

La network

the college of liberal arts newsletter



DIA
de los
MUERTOS
CLA | PSJA ISD
MAS | LUCHA



from the Dean's Desk.

With the semester in full swing, we are happy to introduce the inaugural issue of the College of Liberal Arts' newsletter—*la network*. Its goal is to share with our CLA community the great things our faculty colleagues, departments, and students are doing in the many areas that color our rich college.

We would like this venue to be a place where we all can continuously showcase our collective achievements and stories of success. Please send your achievements, exciting stories, and student successes to our editorial team for inclusion in *la network*. Please include pictures! (QR code on last page)

Growth!

With a record enrollment of nearly 34,000 students, UTRGV is growing and growing fast! From the Dean's Desk, I want to share with you the initiative for meaningful, strategic growth that the College is embarking on this Fall semester.

With the primary goal of making our Liberal Arts programs both larger and more prominent, we are working with department chairs and program representatives to generate engaging CLA "branding" communication. This includes rewriting our undergraduate promotional materials for high school students and educating high schoolers and councilors about the wide range of programs and professional possibilities a UTRGV Liberal Arts degree offers.

We are the best ambassadors of what we do and must keep telling our story all year round. Stay tuned and think of how you can contribute to spreading the word about what your programs offer.

Strong undergraduate majors feed into stronger graduate programs.

UTRGV is on the trajectory of becoming an "R1" institution. To that end, growth at the graduate level is crucial, especially in the development of doctoral programs.

A task force is being put together to explore the possibility of developing competitive, niche doctoral programs that take advantage of our unique regional characteristics, including bilingualism, biculturalism, and how those dimensions can provide an edge to our graduates competing in an ever-tighter job market in academia.

Bilingual/Spanish Course Design

Our College's Strategic Plan calls for the CLA to be "the leading college of B3 initiatives (Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate) by having all programs meaningfully embed B3 into their curriculum." Many programs have experienced a lot of growth in this direction, too, and I encourage you to continue to work toward this strategic goal.

This summer, the College sponsored ten faculty members to take a series of intensive workshops on bilingual/Spanish course design for their disciplines. This Fall, as these faculty are finalizing their courses to be taught in the summer, we will be able to learn how bilingual pedagogies will have a place or a stronger presence in disciplines such as Criminal Justice, Political Science, Linguistics, Professional Writing, or Psychology. These courses will add to our already outstanding offerings in Spanish language, bilingual or sustainable pedagogies in Anthropology, Communication, Philosophy, Mexican American Studies, History, Geography, Sociology, Spanish, and Translation Studies.

A lot is going on in the CLA, and we hope to bring you a sneak peek every month in *la network*!

¡Vamos!

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



Writing and Language Studies Faculty Member Honored with UT System Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award

In October, The University of Texas System Board of Regents honored Marcela Hebbard for her dedication and innovative teaching methods with the prestigious 2024 Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award (ROTA).

Hebbard, a lecturer in the UTRGV Writing and Language Studies Department, is one of only 12 educators across the UT System to receive this accolade, which recognizes exceptional classroom performance and commitment to student success.

FALL APPOINTMENTS

Interim Associate Deans

Assessment
Dr. Michael Faubion
(History)

Community Engagement
Dr. Kimberly Selber
(Communication)

Faculty Success
Dr. Dawid Wladyka
(Sociology)

Faculty Fellows

Assessment
Dr. Randall Monty
(Writing and Languages Studies)

Faculty Development
Dr. Ruby Charak
(Psychology)

Graduate Studies
Dr. Salvatore Restifo
(Sociology)

Research
Dr. Mario Gil
(Psychology)

Undergraduate
Dr. Mi-son Kim
(Political Science)



CLA Faculty Development Held Mentor-Mentee Meetings in Brownsville and Edinburg

In the recent mentor-mentee meeting (October 1 and 2), the College of Liberal Arts celebrated an inspiring gathering of nearly 50 faculty members dedicated to fostering collaboration and growth across both the Brownsville and Edinburg campuses. The event started with a warm welcome from the CLA Interim Dean, Dr. Jose Davila-Montes, who emphasized the critical importance of the mentor-mentee alliance in enriching our academic community. Led by Dr. Dawid Wladyka, Interim Associate Dean of Faculty Development, and Dr. Ruby Charak, Fellow in Faculty Development, the meeting provided an engaging platform for meaningful discussions and the exchange of ideas.

These mentor-mentee meetings are crucial, as they not only facilitate professional development and knowledge sharing but also help build a supportive network that empowers faculty to navigate challenges and seize opportunities. Faculty members shared valuable insights and experiences, reinforcing our commitment to supporting one another. This successful gathering showcased the incredible potential that arises when seasoned faculty members connect with their peers, and we look forward to seeing these alliances flourish in the coming months.



CLA Participates in Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Latina Leadership Conference

On September 18, 2024, the Rio Grande Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual Latina Leadership Conference at the Mission Event Center. Over 500 participants from across the valley were in attendance, bringing together a dynamic array of local entrepreneurs, professionals, and advocates. The conference featured panel sessions and workshops addressing such themes as effective leadership and networking, as well as multi-generational workspaces, social media use, and AI technologies. Championing UTRGV's commitment to the growth and success of the Rio Grande Valley, College of Liberal Arts faculty participated in events throughout the day, and Dr. Salvator Restifo (Faculty Fellow for Graduate) and Dr. Friederike Bruehoefener (Director, SIPCE) staffed a booth providing attendees information on the various graduate programs and certificates offered. With summer wrapping up, this year's Latina Leadership Conference signaled a truly exciting and empowering start to fall.



Outlook Sunny for UTRGV Dept. of Communication and Telemundo Partnership

College of Liberal Arts Interim Dean, Dr. Jose Davila, Interim Associate Dean for Community Engagement, Dr. Kimberly Selber, and Dept. of Communication Chair, Dr. Jennifer Lemanski visited the Telemundo station in McAllen to discuss internships, partnership, and opportunities for students in broadcast, advertising, and public relations.

UTRGV Alums, Iris Rodriguez (News Director), Karina Segovia (Meteorologist) and Denisse Salinas (Anchor) also joined in.



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

CLA Students (and faculty) are taking learning on the road. For the 2025 minimester and summer sessions, CLA faculty are teaching 30% of all courses offered in the UTRGV study abroad program.



Advertising/PR

The UTRGV Ad Club volunteered at the AAF D10 Trending Tides Conference at South Padre Island. Advertising leaders and marketing trailblazers came together to ride the waves of the latest trends.

Students had the opportunity to network with some of the best in the multicultural advertising business including UTRGV alums Brenda Hernandez, Creative Director Airbnb Latin América, and Lynda Laurin, CEO Pollux Castor Creative along with the CEO & Creative Chairman of Beautiful Beast Dallas, Chief Innovation Officer GALE New York, and Principal, Digital Strategy & Integration Lerma Agency Dallas.



In April, the **Department of Psychological Science** reached another major milestone and was granted accreditation on contingency by the American Psychological Association for their Ph.D. in Psychology.

Dr. Ian Seavey, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies and Mexican American Studies was interviewed by KRGV's "RGV Environmental Minute" on how to reduce your exposure to forever chemicals.



What do Dr. Russ Skowronek, and Captain Kirk have in common?

They were both on the History Channel's *The Golden Age of Pirates* which aired October 4, 2024. But don't worry, me hearties, you can watch the episode here: <https://www.history.com/shows/the-unexplained/season-7>

Dr. Skowronek is a pirate expert, the author of three books on the subject, and a highly sought-after international speaker.



CLA Registration Showcases In Edinburg and Brownsville Bring In Record Crowds



The Registration Showcases, organized by Dr. Sheila Dooley, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education and Dr. Mi-son Kim, Faculty Fellow for Undergraduate Education, were a big success, thanks to our faculty support and interaction with the students who attended. It was clear that the experience was an excellent one for them: they left with smiling faces and hands full of degree program info, pizza, and swag.

Some brought their friends to the event and one student attending in Brownsville even said, "I heard there's a party going on here."

We collected 132 passports. Each passport represented 5 separate conversations with a program table. Therefore, we can confidently say that there were 660 different student-faculty interactions at the Brownsville event. This is a significant increase from the approximately 400 interactions at last spring's showcase. In particular, it is worth noting that the Registration Showcase in Brownsville attracted significantly more students than in Edinburg (we collected 99 passports in Edinburg).



AND THE WINNER IS ...

Congratulations to CHAPS for winning "Best STX Cinematography" for the documentary film "Ancient Landscapes of South Texas: Hiding in Plain Sight" at the South Texas International Film Festival. Director Gerardo "Bull" Sanchez and Executive Producer Juan L. Gonzalez walked the red carpet and were on hand to receive the award.

There was a great turnout at the film screening, where CHAPS Program Associate Producers Russell Skowronek and Christopher Miller answered questions from the audience about the research conducted for this project that promotes our region's amazing geological history and geoh heritage.

The film was also nominated for Best Documentary Feature Film





Luminary Scholars Choose UTRGV & CLA Psychology

The College of Liberal Arts was proud to welcome two new Luminary Scholars Victoria Saenz (left) and Isabella Garcia to the UTRGV Department of Psychological Science this fall semester.

The Luminary Scholarship program is unique to UTRGV for select top incoming freshmen. This program eliminates any financial burden by paying for education-related expenses associated with an undergraduate degree and or a graduate or professional degree like medical or podiatry school.

PSJA Memorial Teacher Receives Prestigious Humanities Award

Monica Alvarez Suarez, a Dual Language Mexican American Studies teacher at PSJA Memorial Early College High School, was recently honored with the Outstanding Teaching of the Humanities Award by Humanities Texas. This award, presented in a special ceremony attended by state, district, and campus leaders, recognizes her exceptional contributions to teaching, curriculum development, and extracurricular programming. Suarez received a \$5,000 cash award, an additional \$1,000 for her campus, and a Texas flag flown over the U.S. Capitol.

A 2019 UTRGV alum with Master's degrees in Mexican American Studies and Spanish, Suarez developed the curriculum for PSJA ISD's interdisciplinary Dual Language Mexican American Studies program. Her courses, taught in Spanish, integrate literature, history, art, and music through project-based learning. She is one of only 15 educators statewide recognized with this honor.

Humanities Texas, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, celebrates exemplary K-12 teachers who contribute to lifelong learning by advancing humanities education in Texas.



8th Annual Dia de Muertos Competition with PSJA ISD

College of Liberal Arts, Mexican American Studies, & LUCHA

In Fall 2017, a new graduate course on Chicx/Latinx Schooling launched a cultural initiative that continues to impact local schools. The course challenged students to create a sustainable project that would address the need for cultural affirmation in the classroom, leading to the establishment of a Día de Muertos Altar competition. Timed with the City of San Juan's first-ever Día de Muertos celebration, the project was designed to become an annual tradition.

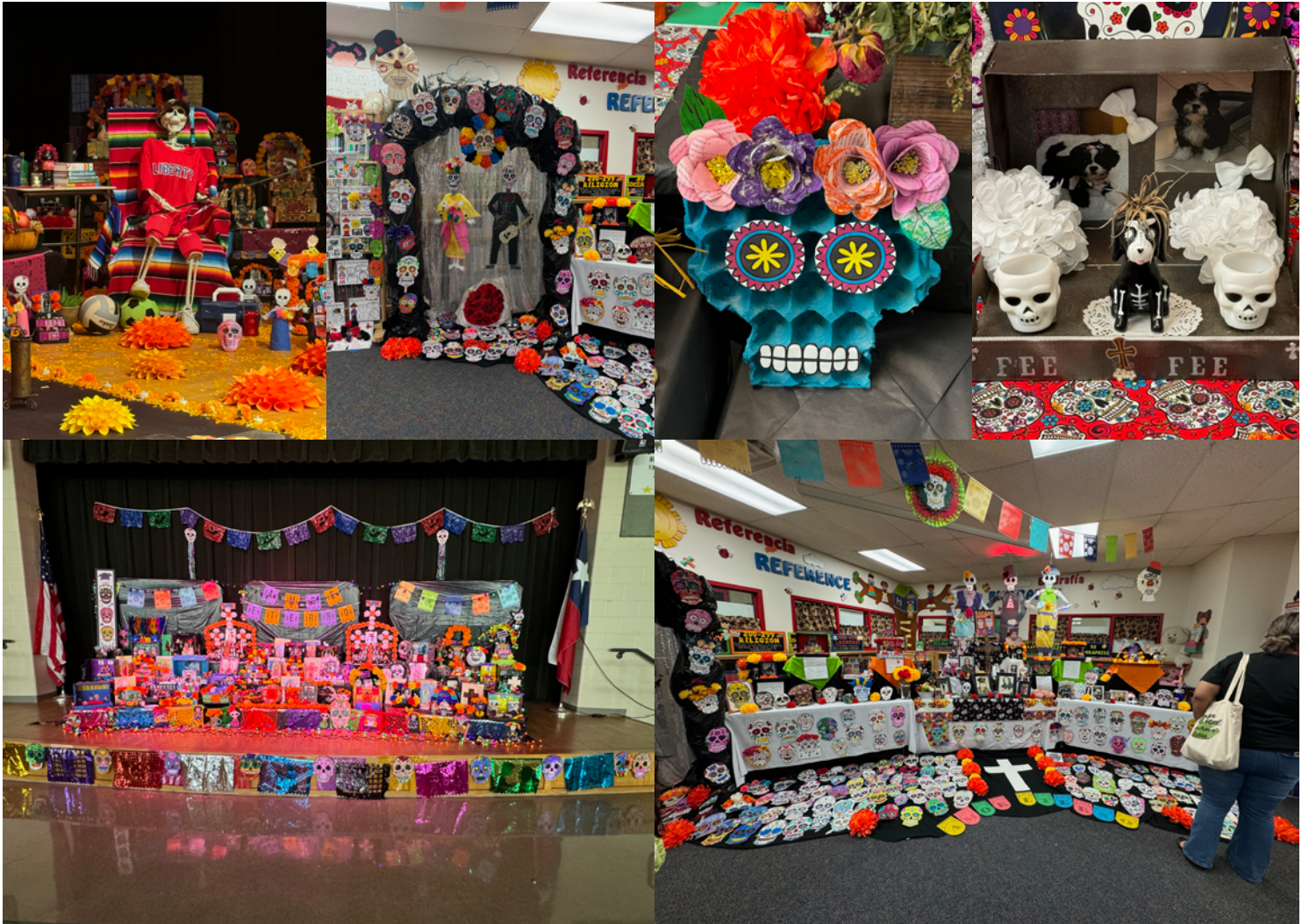
The altar competition, initially involving eight schools, required that each altar be placed in a public space within the school, inviting school-wide participation and encouraging students to include handmade items. Graduate students created bilingual lesson plans, interactive presentations, and crafts to help bring the project to life across different grade levels. The goal was to ensure that each altar could serve as a sustainable, culturally significant focal point for students, just like a Christmas tree in many schools. The project has since become a powerful model of how to bridge theory and practice in education, fostering cultural sustainability and inclusion.

This year, 28 schools participated in the competition with was coordinated by PSJA's Bilingual program and sponsored by UTRGV's College of Liberal Arts, the Mexican American Studies

Program and the student group, LUCHA. Many schools enhanced the experience by incorporating performances—students sang, danced, and played music as judges visited each altar. Altars dedicated to beloved family members, teachers, and even pets were adorned with handmade flowers, creating a heartfelt connection between students and their cultural heritage.

One student from Liberty Elementary School shared that they hadn't known about the tradition of making altars until they learned about Día de Muertos in school. Inspired, their family now plans to create an altar at home. Meanwhile, Murphy Middle School students presented a multimedia tribute to the 43 students who disappeared from Iguala ten years ago. Their tribute included 40 desks with photographs of the missing boys and open textbooks to emphasize that they were students. The performance included poetry readings, a modern dance, and a haunting drum rhythm that resonated with spectators.

This annual event has become much more than a school competition; it is a moving tribute to cultural heritage, sparking both personal and community reflection on Día de Muertos traditions, and ensuring that cultural celebration and continuity remain at the heart of local education.



Día de Muertos



We want to know.

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



Use the below QR Code to access our submission form.



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