network

the college of liberal arts magazine





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Dr. José Dávila-Montes

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Dr. William Donner

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Dr. Colin Charlton

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Dr. Kimberly Selber

Faculty Success  
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Cover photo: Seoul Korea, Study Abroad

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from the  
Dean’s Desk.



The College of Liberal Arts has started the 2025-2026 academic year with remarkable progress, innovation, and recognition through fostering educational excellence and community impact. Propelled by dedicated faculty, talented students, and strategic program development, we are true trailblazers in our scholarly community and in our region. In this issue of *La Network*, we can read about how faculty and students have distinguished themselves through international presentations at overseas conferences, advancing global dialogue. The commitment to bilingualism has opened doors for broader communication and research impact. Numerous new books and multiple journal articles, some co-authored with students, have been published. Faculty also organized conferences and Learning Communities, supporting student engagement and professional growth. Notably, students have received recognition for academic excellence and leadership. The adoption of new technologies for on-site research has enhanced scholarly capabilities locally and abroad. Book launch events and newly funded scholarly programs have invigorated intellectual life within the college.

A landmark achievement for the beginning of the academic year was the establishment of the new School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal and Security Studies (PPLSS). This school will serve as a hub for innovative programs and interdisciplinary collaboration, positioning the college as a leader in these fields. The college is making significant strides in expanding graduate offerings and working towards increased enrollment, demonstrating a strong commitment to advanced education and research. Efforts are also underway to propose and develop future interdisciplinary doctoral programs, broadening advanced study opportunities for students and contributing actively to the “R1” aspirations and future of our institution.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the nearly 70 new full-time faculty members, including tenured and tenure-track professors, lecturers, and professors of practice, who are joining our college this year. This infusion of expertise and perspectives strengthens the college’s commitment to high-quality education and mentorship. Reflecting remarkable institutional growth, UTRGV now enrolls over 35,000 students, while the College of Liberal Arts supports a dynamic community of approximately 8,500 undergraduate and graduate students, further strengthening the impact and reach of nearly 400 faculty members.

Leading the expansion of course offerings on the Brownsville campus, the College of Liberal Arts provided nearly half of UTRGV’s new seats—over 3,000—in the Fall semester, affirming its pivotal role in university growth. And one can tell from this success how vibrant our two main campuses are again! In these changing times, the College of Liberal Arts continues to shape leaders and innovators through strategic initiatives, outstanding scholarship, and community engagement, ensuring resiliency, growth, and impact for our community and beyond!

See you around, and ... ¡Vamos!

jd

José Dávila-Montes, PhD.  
Dean · College of Liberal Arts  
Professor of Translation and Interpreting

# MEET YOUR ASSOCIATE DEANS.

By Nicole Nicholson

Fall '25 was ushered in with five new and two returning associate deans stepping up to lead CLA into the new academic year. Here's the inside scoop on who they are, what motivates them, and the projects they are working on to better serve our college community.

As we listened to the ADs introduce themselves and share what their experiences have been like in our college, and especially as part of the leadership team, a clear theme emerged: This is a group of people who are positive, motivated, dedicated, and just a lot of fun to be around. For example, Dr. Wladyka emphasized how well the Dean's office staff and administrative team work together, accomplishing large-scope and incredibly complex tasks with great efficiency.

Dr. Restifo best summed up his fellow ADs' impressions of CLA being a positive, collegial environment: "There's lots of people doing lots of things and making it work. It's a team atmosphere because we're all working toward something bigger and better for our students, our colleagues, and for the institution."

Thanks to all the ADs, the Dean's office staff, and Dean Davila for working tirelessly (and mostly behind the scenes) on behalf of our college community!



**DR. DONNER EARNED HIS BA IN SOCIOLOGY FROM MILLERSVILLE UNIVERSITY IN PENNSYLVANIA, GOING ON TO EARN HIS MA AND PHD IN SOCIOLOGY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE.** His current research efforts are in disaster studies, and he's the lead editor on the 3rd edition of the Handbook for Disaster Research. The volume addresses key interdisciplinary themes in the field of Disaster Studies, including warning response, climate change, mitigation, AI technologies, and international perspectives, among others. The goal of the new volume is to solicit perspectives from emerging authors in the field to generate new discussions on classic themes in the discipline.

Dr. Donner sees his role as supporting the CLA chairs and CLA in general; he assists the dean in the day-to-day operation of the college, including budget preparation and compliance, University process fulfillment, SACS/COC faculty validation for teaching, CLA Program Review per UTRGV cycle, and CLA policy implementation. Dr. Donner is especially enthusiastic about supporting the launch of the new Ph.D. programs: "They would represent a tremendous evolution for CLA and the University, offering unprecedented opportunities for faculty, staff, and students."

Like many of the ADs, one of the many things he appreciates about the college is that it is interdisciplinary by nature. "As an interdisciplinary scholar, I love working with folks from across different social science and humanities disciplines. Being able to support cross-disciplinary partnerships, working with our chairs, and the great staff has been a wonderful experience."

And when Dr. Donner finally has some spare time, he enjoys spending it with his family, listening to classic rock from the '80s and '90s (REM is a particular favorite), and reading historical and science fiction, like *The Long Day Wanes* by Anthony Burgess.



**Senior Associate Dean  
Dr. William Donner**

**“As an interdisciplinary scholar, I love working with folks from across different social science and humanities disciplines.”**





**Associate Dean for  
Assessment**  
**Dr. Colin Charlton**

“This job is about people  
... seeing what people need  
and offering support.”

**DR. CHARLTON HAILS FROM GREENVILLE, TEXAS. HE STUDIED ENGLISH AND FRENCH AS AN UNDERGRAD AND ENGLISH FOR HIS MA, ACCUMULATING EXTENSIVE HOURS IN FIRST LITERATURE AND FILM AND THEN RHETORIC AND LINGUISTICS AS WELL.** At Purdue, he earned his PhD focusing on professional writing, digital writing, and philosophy. He came to the legacy institution, UTPA, as an assistant professor in 2005.

He comes to his new role as AD with extensive administrative experience, serving as Developmental Coordinator for the Writing Program, then as the Writing Program Administrator, and then as the inaugural department chair for Writing and Language Studies when it formed in 2015 in the transition to UTRGV.

With over 30 years of teaching experience, Dr. Charlton is excited to have more time back in the classroom since his transition from department chair to AD, especially enjoying his time teaching on our lovely Brownsville campus. He feels re-engaged and, with newfound energy, enjoys both his classes and his outreach work with high school teachers through Region One as well as painting as much as possible in his spare time.

He brings that energy and enthusiasm to his role as AD, noting that “this job is about people – helping them with their assessment, helping them be more confident in identifying how to ask a question, answer that question, and then write about it. It’s seeing what people need and offering support.” Fortunately, Dr. Charlton is a self-described “assessment nerd,” and he is keen to help contribute to a college culture where it is understood that student success depends on our ability to reflect on what we’re doing, on what’s working and what’s not.

Dr. Charlton notes that the College of Liberal Arts is special, and the team at the Dean’s office comes together with a strong level of connection and good humor to solve problems quickly. “I’m more invested every day that I work with this team.”



**DR. SELBER GREW UP IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, GRADUATING WITH HER BA IN COMMUNICATION FROM CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON.** Dr. Selber has always had parallel professional and academic careers: She worked for multiple advertising agencies before and after college, working on such well-known accounts as Kawasaki and Taco Bell. She then moved to Illinois for graduate school at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to earn her MA in advertising and then on to Chicago to work as freelance art director at DDB on accounts including Budweiser, Discover Card, and Morton Salt, and then on to UT Austin to pursue her PhD in the narrow academic field of Advertising Creative, one of only three others in the country with that degree. While studying for her doctorate, she also worked for GSD&M Advertising on their accounts for Southwest Airlines and Ballet Austin. She was hired as an assistant professor at UT Austin after graduating.

Dr. Selber moved to the RGV in 2003 with her husband and baby daughter to join legacy institution, UTPA, as an assistant professor. The year she gained tenure, she also won the UT Regents’ Outstanding Teaching Award, and that was also the year she was asked to start up and run the newly-formed University Marketing and Communications (UMC). She remained in that position for nine years as Chief Creative Office and AVP. She returned to the classroom full-time in 2019.

Dr. Selber continues the work she began last year as interim AD, bringing to fruition the vision she had for strategic and systematic community engagement: coordinated departmental community liaisons (CLs). This new and exciting project is already having a major impact on internal event advertising as well as public-facing social media and community outreach efforts. The CLs will also assist with student recruitment at local high school that will put the UTRGV College of Liberal Arts front and center in the minds of prospective students.

Dr. Selber’s hobby is genealogy research, and she has found all kinds of surprising connections between her family and her husband’s family, stretching all the way back to the 1600s and a distant cousin right here in the CLA!



**Associate Dean for  
Community Engagement**  
**Dr. Kimberly Selber**

“The departments  
are the subject matter  
experts. Our job is to  
put it in a format that  
works for marketing and  
recruitment so that we are  
successful.”



**Associate Dean for  
Faculty Success**  
**Dr. Dawid Wladyka**

“You meet for a coffee with a few colleagues and then a month later you have a research project put together with them, and that’s so cool.”

**DR. WLADYKA EARNED HIS BA AND MA IN SOCIOLOGY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA IN KATOWICE, POLAND, HIS PHD IN GEOGRAPHY FROM THE AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA, AND AN MA IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES FROM UTB AND TEXAS SOUTHMOST COLLEGE.** He is a geographer housed within sociology, interested primarily in human geography and migration as well as environmental sociology, urban geography, rural studies, and disaster studies. He has recently worked on a project examining air quality and environmental issues here in the valley with an interdisciplinary research group funded by NASA.

Dr. Wladyka served as interim AD last year, so he has a clear vision for his role to interact with faculty and serve as liaison and mediator with faculty affairs, the Provost, and the Dean. Right now, one of his main focuses is to create a coherent workload policy together with the annual review policy and to create support for faculty navigating those new policies. He is also enthusiastic about implementing faculty development workshops and facilitating the mentoring program in place for new faculty – a tall order considering that in Fall 2025, CLA had almost 50 new full-time faculty hires.

One of his favorite things about working in the College of Liberal Arts is the interdisciplinary and collaborative community. “You meet for a coffee with a few colleagues and then a month later you have a research project put together with them, and that’s so cool.”

When asked what he did in his free time, Dr. Wladyka quipped, “What’s that?” But he does appreciate the Brownsville tennis center and enjoys playing there in the evenings once things cool down, and as a sci-fi and fantasy fan, he recommends *The Expanse* series by James S.A. Corey.



**Associate Dean for  
Graduate Education**  
**Dr. Salvatore Restifo**

“I want to be a sounding board for [GPCs] and to provide them as much support and ‘ground-floor’ advice and assistance as possible.”

**DR. RESTIFO WAS BORN IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA TO A FATHER HAILING FROM SICILY AND A SOUTHERN-ITALIAN MOTHER BORN AND RAISED IN NEW YORK.** While working in the family business, Dr. Restifo earned his BA in history and sociology from Arizona State University and his MA and PhD in sociology from The Ohio State University. His current research efforts include co-directing the TARS! Lab, mentoring student projects exploring attitudes toward immigrants and migration, part of data collection for a national survey.

Dr. Restifo is also part of the Census Bureau’s Higher Education Consortium. He says the project is exciting because “sometimes students like the idea of pursuing a graduate degree, but they don’t necessarily know what opportunities they’ll have with it. This collaboration can help advance their training and career opportunities, learning more about data resources, and opening up doors for faculty as well.”

Dr. Restifo’s enthusiasm for supporting graduate students reflects his own experience as a first-generation college student, drawn to research and graduate school by his mentor, who kept him engaged and motivated. This enthusiasm also makes him a great fit for his new role as AD for Graduate Education, especially considering all he learned last year as a Faculty Fellow and in his substantial experience as a Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC). His goal is to make graduate education more accessible for everyone and get the word out about all the great programs our college offers. He also strives to be an asset and a support to his GPC colleagues. “I want to be a sounding board for them and to provide them as much support and ‘ground-floor’ advice and assistance as possible.”

An important part of Dr. Restifo’s work/life balance is spending time with his twin seven-year-old daughters, including teaching them how to make fresh, authentic pizza. He also enjoys watching basketball and is a lifelong, die-hard Phoenix Suns fan.





## Associate Dean for Research

### Dr. Mario Gil

“I’m learning to adapt to challenges and opportunities and to be prepared to take advantage of those.”



**DR. GIL HOLDS A PHD IN NEUROSCIENCE FROM FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY, FIRST EARNING HIS BACHELOR’S DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY RIGHT HERE AT UTB AND TEXAS SOUTHWEST COLLEGE, AND A MASTER’S DEGREE IN BEHAVIORAL NEUROSCIENCE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF BUFFALO SUNY.** His research interests are currently focused on the link between the brain and the heart. “We all know that psychological factors like psychosocial stress can increase our risk for cardiovascular disease, but we don’t really know what the underlying mechanisms are.” Dr. Gil is currently pursuing this question as PI with funding from the NIH.

As AD of Research, Dr. Gil hopes to use his experience of successfully funding his own research to help and mentor his fellow faculty members, especially those who are new, so they can successfully reach their research goals as well. Dr. Gil was a Faculty Fellow for research for the previous two years, so in his new role as AD the scope of the work is much larger. In the last couple of months, he noted that for all faculty and administrators to succeed, it’s important to be open to feedback and be as collaborative as possible. “I’m learning to adapt to challenges and opportunities and to be prepared to take advantage of those.”

Dr. Gil spends his free time volunteering with local non-profits advocating for mental health within the community. At tabling events in rural locations or venues like farmers’ markets, he and his fellow volunteers answer questions about mental health. “It’s very, very rewarding. It’s something I enjoy, and I’ve made great friends.”



**A POLITICAL SCIENTIST THROUGH AND THROUGH, DR. KIM STUDIED POLITICAL SCIENCE FOR HER BA AND MA IN SOUTH KOREA AND THEN EARNED HER PHD IN POLITICAL SCIENCE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA.** She joined our faculty in 2015 with the formation of UTRGV. Her current research examines South Korean elections and how frequent party changeability and rebranding impact the quality of their democracy. She also studies local RGV politics as Associate Director of the Center for Survey Research and Policy Analysis.

As Associate Dean, Dr. Kim wants to focus on local high school student recruitment. She brings experience as a Faculty Fellow for Undergraduate Education, a role she found very rewarding as she interacted with students visiting our campus. As AD, Dr. Kim wants to take outreach a step further by building strategic connections with local high schools to bring the College of Liberal Arts recruitment experience to them on their own campuses. She wants to help those students – and their counselors – to learn more about the college’s “vast variety of options and opportunities, and just how good we are!”

She is also focused on student retention and success. She hopes to methodically help departments develop a student sense of belonging and community; she hopes that students will see that their department cares about them and their success. She adds, “There are so many faculty already doing this on an individual level. It’s my job to give them a more systematic channel through which they can participate.”

Dr. Kim says she learned a lot under the leadership of former AD for Undergraduate Education, Dr. Sheila Dooley, including how even little things, like listening to students and their parents about what they want to learn and engaging with them at a more personal level, can make a real and lasting impression.

And when she’s not working for our college, she enjoys cooking for her family and arranging flowers as satisfying ways to relax and be creative!



## Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education

### Dr. Mi-son Kim

“Working as part of the CLA leadership team is a highly motivating and supportive experience.”



# Meet the New “PPLSS”

THE SCHOOL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, LEGAL & SECURITY STUDIES

## Serving Students and Faculty With Dynamic Initiatives

By Nicole Nicholson

This September, the College of Liberal Arts was proud to introduce the new School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal and Security Studies (PPLSS). La Network was pleased to sit down with Dr. Dongkyu Kim, the inaugural director of PPLSS (pronounced “peoples”), to learn more about the new school.



### IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY

Dr. Kim explained the rationale for the new school, noting that the Public Administration and Security Studies (PASS) program was an independent department up until a few years ago, when it joined the School of Interdisciplinary Studies and Community Engagement (SIPCE), but that in many R1 universities it is housed with the Political Science Department. Dr. Kim explained that merging the two to form PPLSS makes sense since Public Administration and Security Studies shares many parallels with Political Science. The new school provides even more opportunities for fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration.

Dr. Kim emphasized the positive impact of the departmental merger for its students, immediately strengthening curriculum opportunities for them at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The Masters of Public Affairs, for example, offers three different programs (concentrations in Global Security & Intelligence Studies, Public Administration & Non-profit Leadership, and Public Policy & Civic Innovation) and an accelerated online option (MPA in Public Administration). Since joining PPLSS, these MPA students have a greater number of courses to choose from to complete their degrees on time. Political science students also benefit since they can now take classes offered by the public policy program. “The scope of classes they can take broadened,” he stated, and those courses are much more closely aligned with their degrees. With more faculty in the newly consolidated department, student research opportunities also expand. Building on past years’ momentum, the school is sending its graduate students to attend national and regional conferences to present their theses.



As the program grows, so does its scholarship. Dr. Kim shared that the PPLSS research program is remarkably strong and active, from faculty and graduate students. Several faculty from the former Department of Political Science collaborated on the book, *Politics of the Rio Grande Valley: An Insider’s Perspective to Regional Politics*, and volume 2 is under contract. “We collaborate a lot,” Kim said. “By creating the School, I definitely see more areas where our faculty can collaborate.”

### NEW INITIATIVES

The formation of the School of PPLSS also provides an optimal moment to undertake several exciting school initiatives. One such initiative is the renovation of the curriculum for all 12 academic programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, including minors. This process has already begun, and the department is in the process of submitting curriculum changes to the university.

PPLSS is also revamping the Law School Preparatory Institute (LSPI), an intensive, six-week Summer I experience with a curriculum built around two rigorous pre-law courses. Its new director, Dr. Douglas Brattebo, holds JD and PhD degrees and brings to the new school decades of experience in higher education. While regular semester courses in pre-law are available on both campuses, the LSPI program takes place in Brownsville during Summer I. The plan is to provide housing on the Brownsville campus for students, extending access to an immersive experience in legal writing and LSAT preparation for participants.

PPLSS is also bringing back the Model United Nations program, which has been on hiatus since 2020. Prior to that, UTRGV had been very active, sending 7-8 students to New York every year. The NY Model UN conference is the largest

and most prestigious university-level conference of its kind. Participating students network and engage on global issues with their peers from across not just the country but the world. Dr. Kim is working to rekindle student interest in the program and, in collaboration with CLA Dean José Davila, hopes to sponsor students traveling to the Model UN conference in New York.

Dr. Kim emphasized that one of the new school’s most exciting programs, “Stay in Brownsville,” invigorates the PPLSS presence on the Brownsville campus with the goal of reducing course cancellations and increasing the number of courses offered there. In the past, some courses were canceled due to low enrollment. The pilot program invested \$10K in scholarship support each semester to provide support for on-campus housing and meals for a small number of Hidalgo County resident students; at the moment, two graduate and two undergraduate students are staying at Casa Bella in Brownsville. These students first applied to the competitive program and then registered for Brownsville-campus courses. Since the pilot’s implementation, cancellations of PPLSS courses on the Brownsville campus have been eliminated and Dr. Kim is hopeful that the initiative can be sustained.

PPLSS is launching another pilot project this spring: a reading and writing intensive core class, U.S. Federal Government and Politics (POLS 2035). This pilot section of 25 mostly first-year political science majors and honors students will engage with critical reading and writing early on in their academic career. With the smaller class size, the instructor will direct and support discipline-specific critical thinking skills that are more difficult to support pedagogically in the larger course sections. Dr. Kim is optimistic that this promising pilot will be successful and lead to further implementation.





“We are a dynamic School.”

—Dr. Dongkyu Kim, Founding Director

#### BRINGING IN FUNDING THROUGH THE CSRPA

And let's not forget about the funding Dr. Kim and his colleagues have brought to PPLSS and the college through the Center for Survey Research and Policy Analysis (CSRPA)! The CSRPA provides survey analysis and consulting services to agencies, local NGOs, community groups, and other universities.

Dr. Kim became the CSRPA Director in 2020, and at that point the center began ramping up in terms of the number of contracts they procured. Then, in 2022, the CSRPA landed the proverbial big fish: The Texas Department of Insurance (TDI), which handles the workers' compensation program for the state. Every other year, the TDI must generate a report for the state legislature, and they utilize a state-wide survey to generate necessary data. When TDI opened the bidding process for a new provider to administer the survey, Dr. Kim applied. It was a long and tedious process, but the CSRPA was rewarded with a substantial contract. TDI was thoroughly satisfied with the results, visiting the CSRPA site and confirming the renewal of the \$345K contract.

Today, under Dr. Kim, Associate Director Dr. William Donner, Associate Director Dr. Mi-son Kim, Projects Coordinator and Survey Data Analyst Dr. Carlos Gutierrez-Mannix, CSRPA fellow Dr. Juhyun Bae, and CSRPA-affiliated faculty Dr. Hanna Shin, the center regularly administers two or three surveys every semester. Survey topics range from civic agriculture (for a UTRGV SEEMS graduate student) to food access and security (for the Texas Dept. of Agriculture) to RGV population health (for the UTRGV School of Medicine). To keep up with this demand, CSRPA constantly hires 10 – 15 student employees, an added financial and experiential benefit to our CLA students.

Contracts that CSRPA fulfills provide support funds for PPLSS and CLA programs, such as the PoliSci colloquium series and the pilot “Stay in Brownsville” program. And more broadly speaking, maintaining an active, high-profile survey and public policy center is one of the hallmarks of a major university, making UTRGV and CLA even more attractive to prospective new faculty members. The College of Liberal Arts' CSRPA supports and aligns with the institutional goal of R1 status.

There is so much happening in PPLS right now, building on years of good work and the momentum of the new unit. As Dr. Kim proudly declares, “We are a dynamic school!” The College looks forward to seeing PPLSS grow as it continues to create positive impacts for its students and faculty.



## Edinburg & Brownsville Fall Registration Showcase

**Over 450 UTRGV students visited with faculty to learn more about the majors and minors offered in the CLA.**





# MEET THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRS



**Dr. Bill Donner**  
Interim Director SIPCE



**Dr. Dongkyu Kim**  
Director PPLSS



**Dr. Barbara Zimbalist**  
Literatures & Cultural Studies



**Dr. Gregory Gilson**  
Philosophy



**Dr. Sarah Rowe**  
Anthropology



**Dr. Jennifer Lemanski**  
Communication



**Dr. Perry Fuchs**  
Psychological Science



**Dr. Katarzyna Sepielak**  
Sociology



**Dr. Gordon Crews**  
Criminal Justice



**Dr. Dan Knight**  
History



**Dr. Arlett Lomeli**  
Spansih



**Dr. Nazaret Fresno**  
Writing & Language Studies





**CONFERENCE PRESENTATION  
AWARD: BEST PAPER**  
**Dr. Soo Yun Kim**  
Department of Communication

Dr. S. Y. Kim and co-author W.-L. Chang are receiving a Top Paper Award at the National Communication Association (NCA) annual conference, held this November in Denver, Colorado.

Their paper, “**Enhancing Student Engagement in Basic Communication Courses: The Role of Instructor Nonverbal Immediacy, Students’ Perceived Connected Classroom Climate, and Academic Self-Efficacy in a Flipped Classroom Setting,**” was selected for this honor in recognition of its strong contribution to the field of communication studies at the Gerontological Society of America Annual Scientific Meeting in Seattle, WA.

**NOMINATION**

**Dr. David Anshen**  
Department of Literatures and Cultural Studies

Dr. David Anshen, Associate Professor in the Department of Literatures and Cultural Studies, has been nominated as an Advisory Board Member of the **Centre for Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT)** in Bhubaneswar, India.

**FELLOWSHIP**

**Dr. José Luis Cano**  
Department of Writing and Language Studies

Lisa A. Flores, current Josephine Berry Weiss Chair of the Humanities at Penn State University, hosted a writing retreat and symposium focused on borders, containments, and race/coloniality/decoloniality. Cano participated as an inaugural **Weiss 2025 Summer Fellow**, presenting his research on immigration enforcement. He also shared his work on rhetoric and immigration enforcement at the Rhetoric Society of America’s biannual Summer Institute at the University of Cincinnati.



**AWARD**  
**Dr. Alfonso Mercado**  
Department of Psychological Science

Dr. Mercado was presented with a **Presidential Citation from the American Psychological Association**. He was recognized for his research, practice, and advocacy work with vulnerable populations. APA Past-President Dr. Cynthia de las Fuentes presented the award during the NLP conference in McAllen, Texas on October 18, 2025.



**CONFERENCE PRESENTATION**  
**Dr. Erica Buchberger**  
Department of History

Dr. Erica Buchberger presented her research at the **International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds, UK**, in July, with support from the College of Liberal Arts. The conference brought together over 2,700 participants from more than 60 countries.

Dr. Buchberger’s study examines how a tenth-century historian in Spain leveraged descent from earlier Christian kings to legitimize his family and demonstrate loyalty to Muslim rulers—while strategically omitting certain details to strengthen his case. Her work contributes to broader discussions on how historical narratives are shaped and the role of identity in crafting histories.

**CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION**

**Dr. Juan Gonzalez**  
Department of Anthropology  
**Ms. Rosanne Bacha-Garza**  
Department of Anthropology & CHAPS  
**Dr. Russ Skowronek, Emeritus**  
Department of Anthropology  
**Dr. Chris Miller, Emeritus**  
Department of History



**CONFERENCE PRESENTATION**  
**Dr. Gabriel González Núñez**  
Department Writing and Language Studies  
**Ms. Viridiana Zúñiga**  
Director, Translation and Interpreting Office



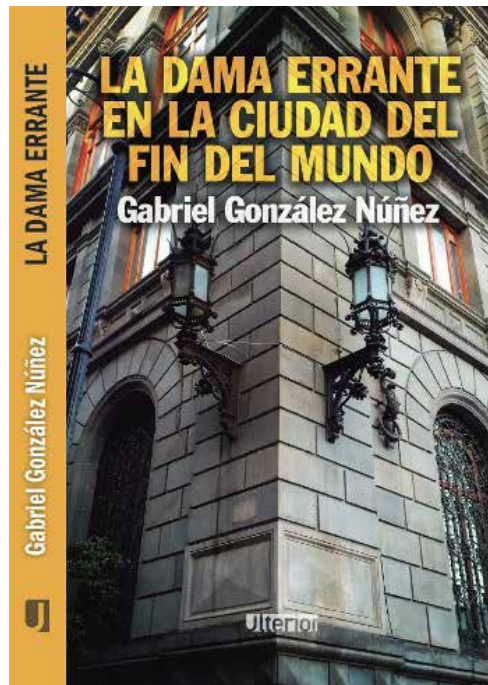
Dr. Gabriel González (Director, Academic Translation & Interpreting Programs) and Ms. Viridiana Zúñiga (Director, Translation and Interpreting Office) presented their joint research, “**Translation Policy Evaluation,**” at the 2025 European Society for Translation Studies Congress in Leeds, England. The project was a collaboration between the Writing & Language Studies Department and the Office for Bilingual Integration.

They were joined by Mr. Dorian Vázquez, lecturer in the academic program and interpreter for the Office, who received a spontaneous ovation from the audience in recognition of his dedication and hard work during the presentation.

On October 10-12, the Texas Archaeological Society (TAS) held its 96th Annual Meeting in McAllen, marking the first time in the Society’s long history that the event has been hosted in the Rio Grande Valley. While CHAPS did not present in a technical session this year, as it has often done over the past fifteen years, the program was invited by conference organizers to participate in two special events highlighting the Ancient Landscapes of South Texas Project. These sessions featured both the museum exhibit and the award-winning documentary, with about 250 participants; both CHAPS-led events were well received.

Continuing its long-standing tradition, the CHAPS team participated in the 19th Annual Rio Grande International Archaeology Fair at the Guerra Ranch north of Edinburg. The fair provided an opportunity to reconnect with community partners, and as in previous years, CHAPS played a key role in the event’s success.





#### PUBLICATION

##### Dr. Gabriel González Núñez

Department of Writing and Language Studies

Dr. Gabriel González has published a new Spanish-language novel, ***La dama errante en la ciudad del fin del mundo***, with the Mexican publishing house Ulterior Editorial.

The book is available through Ulterior Editorial at <https://editorial.ulterior.mx/la-dama-errante>

#### PUBLICATION

##### Dr. Jose Luis Cano

Department of Writing and Language Studies

The personal essay “**The Composition of Thoughts**” was acceptance into the Harvard Educational Review. The essay explores the experience of graduate education in Rhetoric and Composition.

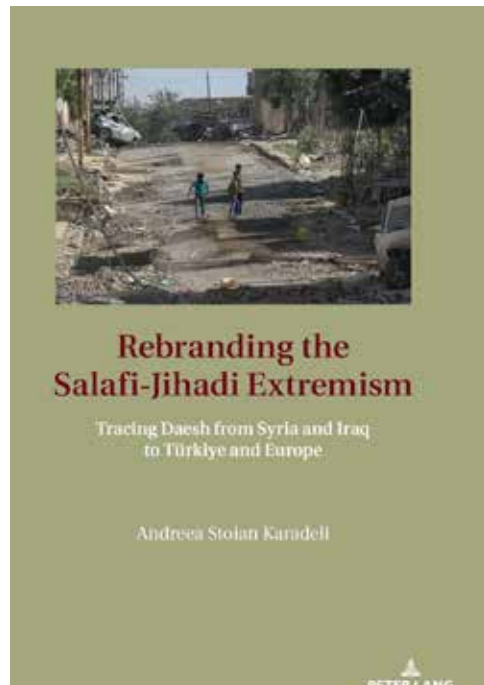


#### PUBLICATION

##### Dr. Bryant Sculos

School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies

Dr. Bryant Sculos recently published an interview with Professor Tom



#### PUBLICATION

##### Dr. Andreea Stoian Karadeli

School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies

This compelling work delves into the chilling rise of Daesh, exploring how this modern terror group captivated global attention and declared a Caliphate. It unravels the anatomy of Daesh, tracing its ominous trajectory from Syria and Iraq all the way to Türkiye and Europe. The book reveals how the group masterfully leveraged technological advancements and communication networks to project its influence far beyond its physical borders. It also critically examines the international community's response, shedding light on the dangerous consequences of underestimation and delayed action. More than just a history lesson, “**Rebranding the Salafi-Jihadi Extremism**” serves as a stark warning: Ignoring the nuances of evolving threats can have devastating repercussions. Discover the unsettling truth about the “shadow Caliphate” that continues to cast its long and dangerous shadow across the world!

Malleson. The conversation centers on Malleson's newest book, *Against Inequality: The Practical and Ethical Case for Abolishing the Superrich*, published in New Political Science.



#### PUBLICATION

##### Dr. Alvaro Corral

School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies

Dr. Alvaro Corral has published a research article titled “**“Trump es la cabeza de todo esto”: Rhetoric, Racism, and the Political Socialization of Latinx Immigrants**” in Politics, Groups, and Identities.

This paper explores how Latina/o immigrants underwent a political socialization experience in a new destination state with a hostile context of reception. Drawing on interviews from the 2018 Immigrant Worker Project Survey (IWPS), the study highlights how immigrants' interpretations of racist elite rhetoric and experiences with local discrimination serve as pathways to political learning and socialization in the USA.

The results of the analysis provide implications for how Latinx immigrants of undocumented or other precarious immigration statuses exercise agency by refracting political rhetoric into the development of politicized group consciousness necessary for expressions of cultural citizenship.

#### RESEARCH GRANT

##### Dr. Sarah Rowe

##### Dr. Guy Duke

Department of Anthropology

Department of Anthropology faculty Dr. Sarah Rowe and Dr. Guy Duke, together with their research collaborator Dr. Sara Juengst (UNC Charlotte), have received a **Senior Research Award from the National Science Foundation's Archaeology Program**.

Their project, Drivers of Variation in Social Organization, will investigate how environment and local resources shaped social organization at Buen Suceso, located on the coast of Ecuador. This site, occupied between 3800 and 1450 BC, provides key insights into the effects of environmental change on ancient societies. The 2026 field season marks the 20th anniversary of the larger archaeological project, the Proyecto Arqueológico de los Ríos Culebra-Colín (PARCC, <https://www.utrgv.edu/parcc/>).



#### FELLOWSHIP

##### Dr. Alfonso Mercado

Department of Psychological Science

Dr. Alfonso Mercado has been selected as a **2025–2026 Faculty Research Fellow in the area of Societal Transformations**, one of seven recognized Research

Pathways at UTRGV. This is Dr. Mercado's second year in this role.

As part of the Faculty Research Fellow cohort, Dr. Mercado will engage in professional networking events, mentor fellow faculty members, and lead or co-lead a large-scale research proposal during the fellowship period.

The program, coordinated by Dr. Megan Keniry, Assistant Vice President for Research Enhancement, supports faculty whose work strengthens UTRGV's research culture and encourages new partnerships across disciplines. This appointment recognizes Dr. Mercado's dedication to advancing research and exploration that connects the liberal arts with broader social change.







## TEACHING

# Designing, Implementing, and Assessing a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Faculty Learning Community (SoTL FLC)

**Dra. Alyssa G. Cavazos, Professor of Writing & Language Studies and Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE)**, launched a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Faculty Learning Community to advance evidence-based teaching across disciplines.

Who participated: Five faculty members from the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) and the Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship (RCVCOBE) completed a five-session series of workshops and feedback conversations across Spring and Summer 2025.

The SoTL FLC supports faculty who wish to study the impact of their teaching on student learning, growth, and success. In a guided, structured environment, participants explored evidence-based pedagogies and designed, implemented, and assessed SoTL study plans.

As part of her scholarly agenda, Dra. Cavazos is examining effective practices for designing, running, and evaluating SoTL FLCs to build a sustainable, cross-disciplinary community of scholar-teachers whose work strengthens teaching, student success, and the broader knowledge base at UTRGV and beyond.

## CLA Participants & Projects

### Grace Francis, Lecturer I, Psychological Sciences

Project: Enhancing Student Outcomes Through Growth Mindset Interventions in Undergraduate Psychology Education.

Focus: Tests how growth-mindset strategies influence resilience, motivation, and performance in psychology courses, work with implications for persistence and success initiatives (including STEM-adjacent contexts).

### Dean Kyne, Professor, Sociology

Project: Exploring the Short- and Long-Term Impacts of Service Learning in Disaster and Emergency Management Education

Focus: Studies how community-based projects improve learning, critical thinking, and career readiness; identifies best practices for integrating service learning into DEM curricula and for strengthening university-community partnerships.

### Kyung Lee, Assistant Professor, Literatures & Cultural Studies

Project: Scaffolding Professional Identity: Teacher Certification Preparation as Transformative Practice

Focus: A qualitative analysis of how preservice teachers develop professional identity through certification prep, inquiry prompts, and interviews with practicing English teachers, informing personalized pedagogical supports for exam prep and reflective practice.



## DOCUMENTARY

### Dr. Marla Pérez-Lugo

Department of Sociology

Marla Pérez-Lugo was recently featured in the United Methodist Church's documentary **Out of the Whirlwind: Disaster Response in Puerto Rico**, which explores the lasting impact of Hurricane Maria and the island's ongoing recovery efforts.

The full documentary can be viewed on YouTube at <https://tinyurl.com/4rxhc7pr>.



## STUDENT PRESENTATION

### Zanela Denise Bajarias

School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal and Security Studies

Graduate student Zanela Denise Bajarias presented her thesis project, **"Authoritarian Bidding,"** at the South International Studies Association meeting in Lubbock, Texas.

## INVITED TALK

### Dr. David Anshen

Department of Literatures and Cultural Studies

Professor David Anshen was invited to present at the 6th International e-Conference, **Imagining Futures: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Humanity, Crisis, and Change.**



## STUDENT PRESENTATION

### Perla Luengo and Norma Martínez

Department of Spanish

Perla Luengo and Norma Martínez, graduate students in the Spanish Department, attended LASSO 2025 at Wichita State University in Kansas. They delivered two well-received presentations:

- **Ideologías intergeneracionales sobre el habla en dos familias centroamericanas** (co-presented with Nayán Mendiola and Norma Zárate)
- **Testimonios lingüísticos de la Esperanza: Supervivencia y adaptación lingüística en contextos migratorios.**

Perla and Norma shared original research, connected with fellow scholars, and received valuable feedback on their work.

Their travel to LASSO 2025 was generously supported by student travel funding from the Spanish Department, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Graduate College.



## FACULTY-STUDENT PRESENTATION

### Dr. Richard Longoria

### Dana Reyes

Department of Sociology

Professor Richard Longoria and undergraduate Dana Reyes have published an article in **Social Science Quarterly** titled, *The Irrelevance of "Peak Fame" on Celebrity Candidate Success.*



STUDENT SUCCESS

# UTRGV Criminal Justice Students Dominate at ACJA Region 2 Conference

Iota Kappa Chi Chapter Brings Home 45 Medals and the Grand Champion Sweeps Award



The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Iota Kappa Chi (IKC) Chapter of the American Criminal Justice Association (ACJA) made a commanding statement at the 2026 ACJA Region 2 Conference, held October 9–11, 2025, in San Marcos. Competing against top programs across the region, the Brownsville-based team captured an astounding 45 medals—and earned the coveted Sweeps Award, recognizing them as the conference's overall grand champion chapter.

Led by Dr. Sanchez, the 15-member student delegation delivered a powerhouse performance across every competition category—academics, physical fitness, shooting, and crime scene investigation—with every student earning at least one medal. The team's results were nothing short of remarkable:

- 10 for Academic Testing
- 4 for Physical Fitness
- 7 for Individual Shooting
- 5 for Team Shooting
- 3 for Crime Scene Investigations

Their consistent dominance in firearms events continued, capturing 13 of the 17 possible awards in that category alone. Yet this year also marked a broader sweep across disciplines—showcasing the chapter's growing versatility. Of particular note was the performance of an all-female shooting team that claimed 2nd Place in Upper Division Team Shooting, a testament to the chapter's expanding inclusivity and talent pipeline. Two of these

students, impressively, had been training for less than six months.

Support from leadership played a key role in this success. "Such achievements would not be possible without the continued encouragement of our Dean, Dr. José Dávila, and Department Chair, Dr. Gordon Crews," added Dr. Sanchez. "Their support empowers our students to pursue excellence beyond the classroom."

The IKC Chapter's commanding 64-point total—double that of the next closest competitor—secured the Sweeps Award and set the stage for their next challenge: representing UTRGV at the 2026 National Conference in Minneapolis.



Academic Testing

- ACJA LAE Knowledge Test: Christina Hernandez (1st, Professional); Gustavo Mata (3rd, Upper); Gabriel Richarte (1st, Lower)
- Criminal Law: Luis Vasquez (1st, Upper); Kriz Peña (2nd, Lower)
- Juvenile Justice: Dr. Sanchez (2nd, Professional); Kriz Peña (1st, Lower)
- Police Management: Dr. Sanchez (2nd, Professional)
- Corrections: Dr. Sanchez (3rd, Professional); Kriz Peña (1st, Lower)

Firearms – Individual

Christina Hernandez (2nd, Professional); Dr. Sanchez (3rd, Profes-

sional); Alberto Garay (1st, Upper); Kayla Navarro (3rd, Upper); Brianna Rodriguez (1st, Lower); Gabriel Richarte (2nd, Lower); Kriz Peña (3rd, Lower)



Firearms – Team

- Christina Hernandez, Rene Sanchez, Devin Perez – 1st (Professional)
- Brendaly Quiñonez, Luis Vasquez, Jair Medina – 3rd (Professional)
- Alberto Garay, Denisse Jimenez, Gustavo Mata – 1st (Upper)
- Yudith Martinez, Angela DeLeon, Kayla Navarro – 2nd (Upper)
- Kriz Peña, Brianna Rodriguez, Gabriel Richarte – 1st (Lower)

Crime Scene Investigation

- Christina Hernandez, Jair Medina, Brendaly Quiñonez – 1st (Professional)
- Luis Vasquez, Gustavo Mata, Kayla Navarro – 3rd (Upper)
- Gabriel Richarte, Brianna Rodriguez, Kriz Peña – 3rd (Lower)

Physical Fitness

- Devin Perez (1st, Male 26+); Kriz Peña (1st, Male 25 & under); Brendaly Quiñonez (2nd, Female 25 & under); Christina Hernandez (3rd, Female 25 & under).





#### STUDENT PUBLICATION

School of Political Science, Public Affairs, and Legal and Security Studies

Students Ashley Castañeda, Ruby Hernández Espinoza, and Kaylee Ruiz co-authored the article **“Framing Policy and Gender: A Comparative Analysis of Political Communication in the First 100 Days of Presidents Sheinbaum and López Obrador.”** Their work has been published in *Reformas Políticas*, a journal of the Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).



#### STUDENT PUBLICATION

School of Political Science, Public Affairs, and Legal and Security Studies

Allison Domínguez and Leonardo García co-authored **“Transnational Political Perceptions Among Texas Border Students: Attitudes Toward the Sheinbaum Administration.”** Their paper was published in *Reformas Políticas*, a journal of the Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).



#### STUDENT SUCCESS

##### Lia Cavazos-García

School of Political Science, Public Affairs, and Security and Legal Studies

Lia Cavazos-García has been selected as the new **Texas Civic Ambassador representing UTRGV!** The Civic Ambassador Program provides students with unique opportunities to strengthen their leadership skills, engage their communities, and become changemakers.

tion to Advertising class attended the SOCIAL FEST Conference in Mission, Texas. The two day event attracted over 900 attendees and featured international speakers sharing best practices for social media.



#### DEPARTMENT SUCCESS

##### Communication

Fifteen students from Dr. Kimberly Selber’s Introduc-

# MEET YOUR new colleagues

While our student body continues to grow, so does our faculty.

This fall, forty-eight new faculty members joined the College of Liberal Arts, bringing fresh energy, ideas, and expertise to a community of more than 300 scholars. Together, this growing cohort strengthens UTRGV’s commitment to rigorous research, innovative teaching, and life-changing opportunities for students across the college and the university.







**Angela Achorn**  
Anthropology  
Assist. Prof.



**Jack Bish**  
Anthropology  
Lecturer I



**Amal Sachedina**  
Anthropology  
Prof. of Practice



**Roseann Bacha-Garza**  
Anthropology  
Prof. of Practice



**Michael Flanagan**  
Communication  
Lecturer I



**Emily Villarreal**  
Communication  
Lecturer I



**Victoria Olivarez**  
Communication  
Lecturer I



**Citlaly Palau**  
Criminal Justice  
Assist. Prof.



**Salvador Salinas**  
History  
Assist. Prof.



**Alexander Petrusek**  
History  
Assist. Prof.



**Anne Boyd**  
History  
Assist. Prof.



**Benjamin Hruska**  
History  
Assist. Prof.



**Kathryn Densford**  
History  
Assist. Prof.



**Nathaniel Conley**  
History  
Lecturer I



**Jack Lorensini**  
History  
Lecturer I



**Yulia Cherniavskaia**  
History  
Lecturer I



**Lilia Garcia**  
History  
Lecturer I



**Louis Castillo**  
History  
Lecturer I



**Laura Lamb**  
History  
Lecturer I



**Ian Seavey**  
History  
Assist. Prof.



**Juan Garcia**  
SIPCE  
Lecturer I



**Alberto Rodriguez**  
Lit & Culture Studies  
Professor



**Nicole Huff**  
Lit & Culture Studies  
Assist. Prof.



**Cynthia Martin**  
Lit & Culture Studies  
Lecturer I



**Zugay Trevino**  
Lit & Culture Studies  
Lecturer I



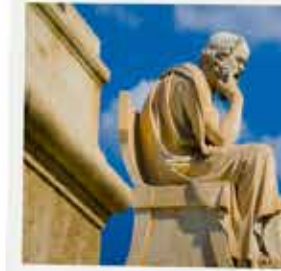
**Matthew Wester**  
Philosophy  
Lecturer I



**Hannah Allen**  
Philosophy  
Assist. Prof.



**Ioan Muntean**  
Philosophy  
Lecturer I



**Stephen Smith**  
Philosophy  
Assist. Prof.



**Erik Underwood**  
PPLSS  
Assist. Prof.



**Douglas Brattebo**  
PPLSS  
Assist. Prof.



**Sarah Perez**  
PPLSS  
Assist. Prof.





**Gabriela Ontiveros**  
Psych. Science  
Clinical Assist. Prof.



**Maria Montenegro**  
Psych. Science  
Assist. Prof.



**Frances Morales**  
Psych. Science  
Assist. Prof.



**Peiyi Wang**  
Psych. Science  
Assist. Prof.



**Justin Vollet**  
Psych. Science  
Assist. Prof.



**Kasandra Garcia Reyna**  
Psych. Science  
Lecturer I



**Heather-Ann Layth**  
Sociology  
Lecturer II



**Jaime Marroquin**  
Spanish  
Professor



**Nicole Nicholson**  
Writ. & Lang. Studies  
Lecturer III



**Aviva Wei Xue**  
Writ. & Lang. Studies  
Lecturer I



**Naomi Vela**  
Writ. & Lang. Studies  
Lecturer I



**Blanca Rocha**  
Writ. & Lang. Studies  
Lecturer I



**Alma Morales**  
Writ. & Lang. Studies  
Lecturer I



**Ryan McBride**  
Writ. & Lang. Studies  
Lecturer I



**Saul Dominguez**  
Writ. & Lang. Studies  
Lecturer I



**Cynthia Garza**  
Writ. & Lang. Studies  
Lecturer II

# Where shall we go?

From the cafés of France to the shores of Cyprus, the streets of Seoul to the historic halls of England—College of Liberal Arts students spent the summer discovering what it means to learn without borders. Study abroad transforms more than résumés. It transforms perspectives.

**UTRGV**  
College of Liberal Arts  
**STUDY ABROAD**



# Journey To Cyprus



In Summer 2025, UTRGV students traveled to Cyprus with Dr. Michael Smith of the Department of Political Science. While on the island the students visited historic medieval cities, Greek and Roman ruins, met with State Department officials from the US Embassy, observed sea turtles and other wildlife in the island's waters and engaged in local craft workshops in the island's mountains.

# ENGLAND



Over the summer, Dr. Andrew Fleck (Professor in Literature and Cultural Studies and Honors Faculty Fellow) taught a Shakespeare course that spent two weeks in London, England. Students saw performances of Romeo and Juliet and A Midsummer Night's Dream in London, Hamlet at the Royal Shakespeare Company's theater in Stratford-upon-Avon - Shakespeare's birthplace - and Twelfth Night in Oxford. Students studied the texts of the plays on campus before their departure.

# Study Abroad



# The perfect Harmony of Paris

"After a light dinner, another student and I decided to take an Uber back to our accommodations. As we drove through the pulsing city, we suddenly came upon the Arc de Triomphe, standing tall and bathed in white light. Who knew a common rideshare experience could be so magical?"



# Study Abroad Korea







## DEPARTMENT SUCCESS

### Psychological Science

The Department of Psychological Science at UTRGV is celebrating a major milestone this fall with the largest-ever cohort of **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Certificate students**—and the first official group since the program’s comprehensive revamp.

This 21-credit, graduate-level certificate meets the coursework requirements for Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA®) certification and is tailored for professionals in psychology, education, counseling, and related fields. Students pursuing master’s degrees in Experimental or Clinical Psychology can also complete the certificate concurrently, expanding both their expertise and career opportunities.

With plans to evolve into a standalone master’s degree, the program reflects UTRGV’s growing commitment to meeting workforce needs in behavioral health.

“There is a high need for qualified BCBAs who can serve the community,” said Dr. Christelle Garza, Clinical Assistant Professor and Graduate Program Coordinator. “Our goal is to provide high-quality instruction that allows students to meet their career goals in a very rewarding field.”



## DEPARTMENT SUCCESS

### Anthropology

Thanks to support from the College of Liberal Arts, the Department of Anthropology has acquired a Laser Aided Profiler to enhance the rapid production of digital drawings of archaeological artifacts. This summer, Dr. Sarah Rowe used the equipment in Ecuador to document 6,000-year-old ceramics from the Valdivia culture.



## DEPARTMENT SUCCESS

### Writing & Language Studies

Earlier this fall, Kylie Torres of the Intersectional Feminist Student Organization and José Luis Cano from the Department of Writing and Language Studies hosted a joint reception celebrating their exhibits, *Human Expressions* and *Muñequitas de La Llorona*.

*Human Expressions*—a collection exploring creativity, identity, and the shared human experience—was featured on the third floor of the UTRGV Brownsville Library from September 1 to October 3 before moving to the first floor of the Edinburg Library from October 6 to November 7.

*Muñequitas de La Llorona* remained on display on the third floor of the Brownsville Library through the end of the fall semester, offering a powerful reflection on cultural folklore, femininity, and expression.

Special thanks go to Sarah Muñoz of the Department of Writing and Language Studies and John Ferris of the UTRGV Library for their collaboration and support in making these exhibits possible



## DEPARTMENT SUCCESS

### Literatures & Cultural Studies

The Department of Literatures & Cultural Studies (LCS) co-sponsored the screening and panel discussion of the acclaimed, Netflix-distributed documentary *Going Varsity in Mariachi*. Following the screening, Dr. Linda Belau, Director of Film Studies, moderated a dynamic discussion with the film’s directors and Abel Acuña, Director of EHS’s award-winning *Mariachi del Oro*.



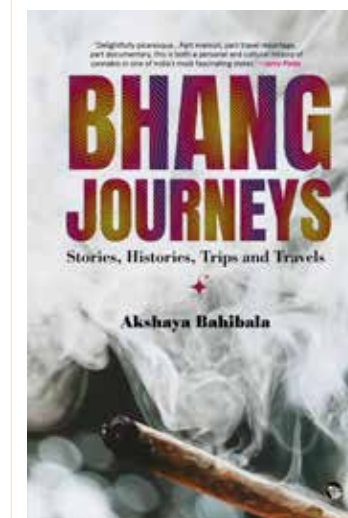
## DEPARTMENT SUCCESS

### The School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies

PPLSS is excited to announce a new student mentoring service designed to support first- and second-year students majoring within the school.

Through this initiative, students can make an appointment with their mentor to help set up course schedules, provide guidance for managing school/work/life, maintaining good academic standing, and accessing university resources.

Mentors are also available to help students draft résumés for campus jobs.



## DEPARTMENT SUCCESS

### Literatures & Cultural Studies

The Department of Literatures and Cultural Studies (LCS) welcomed Akshaya Bahibala, visiting scholar and nonfiction author from India, for a series of class visits and community events celebrating global literary voices.

During his visit, Mr. Bahibala met with multiple classes, engaging students in conversations about his career as a nonfiction writer and bookstore advocate, and about the role of literature across languages and nationalities.

His visit proceeded with a public reading of his recent book, *Bhang Journeys*, held at Buho Bookstore in Brownsville on Thursday evening, October 16.

## COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS SUCCESS

### Communication Liaisons

Dr. Kimberly Selber (AD for Community Engagement), Faculty Fellows Alyssa Cerroni (Communication) and Nicole Nicholson (WRLS), and CLA Communication Liaisons Rey Villarreal (Anthropology) and Denise Deleon (Criminal Justice) attended the inaugural SOCIAL FEST Conference in Mission, Texas.





**DEPARTMENT SUCCESS**

**The School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies**

PPLSS faculty Dr. Mi-son Kim and Dr. William Sokoloff recently visited students at Sharyland High School, sharing insights about the School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies at UTRGV. The visit offered a wonderful opportunity to engage with such bright and inquisitive students and to inspire future leaders in the field.



**DEPARTMENT SUCCESS**

**The School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies**

On September 3, PPLSS hosted its first Meet & Greet and Book Launch of the year. Students and faculty gathered to learn about Dr. Sokoloff's newest publication, *Joey Chestnut's America: Politics, Patriotism and the Future of Democracy*, and to connect informally as the new academic semester began.



**DEPARTMENT SUCCESS**

**The School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies**

On the evening of Wednesday, Sept. 17, students and faculty gathered for the first Pizza & Politics event of the semester, organized by Dr. Bryant W. Sculos and hosted by the School of Political Science, Public Affairs, and Legal & Security Studies (PPLSS) and the College of Liberal Arts (CLA).

Each of these events has a life of its own without a formal structure. On Wednesday, roughly 30 students—along with 5 faculty from PPLSS—self-organized into a multi-topic discussion on various issues including domestic and international politics while devouring 7 pizzas. Several participants stayed well past the scheduled end time to continue the discussion, making it an opportunity for students to explore the topics they were most interested in. Everyone learned a lot and enjoyed engaging even with the most controversial issues!

**DEPARTMENT SUCCESS**

**The School of Political Science, Public Affairs, Legal & Security Studies**

On October 1, faculty from the School of Political Science, Public Affairs, and Legal & Security Studies (PPLSS) took part in the Career and Internship Expo in Brownsville.

They met with students to share career advice, discuss professional pathways, and connect with organizations offering internship opportunities.



**DEPARTMENT SUCCESS**

**Psychology**

UTRGV proudly hosted the National Latinx Psychological Association (NLPA) Annual Convention from October 16 to 18, 2025, welcoming nearly 500 attendees from across the country to our campus.

The convention kicked off with a lively community Bienvenida at the Old Hidalgo Pump House and World Birding Center, featuring performances by the

award-winning UTRGV Mariachi Aztlán and UTRGV Ballet Folklórico. NLPA's Psychology at the Border showcased a diverse range of 119 sessions across 16 tracks, covering topics essential to our collective understanding of psychological resilience and health. The event included over 156 speakers and 103 student poster sessions!

Dr. Alfonso Mercado currently serves as the president of the NLPA.





## ALUMNI

# Communication Alumna Leads Lifesaving Efforts Across the RGV

By Alyssa Cerroni

UTRGV alumna Shelby Rios (B.A. Communication Studies, 2019) has transformed her passion for helping others into a career that saves lives. As a student, Shelby discovered her calling for health communication and advocacy through an internship with the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP), guided by her communication professor, Ms. Alyssa Cerroni.

During her internship, Shelby used her communication skills to raise awareness about health disparities among ethnic minorities affected by blood cancer and inspired fellow students to join the marrow donor registry. Her commitment led the NMDP to create a new position for her as Outreach Coordinator serving the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, and El Paso. In this role, she helps connect patients with life-threatening blood cancers and disorders to potential donors.

She used her communication skills to highlight health disparities among ethnic minorities with blood cancer. She helped her inform, persuade, and inspire students to join the marrow donor registry. This hands-on internship sharpened Shelby's skills and opened new career doors. Her dedication prompted NMDP to cre-

ate a role for her as outreach coordinator across Rio Grande Valley communities, Laredo, and El Paso. Shelby helps patients with life-threatening blood cancers and disorders find a donor and receive a transplant. She focuses on enrolling volunteers in the NMDP registry and on finding donors willing to donate marrow or blood stem cells.

From October 20-24, the UTRGV NMDP Club held an on-campus registration drive encouraging students to join the marrow registry. With support from the UTRGV NMDP Student Organization and communication students, Shelby added 513 UTRGV students to the NMDP registry. Since 2018, 40 registered students have donated stem cells to patients. Currently, two students — one former Communication major — are in the process of donating. Shelby Rios, Professor Cerroni, and their students continue to use their communication skills to save lives. Their ongoing commitment to advocacy and community engagement has a lasting impact across the Rio Grande Valley.



## ALUMNI

### Denisce Palacios

BS Political Science '21

Congratulations to CLA alum Denisce Palacios for being recognized as a graduate of the prestigious Obama Foundation Leaders USA program!

Denisce (BS Political Science, '21) attended the program alongside fellow UTRGV alum Mackenzie Feldman (MS, School of Earth, Environmental and Marine Sciences, '24).

They joined a cohort of 100 changemakers from across the nation—representing two of only six Texans selected for this national honor.

Denisce, a passionate advocate for nonpartisan voter engagement, works to empower young people and mobilize communities to participate in the legislative process.



## ALUMNI

### Ana Avila

BA Mass Comm '18  
MA Comm '22

Congratulations to Ana Avila who has been appointed Chief Communications Officer for Duncanville ISD in Duncanville, TX.



## ALUMNI

### Dr. Marcos Silva

BA in Psychology, Minor in Communication '09

Dr. Marcos Silva, a UTRGV alum and former Executive Director of Rio Grande Valley LEAD, has been appointed Executive Director of the South Texas College Foundation and External Affairs. In this role, he will help raise funds and build partnerships to support scholarships and educational programs for students across the Rio Grande Valley.

Dr. Silva began his career as a counselor with IDEA Public Schools and has long focused on creating opportunities for first-generation students. He also continues to teach part-time at UTRGV and has played a leadership role in organizing TEDx McAllen events. His dedication to education and community engagement continues to make a lasting impact in the region.



# We want to know.

Send in your “did you know” accomplishments,  
publications, kudos, grants, student successes,  
and other bragging points - big and small -  
to be included in our CLA college newsletter.



Use the below QR Code to access our submission form.



<https://tinyurl.com/4ukp3m3v>