

Summer Newsletter

Center for Vector-Borne, Zoonotic, &
Emerging Diseases (CVZED)

July 2026



Here's what has happened in the last few months and what's to come!

As we approach the end of spring, there is some exciting and interesting news from the Center. We have added a new location for our internship program – the City of Mission is now an internship partner, willing to take on a student or two each semester. This is great news as it will expand the opportunities open for graduate and undergraduate students. Currently the partnership includes the City of Pharr, Hidalgo County Health Department, Cameron County Health Department, the USDA, and the Texas Department of State Health Services. We will continue to reach out to other locations about their involvement and may have some additional sites in the future.

Other news includes the recent discovery of New World Screwworm (NWS) in Texas. While we have known this was inevitable, as the NWS escaped the containment barrier back in 2023 and has been moving northward, no one was sure when the first cases would be reported.

I am also happy to announce that the Center was selected by the USDA for funding a NWS surveillance effort. Dr. Sarah Maestas is the PI on this multimillion-dollar award, which also has other faculty included – Dr. Pushpa Soti, Dr. Andrea Contina, and myself. Dr. Maestas' project was one of the projects selected for funding from hundreds of applications. We hope to have good news in the future as we move forward with this project.

We are working on developing “information guides” to include on our website. The goal of these is to provide general information regarding different diseases and vectors that will be available to the public.

Dr. Vitek 

In this newsletter
you can expect:

Grant Updates

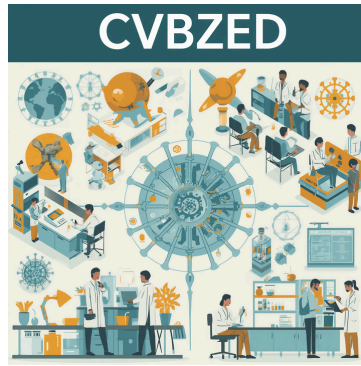
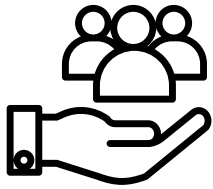
New Business and
Partnerships

Achievement
Awards

Student Spotlight

Faculty Profile
Highlights

Important News



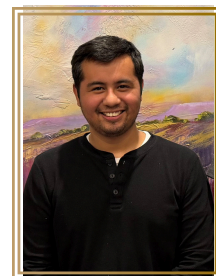
Community Outreach

To expand community outreach, we are working with Dr. Maestas (our local NWS expert) to offer a community education seminar on NWS sometime in the next few months. Similar to previous community outreach efforts, this semester will be available to anyone interested, and we hope to also have it streaming online.

As the Center continues to expand, and emerging or continuing threats continue, it is our goal that the Center continues to act as an information source, as well as provide cutting edge research into these threats, and to assist in efforts to control or contain them.



Ms. Esme Rosas



Mr. Abbey Abalos

Please join us in celebrating Ms. Esme Rosas and Mr. Abbey Abalos. Both of these graduate students successfully defended their thesis in Spring 2026 and graduated with a Masters in Biology. In addition, they both successfully completed the certificate in Vector Biology and Vector-Borne Diseases.

Congratulations



Dr. Andrea Contina

Received the NSF CAREER award (\$879,038).

Here is the link to the abstract: https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/show-award/?AWD_ID=2542514



Dr. Sarah Maestas

Sarah received the USDA Screwworm grant!

Dr. Maestas' project was one of the projects selected for funding from hundreds of applications. We hope to have good news in the future as we move forward with this project.



Dr. George Yanev

Our Applied Statistics and Data Science program's alumnus, Solomon Eshun, is a coauthor of the paper

Permethrin-Treated Baby Wraps for the Prevention of Malaria | New England Journal of Medicine: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2501628>

This paper was named as one of the Clinical Research Forum's "Top Ten" Achievement Awards for 2026.

2026 Top 10 Clinical Research Achievement Awards: <https://www.clinicalresearchforum.org/Programs-and-Events/Annual-Top-10-Awards>



UTRGV Dr. Maestas Scientist Explains How To Spot The Screwworm

- <https://www.krgv.com/news/utrgv-scientist-explains-how-to-spot-the-screwworm-fly/>
- UTRGV scientist Dr. Sarah Maestas is helping raise awareness about the New World screwworm, a parasitic fly that can cause serious harm to animals and even humans. These flies are attracted to open wounds, where they lay eggs that hatch into larvae and feed on living tissue, making early detection critical.





Important News

The federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has proposed changes to the guidelines that regulate all federal grants. The proposed changes will significantly change research in the USA. The full proposal is available here, with a summary of major changes here. Some of the changes include:

- Grant awards determined by political appointees, not peer reviews by experts. Peer reviews will be non-binding.
- Active grants can be terminated at any time, for any reason.
- Conference attendance and membership fees require pre-approval from the federal government.
- Publication costs and open access fees not covered by grants.

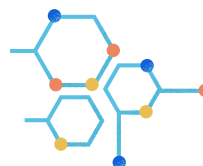
Science works because it is guided by evidence, peer reviewed, and transparent. These changes will affect how grants are awarded, and in turn how federally funded science is conducted in the USA. The proposal is in the open review stage, open to public comment until July 13, 2026. We encourage anyone (students, faculty, professionals) to share your voice and opinion on these changes. To submit a comment, use this link.

Use the following links for the active hyperlinks above (in bold).

The link for the full proposal is [**Federal Register: Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance**](#)

Summary is here - [**Summary of Key Changes in OMB's Proposed Federal Financial Assistance Rule**](#)

Public comment is here - [**Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance**](#)





We welcome your feedback - if there is something you would like to see included in the newsletter or any suggestions you'd like to share, please submit your request, and we will follow up as soon as possible.

Thank you for reading!

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utrgv.edu/cvbzed/index.htm	Science Building 