# The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

# Office of Faculty Affairs

# 2024 2025

## Annual Report

Texas Rio Grande Valley

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The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

# Foreword from Dr. Saavedra

It has been a great pleasure to serve as your Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs over the past two years. During this time, my commitment has been focused on advancing the Office of Faculty Affairs in alignment with UTRGV's Mission, Vision, and Strategic Plan.

In the first year of my tenure, my primary focus was on establishing a robust foundation for the Office of Faculty Affairs. I emphasized recruiting and developing our team to ensure we were equipped to support faculty needs.

Recognizing the importance of collaboration, I prioritized fostering strong relationships with other offices and divisions vital to faculty success, promoting open communication and partnership to create a cohesive, supportive environment that empowers faculty, which in turn supports students' success and thereby strengthens the university.

We adopted a 360-degree organizational model to strategically align and strengthen foundational components across our operations. This iterative approach enables regular review of the faculty life cycle, growth, recognition, policies, and procedures, ensuring our efforts continually improve and strengthen faculty life.

These achievements would not have been possible without the dedication, commitment, and creativity of my OFA team. I sincerely thank them for their hard work and the positive office culture they uphold.

I am proud of our progress. Looking ahead, our focus will be on bolstering cross-institutional collaboration, expanding faculty support systems, and improving strategic communication. My goal is to cultivate an innovative academic environment where every faculty member can thrive.

I hope you enjoy reading our annual report. I remain committed to serving the UTRGV faculty who are the foundation of our student success. Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to our shared mission. Together, we are making a lasting impact that will resonate for years to come

Dr. Cinthya M. Saavedra
Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs

# Our Mission

The Office of Faculty Affairs (OFA) supports the University's mission by promoting faculty success, a necessary prerequisite for student success and achievement. It is our goal to ensure the personal and professional success of all our faculty through providing comprehensive and holistic support at all stages of their careers. In this capacity, OFA offers programming and support services in faculty development, leadership development, faculty advancement, policy, and processes. UTRGV is committed to creating a welcoming workplace where professional growth, development, recognition, and work-life balance are highly valued and promoted.

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# Foundations for Success

**Robust Communication Plan**
Effective communication is foundational for keeping faculty and leadership informed, engaged, and connected to institutional priorities and resources.

**Leadership Development**
Emphasizes the importance of cultivating leadership skills among faculty, offering targeted academies, retreats, and peer learning communities to empower faculty to take on leadership roles and drive institutional excellence.

**Faculty Development**
Represents the university's commitment to providing comprehensive support and growth opportunities for faculty at all career stages. It includes onboarding, mentorship, training, and ongoing professional development programs.

**Policies Revisions**
A focus on continuously updating and refining policies ensures that faculty evaluation, promotion, and advancement are guided by transparent standards.
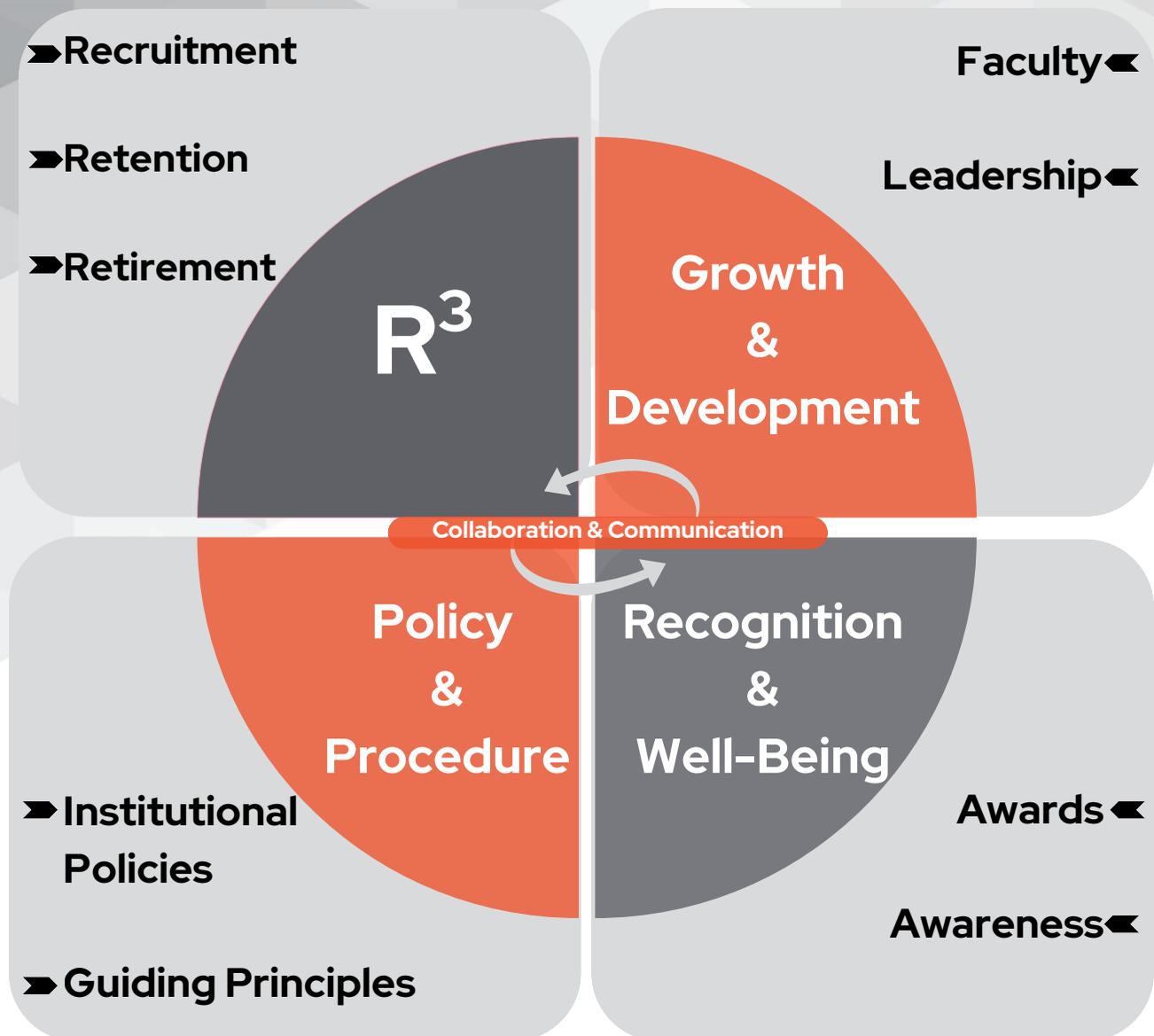
**Faculty Systems**
Streamlined administrative systems and processes reduce barriers, promote autonomy, and allow faculty to focus on impactful work.

**Building Bridges**
Underscores the value of collaboration and cross-institutional engagement, encouraging connection, idea sharing, and university alignment.

# Our 360 Approach

**Recruitment**

**Retention**

**Retirement**

**Faculty**

**Leadership**

**R³**

**Growth & Development**

Collaboration & Communication

**Policy & Procedure**

**Recognition & Well-Being**

**Institutional Policies**

**Guiding Principles**

**Awards**

**Awareness**

# Our 360 Approach

**Professional Growth & Development**
The university invests in comprehensive support at all career stages, ensuring faculty have access to development opportunities, leadership training, and resources for success.

**Recognition & Well-Being**
By valuing work-life balance, celebrating achievements, and fostering a welcoming workplace, UTRGV creates an environment where faculty feel supported and motivated.

**Transparency**
Streamlined systems and clear policies promote fairness, clarity, and trust, enabling faculty to thrive and focus on achievements and meaningful contributions.

**Collaboration & Communication**
The structure encourages building bridges and robust communication, ensuring faculty are connected, informed, and able to collaborate across disciplines.

Achieving faculty success requires integrating our institutional mission and values, resulting in a holistic approach to our operational design.

Evaluating a faculty's life cycle at the institution, with the recognition that development is not mutually exclusive from policy or how we recognize achievements. Our 360 model enables us to create programming that is intentional about what we do at the institution, ensuring faculty have agency in their work and are recognized for it.

Each quadrant informs the other culminating in intentional faculty programming. By integrating these core components into every aspect of our operations, OFA delivers a true 360-degree model—one that empowers faculty, recognizes their achievements, supports their growth, and ensures their well-being. This comprehensive approach drives both individual and collective success, advancing the university's mission and student success.

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# UTRGV Office of Faculty Affairs

**Dr. Robert K Dearth**
**Associate Vice Provost**
**for Faculty Affairs**

**Dr. Cinthya M. Saavedra**
**Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs**

**Maggie Cronn**
**Assistant Vice Provost for**
**Faculty Affairs**

## Faculty Success

## Faculty Affairs

## Faculty Systems

**K Bryan Smith**
**Program Manager**

**Dr. Paul Jorgensen**
**Faculty Fellow: Policy and**
**Analytics**

**Vanessa Ceballos**
**Faculty Systems Manager**

**Jocelyn Pineda**
**Program Manager**

**Laura Ramos**
**Faculty Success Manager**

**Daynara Gutierrez**
**Program Assistant**

**Reagan Esquierdo**
**Student Assistant**

**Kate Escamilla**
**Student Assistant**

**Crisselda Leija**
**Executive Assistant**

**Jessica Ortiz**
**Student Assistant**

# Our Team

To get the job done, the OFA team comprises nine dedicated professionals, led by Dr. Cinthya M. Saavedra, Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs. They collaborate seamlessly to bring our mission and values to life. Drawing on a wide range of expertise, team members work together to design and implement programs, coordinate initiatives, and create resources that directly support faculty at every career stage. By fostering open communication, leveraging individual strengths, and prioritizing shared goals, our team ensures that each component of our 360-degree operational model is executed with intention and excellence. This united approach allows us to deliver holistic support, celebrate achievements, and drive continuous improvement—ultimately advancing faculty success and the broader mission of the university.

Our office structure comprises three internal units: faculty affairs, faculty systems, and faculty success. Each group is composed of cross-trained professionals who work collaboratively to ensure comprehensive support for all faculty members. The Faculty Affairs unit manages faculty policies, reviews, analytics, employment actions, HR liaison duties, compliance, faculty files, reports, separations, grievances, and faculty recruitment.

Faculty Systems focuses on faculty institutional procedures, communications and marketing, faculty system tools, course evaluations, syllabus management, IT liaison responsibilities, and events. Faculty Success focuses on awards, workshops, communities of practice, institutional development memberships, new faculty convocation, leadership development, events, faculty review, tenure, and promotion. Together, these teams embody a seamless, integrated approach to faculty support, reflecting the office's commitment to holistic service and operational excellence.

# Team Principles

- **Holistic Support:** We provide comprehensive resources and guidance, from onboarding to retirement, ensuring their personal and professional needs are met.
- **Continuous Feedback:** We provide regular communication and feedback loops keeping faculty informed, engaged, and connected.
- **Collaborative Culture:** We build bridges and encourage cross-institutional collaboration, making sure faculty are part of a unified, supportive community.

# Result-Driven Organizational Design

Each group is cross-trained and works seamlessly together, which brings several key results benefitting faculty and the institution:

## Comprehensive Support for Faculty
By having specialized units that are also cross-trained, the team ensures that faculty receive holistic support. No matter the issue—whether it's related to policy, systems, or professional development—faculty can access knowledgeable support without being redirected or facing gaps in service.

## Streamlined Processes and Communication
Collaboration between units means that processes (like employment actions, compliance, course evaluations, and events) are managed efficiently. Faculty don't have to navigate complex bureaucracies; instead, they benefit from coordinated efforts that reduce redundancy and confusion.

## Enhanced Innovation and Responsiveness
Cross-training allows team members to share insights and best practices across units. This fosters innovation, as ideas from one area (e.g., faculty success workshops) can inform improvements in another (e.g., policy updates or system tools).

## Consistent Faculty Experience
With seamless collaboration, faculty experience consistent support throughout their career lifecycle—from onboarding and development to evaluation and recognition. This continuity helps build trust and engagement within the faculty community.

## Agility in Addressing Challenges
When challenges arise the integrated team can quickly mobilize resources and expertise from across units to respond effectively.

## Bridging our Campus Community
OFA made an intentional effort to be present and available at both campuses to accommodate and improve our responsiveness to our faculty.

The organizational design of OFA ensures that faculty benefit from a unified, responsive, and innovative support system. This not only enhances individual faculty success but also strengthens the university's mission and community as a whole.

# Our Programs

Our office is dedicated to providing programs that empower faculty and academic leaders at UTRGV. We offer a variety of initiatives designed to strengthen teaching, research, and service while supporting leadership growth across the institution. Through targeted professional development opportunities and leadership programs, we help faculty enhance their skills, expand their impact, and prepare for future roles. These offerings foster collaboration, mentorship, and innovation, ensuring that faculty and leaders have the tools and resources to succeed. By investing in these programs, we create an environment where growth, recognition, and work-life balance are actively supported—helping faculty and leaders thrive personally and professionally.

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# Faculty Leadership Academy

This year marked an intentional effort to support our new academic leaders. We surveyed our current chairs and school directors to capture their needs and knowledge gaps. In response, we launched several initiatives, including the Faculty Leadership Academy. A monthly development program for all first-year Chairs, School Directors, and Interim Chair/Directors.

The program is grounded in the four levels of leadership: Leading Self, Leading Others, Leading Teams, and Leading Systems. Participants engaged in dynamic activities and collaborative peer discussions designed to foster leadership growth, spark innovative thinking, clarify roles and responsibilities, and explore impactful strategies for guiding high-performing units that align with the university's mission. Programming included building trust, embracing leadership, constructive feedback, management, faculty mentoring, time management, and prioritization

**12** Participants in Cohort-I

## IMPACT:

**3** Interim Chairs Selected as Permanent Chairs

**2** Selected to Senior Associate Dean

## Leadership Development Outcomes:

- **Understand Their Role and Responsibilities:** Clarify your position and duties within the organization.
- **Learn University Structure and Key Contacts:** Familiarize yourself with the institution's hierarchy and identify individuals who can assist you.
- **Shape Their Leadership Approach:** Identify your personal leadership approach and areas to improve.
- **Master Strategies for Leading Others and Personal Well-being:** Acquire techniques for effective unit planning, management, and maintaining personal well-being.
- **Build a Strong Network of Peers:** Establish meaningful connections and foster collaboration with fellow leaders.

# Leadership Excellence Series (LES)

To give UTRGV leaders access to new trends in higher education on campus, we launched the Leadership Excellence Series (LES). LES is a semesterly event open to all leadership, offering external insights and innovative ideas from academia.

**"Navigating a Distributed Campus" A presentation on the complexities of leading a disputed campus.**

By Dr. Dan Linzell, Division Director for the National Science Foundation's Division of Civil, Mechanical, and Manufacturing Innovation. Associate Dean for Graduate and International Programs, College of Engineering, University of Nebraska.

## 64%
**Found it informative**

## 35
**Attendees**

## 57%
**Satisfaction with the Experience**

# What Participants Said

> " I APPRECIATED THE DISCUSSION, AND HEARING HOW OTHER UNITS MANAGE THE VARIOUS CAMPUS AND HOW IT IMPACTS DIFFERENTLY DEPENDING ON WHICH UNIT AND THE CONTEXT. "

> " THERE WERE INTERESTING CONCEPTS ABOUT CROSS CAMPUS INCLUSION. "

# Topics Discussed During CoP

**NEW DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

**HOP CHANGES AND LEGISLATIVE BILLS**

**NEW FACULTY HIRING**

**UNIVERSITY DASHBOARDS**

**PROCESS FOR SUBMITTING REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**TENURE AND PROMOTION EXTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS**

**OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

# Chair/Director Community of Practice

In response to leadership feedback, a desire to enhance communication with leadership, and to further develop current leadership, we established the Chair Community of Practice (CoP). The Chair CoP is a monthly leadership meeting designed to inform chairs/school directors (and associate chair/directors) about relevant university and system information that affects their faculty. It also serves as a platform for chairs to express concerns and give feedback.

## 63%
### Average Leadership Attendance

## Objectives:

- Establish a direct communication line between OFA and our unit leaders.
- Ensure timely information sharing and increased accessibility.
- Enable chairs to voice concerns.
- Streamline university messaging to present one unified voice.

## How it Helps the Institution:

Raises awareness of what is happening on the front lines and the challenges you face related to university policies, procedures, and mandates. Provides OFA with stakeholder input on shaping institutional processes.

## How it Helps Leadership:

CoP is designed to reflect the rapidly changing academic landscape, preparing our chairs and school directors to be agents of change.

**Visiting Speakers**

**Dr. Marco Garza**

Dr. Marco Garza, a proud South Texas native, is a s[...]
background in human resources, healthcare admini[...]
community development. He currently serves as Di[...]
at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Assista[...]
Department at the UTRGV College of Business Adm[...]
Program Director for the Master of Science in Huma[...]
he held executive roles at ARMARK Healthcare and[...]
and Human Resource Development and an MBA, D[...]
in Virtual Human Resource Development and talent[...]
deeply engaged in advancing HR practices through[...]
community engagement.

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Today's Facilitator

**Erin Marie Furtak, PhD**

- Professor of STEM Education,
  University of Colorado Boulder
- Faculty Chair, former Associate
  Dean of Faculty
- NCFDD Certified Workshop
  Facilitator
- Mother of two balancing family,
  self, and writing

ncfdd

# Chair Leadership Retreat

**NEW PROGRAM**

The Chair Leadership Retreat was launched as an investment in our leadership team, offering a funded off-site experience at South Padre Island. The retreat aimed to help chairs, school directors, and associate deans connect and strengthen their skills, featuring keynote speaker Dr. Serenity King, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and architect of the UTD Lead program.

## 88%
Satisfaction with the Experience

## 87%
Said it helped them gain a better understanding of how to excel in their role

## 83%
Attendance

## Topics Discussed

### 79% Approval

*Embracing Academic Leadership: The Weekly Plan to Reflect, Identify & Balance Priorities, and Protect What Matters on and Off Campus*

Dr. Erin Furtak, NCFDD

### 91% Approval

*Academic Leadership: Decoding the Complexity & Academic Impressions: 5-Paths to Leadership Assessment*

Dr. Serenity King, UTS, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

### 63% Approval

*The Emotionally Effective Leader & EQ-I Assessment*

Dr. Marco Garza, UTRGV, Director for Organizational Development

### 92% Approval

*Student Success Goals, Curriculum, and Development Dashboard Training*

Dr. Jonikka Charlton, UTRGV, Senior Vice Provost for Student Success & Academic Affairs

Dr. Laura Saenz, UTRGV, Vice Provost for Curriculum & Institutional Assessment

## Participant Testimonies from Chair Retreat

" THE MOST HELPFUL MOMENT WAS THE ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT ON LEADERSHIP TYPES. I HAVE NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP AND REFLECT ON THEM. IT WAS GREAT TO THINK ABOUT MY STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS. "

" GOOD TO FEEL WE ARE NOT ALONE AND THAT WE ALL NEED IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND REFLECTION. WE THINK SENIOR CHAIRS HAVE IT ALL FIGURED OUT BUT IT'S A JOB IN PROCESS THAT IS EVER CHANGING. "

" I APPRECIATED NETWORKING TO HELP THINK OF DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENT CHAIR ISSUES AND MAKING CONNECTIONS FOR FUTURE ASSISTANCE. "

# Faculty Programs

During 2024-2025, OFA concentrated on strategically aligning developmental programs to support faculty and academic leaders in advancing our R1 mission. The aim was to provide faculty with a development toolkit tailored to their position and the university's values. Developmental opportunities were intentionally designed to meet diverse academic needs, including dossier workshops, tenure-track evaluation pilot program, an updated faculty onboarding program, and a mid-career faculty pilot program. With an investment of over 472K, developmental opportunities increased 100-fold, with subject experts supporting faculty needs and well-being.

**100-FOLD**
INCREASE IN DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**96%**
PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION WITH PROGRAMMING

**472K**
NEW INVESTMENT

# New Faculty Academy

The New Faculty Academy is a cornerstone initiative designed to launch new full-time faculty into successful, fulfilling careers at the university. In 2024, we redesigned our faculty onboarding process to align with our institutional mission and to give faculty what they need to start their positions successfully. Our New Faculty Academy program was thoughtfully designed to support their successful transition into the university and broader Rio Grande Valley community. More than just an introduction, this program immerses faculty in the institution's mission, values, and academic culture while delivering targeted professional development that fuels teaching excellence, strengthens research capacity, and builds lasting cross-campus connections. It sets the foundation for impact, collaboration, and long-term success from day one. The program began in August (one week before the start of the semester) with the New Faculty Convocation and continued throughout the year, featuring monthly training sessions.

**New Faculty Convocation** was a one-day event for all new full-time faculty. This comprehensive day introduced new full-time faculty to the institution's mission, culture, and key academic and operational resources. It included talks from Division leaders, a university resource showcase, and presentations from Human Resources.

**Monthly Informational Sessions** were hosted every month following new faculty convocation as informational sessions for all new faculty. Through this initiative, faculty began building meaningful connections with colleagues and campus leaders while gaining a deeper understanding of the university's priorities and the region we proudly serve.

## Sessions included:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **'Title IX and Implications of Legislation'**<br><br>Hosted by OTIXEO and Legal Division | **'Preparing for your First Evaluation'**<br><br>Hosted by OFA | **'Shared Governance and Faculty Support'**<br><br>Hosted by OFA | **'Strategic Planning for Research and Identifying Research Pathways'**<br><br>Hosted by OFA |

# Number of New Hires by College

| College | Professional Track | Tenure-Track | Tenured |
|---------|-------------------|--------------|---------|
| CEP | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| CECS | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| CFA | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| CHP | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| CLA | 15 | 11 | 2 |
| COS | 8 | 3 | 1 |
| VCOBE | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| SON | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| SSW | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| UC | 3 | 0 | 0 |

# *100 New Faculty

| 60 Professional Track | 37 Tenure Track | 3 Tenured |
|---|---|---|

*Of the 100 new faculty members we welcomed in academic year 2024-2025, two of them were new academic leaders.*

# Faculty Innovation, Development, and Enhancement (FIDE)

The Faculty Innovation, Development, and Enhancement (FIDE) was a mid-career faculty pilot program developed by OFA and the Division of Research. This program was designed to assist faculty who would benefit from revision, restart, innovation, or further development of their scholarly agendas.

FIDE consisted of 20 associate or full professors nominated by Deans, Department Chairs, or School Directors. They participated in a combination of three-hour workshops and write-ins hosted by OFA.

**20** Mid-Career Tenured Faculty

**10K** New Investment

## IMPACT:

**2** Publications Submitted

**2** External Grants Submitted

**1** External Grant Funded

# Faculty Seed Research Grant (FSRG)

Supporting faculty scholarship and innovation is paramount to our R1 mission. With the Provost's support, the Faculty Seed Research Grant (FSRG) ignites discovery and drives the next wave of academic excellence. The purpose was to fuel groundbreaking research, innovative scholarly projects, and creative works at their critical starting point. Designed to empower faculty launching new initiatives, this vital funding accelerates the development of high-impact work and provides the essential preliminary data needed to secure major external grants. All full-time UTRGV faculty with research/scholarship expectations were eligible to serve as Investigators (PIs and Co-PIs).

## 21
**Grants Awarded**

A total of 21 grants were awarded to both single-discipline and interdisciplinary faculty teams across 8 colleges, showcasing the bold range of academic talent and innovation thriving across our campus.

More than $120,000 in competitive grants were awarded to faculty, jumpstarting bold new research, creative projects, and scholarly pursuits. These seed investments laid the foundation for future external funding, high-impact publications, and long-term academic success.

## $120K+
**Distributed in Grants**

## 64%
**of Total Applications Were Awarded**

A total of 64% of submitted applications received funding, underscoring our sustained commitment to supporting high-potential projects with strong promise for scholarly impact, external funding competitiveness, and long-term academic contribution.

# Membership to NCFDD Programs and Development Workshops

NCFDD is a nationally recognized organization that provides faculty with professional development, mentoring, and resources to support success throughout their careers. Through its online platform, faculty can access research productivity tools, writing support, time management strategies, and guidance for navigating the challenges of academia. As part of an institutional membership, UTRGV faculty have access to a wide range of NCFDD's resources at no cost.

OFA worked with NCFDD to organize resources by faculty position and areas of interest that match our institution's mission, making it easier for faculty to explore NCFDD's many offerings. All are easily accessible through our OFA website. No matter what stage their career is in, all faculty can find professional development content suited to them.

## 40K

**Investment for the Entire University Community to Have a Free Membership to NCFDD**
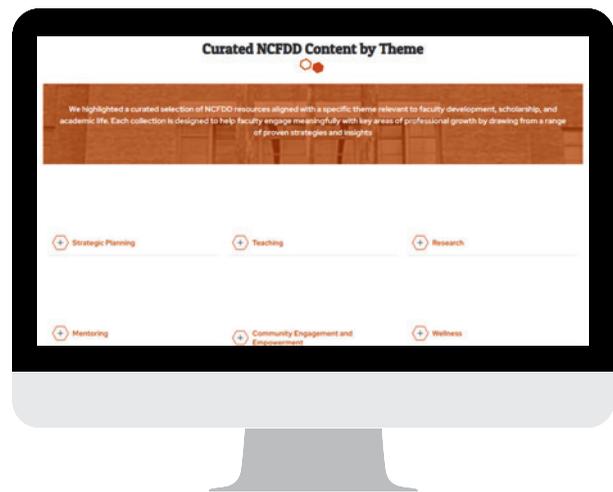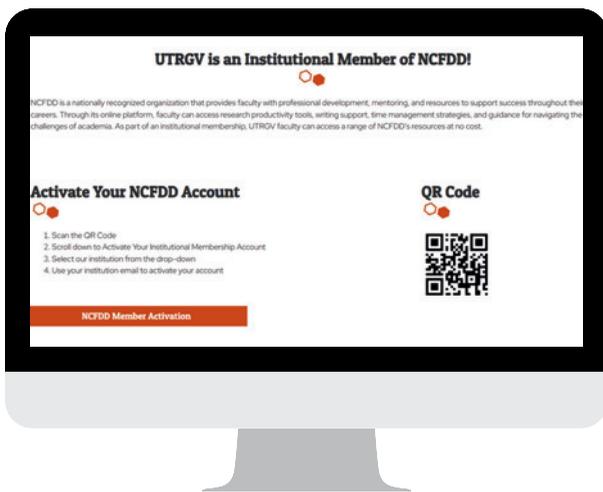
# NCFDD Faculty Success Program

In addition to the standard NCFDD membership, OFA supported 6 tenure-track faculty to participate in NCFDD's Faculty Success Program. The FSP program is a highly regarded 10-week virtual development program designed to help faculty advance in their career while improving work life balance. The 6 tenure-track faculty participated in the spring 2025 session (January 27 – April 6, 2025).

**6**
Tenure-Track Participants

**80%**
Strongly Agreed that FSP Provided Effective Strategies for Writing Productivity and Would Recommend it to a Tenure Track Colleague

" THE PROGRAM WAS HELPFUL, BUT $5000 IS PROHIBITIVE FOR ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL. I THINK THE PROGRAM WILL INCREASE TENURE PRODUCTION AS WELL AS OVERALL PROFESSIONALISM. IT MIGHT EVEN INCREASE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SATISFACTION. BUT IF I WAS REQUIRED TO PAY, IT WOULD NOT EVEN HAVE BEEN ON MY RADAR "

**$5K**
Value per Faculty

" I DON'T THINK IT WOULD BE THE SAME IF I PRACTICED THE SAME SKILLS ON MY OWN. ACCOUNTABILITY HELPS. PLUS, YOU GET TO SEE HOW OTHERS DEAL WITH SIMILAR ISSUES AND HEARING THEIR PERSPECTIVES GIVES A SENSE OF SUPPORT AND NORMALIZES YOUR ISSUES, FEELING THAT "IT'S NORMAL TO STRUGGLE WITH X, Y, Z. "

# Faculty Dossier Writing Workshops

Articulating faculty success and addressing what is essential in the faculty evaluation process can be challenging. Recognizing the need for greater clarity in faculty evaluation, we launched dossier-writing workshops to empower faculty to articulate their achievements. These workshops were designed to demystify the dossier process and guide participants in framing their accomplishments in terms of impact, significance, and quality, fostering a culture of excellence and self-advocacy. By openly sharing best practices and evaluation criteria, the initiative aimed to transform faculty review into a more meaningful experience while supporting professional growth and recognition.

We offered 12 sessions to inform faculty and leadership on how to articulate their performance and how committees review it.

## 12
### New Dossier Training Sessions

## Sessions Included:

- FIRST YEAR DOSSIER SUBMISSION
- COMMITTEE AND LEADERSHIP REVIEW OF DOSSIERS
- TENURE AND PROMOTION
- PROFESSIONAL TRACK RENEWAL AND PROMOTION
- THIRD-YEAR TENURE-TRACK REVIEWS

# Tenure Evaluation and Advisory Committee (TEAC) Pilot Program

In AY 24-25, OFA worked with five departments/schools that elected to pilot the program for their first-year tenure-track faculty. OFA hosted workshops with TEAC groups and a best-practices workshop to assess TEAC's implementation university-wide in the Fall of 2025.

By encouraging transparent communication between faculty and reviewers, TEAC seeks to increase transparency and encourages faculty to effectively demonstrate the quality, quantity, impact, and significance of their work. This initiative exemplifies the institution's commitment to fostering professional development and promoting effective evaluation practices for faculty retention and advancement.

## 5
### Department / Schools Piloted TEAC for First-Year Tenure-Track

## Why TEAC

The retention and promotion of tenure-track faculty are critical to the advancement and success of our institution. In response, the Tenure Evaluation and Advisory Committee (TEAC) pilot program was implemented to provide a systematic approach to evaluating tenure-track faculty during their probationary period. TEAC is designed to deliver an evaluation with constructive feedback and guidance at each stage of the tenure-track review. Distinct from rotating review committees, TEAC maintains consistent membership throughout the probationary review process.

# Our Faculty

Our office is dedicated to empowering faculty through deliberate programming that provides meaningful recognition of their achievements. Each year, we spotlight outstanding faculty through a variety of awards and recognition programs that celebrate excellence across disciplines. These initiatives not only honor outstanding contributions but also foster a culture of mentorship, collaboration, and innovation. By investing in programs that promote growth, development, and excellence, we create an environment where faculty are valued, supported, and inspired to reach their full potential—both professionally and personally.

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Faculty Affairs

Faculty Excellence Awards

Ceremony

2024-2025

# Faculty Excellence Awards

The Faculty Excellence Awards represent the highest institutional honor bestowed upon faculty at UTRGV. These prestigious awards recognize extraordinary accomplishments in teaching, research, and service — celebrating individuals whose work exemplifies the university's highest standards of excellence and impact. Co-sponsored by divisions across the university, this signature program amplifies the achievements of our most distinguished faculty and reinforces a culture that deeply values academic excellence, innovation, and dedication. Earning a Faculty Excellence Award is not only a personal milestone — it is a mark of lasting distinction at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

## Awardees 2024-2025

**UTRGV Distinguished Career Award
Robert Freeman
Interim Dean
College of Engineering and Computer Science**



The UTRGV Distinguished Career Award is one of the university's highest honors, recognizing a senior faculty member with over 20 years of exceptional contributions in teaching, research, and service. Dr. Robert A. Freeman has served UTRGV and its predecessor institutions for over 30 years, leading the Mechanical Engineering department's growth, curriculum innovation, and student success. His teaching and mentorship have impacted thousands of students and faculty, supported by over $10 million in grant funding and the establishment of new degree programs and research centers. Dr. Freeman's legacy is reflected in national recognition for Hispanic engineering student enrollment, multiple teaching awards, and a lasting culture of excellence at UTRGV.

## UTRGV Emerging Scholar Award
## Mohamadhossein Noruzoliaee
## Assistant Professor
## Department of Civil Engineering

The UTRGV Emerging Scholar Award honors rising scholars whose work demonstrates innovation, achievement, and potential for lasting impact. Dr. Mohamadhossein Noruzoliaee exemplifies these qualities through multidisciplinary research in cyber-physical transportation infrastructure and artificial intelligence. In just five years, he has secured $6.6 million in external grants published extensively, mentored nationally recognized students, and developed innovative graduate courses and outreach programs. His scholarship and service have earned editorial roles, professional recognition, and an endowed faculty fellowship—reflecting a trajectory of excellence and influence at UTRGV and beyond.

## UTRGV Faculty Excellence Award in Teaching
## Azucena Herrera
## Clinical Assistant Professor
## Department of Management

The UTRGV Faculty Excellence Award in Teaching  is the university's highest honor for transformative teaching, recognizing faculty who elevate student success through innovative curriculum and engagement. Dr. Azucena L. Herrera exemplifies this distinction, impacting over 1,600 students across 43 courses in undergraduate and graduate programs. Her leadership includes creating the college's first bilingual business course, guiding four international COIL cohorts, and achieving an average teaching effectiveness score of 4.86 (97.2%). Committed to culturally sustaining practices, Dr. Herrera sets a new standard for teaching excellence and inspires success across UTRGV.
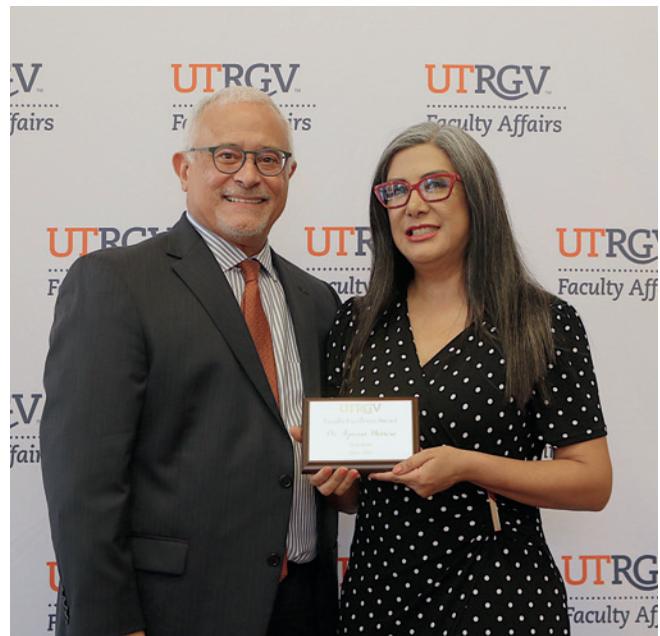
## UTRGV Faculty Excellence Award in Research
## Mataz Alcoutlabi
## Associate Professor
## Department of Mechanical Engineering

The UTRGV Faculty Excellence Award in Research is the university's highest honor for research, scholarship, and creative work, recognizing faculty whose discoveries and dedication advance their disciplines and elevate UTRGV's reputation. Dr. Mataz Alcoutlabi exemplifies this distinction through groundbreaking work in materials science and engineering. In the past five years, he has secured over $7 million and is the most cited researcher in the College of Engineering—with more than 8,200 citations and an h-index of 36. His innovative research and commitment to student success continue to push the boundaries of discovery and strengthen UTRGV's impact.

## UTRGV Faculty Excellence Award in Service
## Dumitru Caruntu
## Professor
## Department of Mechanical Engineering

The UTRGV Faculty Excellence Award in Service is the university's highest honor highlighting the individual's enduring commitment to service and making a meaningful difference in the lives of others. Dr. Dumitru Caruntu exemplifies this distinction through outstanding contributions at UTRGV and in national organizations, including the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). His leadership spans university, college, and department levels—while earning national recognition for organizing major conferences and receiving the prestigious ASME Dedicated Service Award. Dr. Caruntu's commitment to service, mentorship, and academic excellence continues to inspire colleagues and advance UTRGV's mission.

## UTRGV Faculty Excellence Award in Online Teaching
## Tracia Forman
## Associate Professor
## Department of Health and Biomedical Sciences

The UTRGV Faculty Excellence Award in Online Teaching honors faculty who demonstrate exceptional innovation and achievement in online education. Dr. Tracia M. Forman exemplifies this distinction through her commitment to student success. Her evidence-based teaching, curriculum development, and inclusive practices have set a new standard for online learning at UTRGV. Dr. Forman's leadership and mentorship have inspired students and colleagues alike, advancing the university's reputation for excellence in online education.
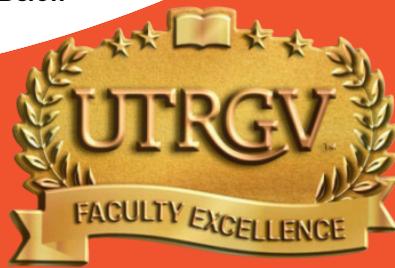


*Faculty Excellence Award Winners Received Stipends, Plaques, and the Lapel Pin Below*



### The Laurels
Typically symbolize **honor, achievement, and academic excellence.** The use of laurel leaves dates back to ancient Greece and Rome, where they were woven into wreaths and given to victors in competitions and great achievers-especially in intellectual or athletic pursuits.

### The Stars
A star on a lapel pin is a classic and powerful symbol. Here are the most common interpretations:

- **Excellence and Achievement-** like a "gold star" for outstanding work.
- **Guidance or Leadership-** stars guide, like the North Star, so it often represents someone who leads or inspires.
- **Honor and Recognition-** a way to show distintion or high merit.

### The Banner/Ribbon:

- **Unity and Purpose-** the banner suggest a cause or shared mission, reflecting a faculty member's alignment with educational values.
- **Celebration of Excellence-**visually, it wraps or frames the design like a celebratory flourish-marking the recipient as someone worth honoring.

### The Open Book

- **Dedication to Education-** symbolizes the faculty member's roles in sharing and expanding knowledge.
- **Commitment to Student Learning-** an open book invites engagement, reflecting a teacher's openness and accessibility.
- **Scholarship and Academic Integrity-** represents the faculty member's pursuit of truth, research, and lifelong learning.

# Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award

The UT System's Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award (ROTA) stands as one of the most distinguished awards for outstanding undergraduate teaching. This distinguished award recognizes educators who deliver extraordinary classroom instruction and groundbreaking innovation, consistently going above and beyond to inspire, engage, and empower students. ROTA celebrates those who transform the learning experience and set new standards for teaching excellence across the UT System.



2024

UT Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award Winner

DR. MARCELA HEBBARD

*Senior Lecturer*

Writing and Language Studies
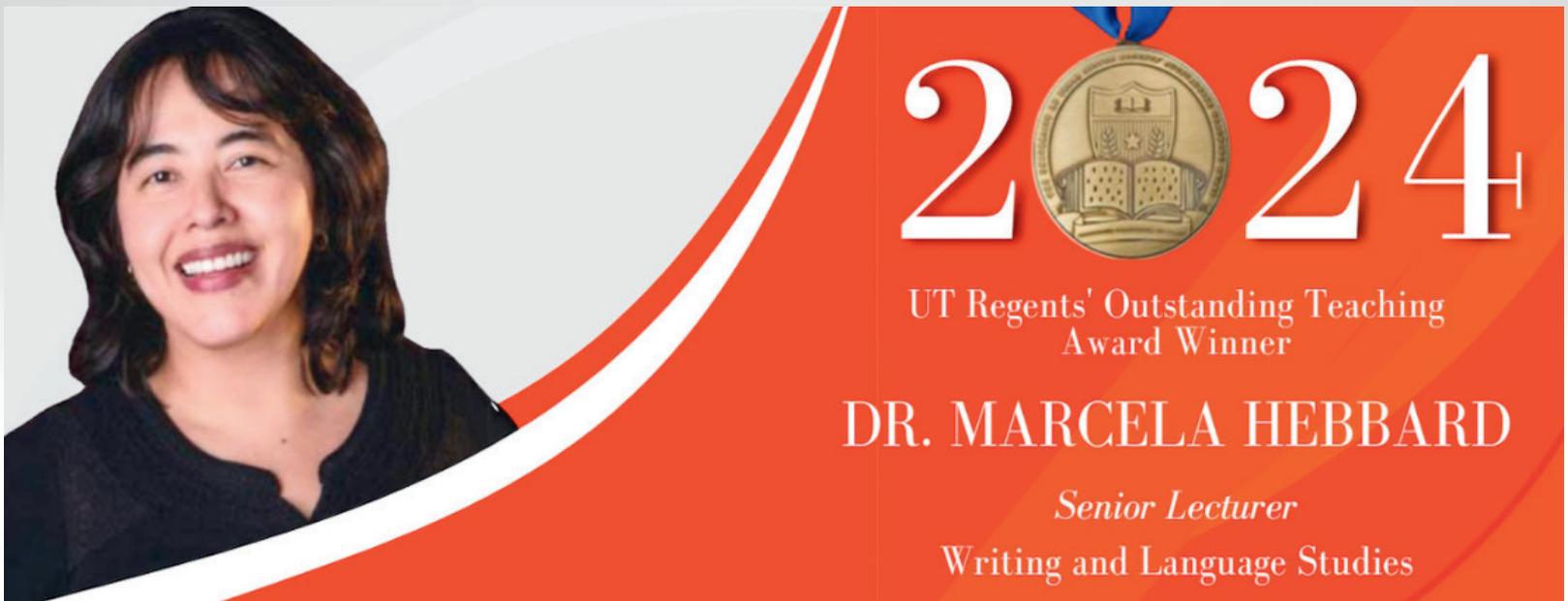
## 2024-2025 Awardee: Dr. Marcela Hebbard

We proudly celebrate the remarkable achievement of Dr. Hebbard, the first faculty member from our institution in five years to receive this distinguished honor! Her exceptional dedication to teaching shines through innovative course designs, impactful assessment practices, and an unwavering commitment to student success. The NovaRhet Symposium and the Graduate Teaching Program at UTRGV are just two examples of the transformative initiatives she has pioneered—hallmarks of her vision and leadership in advancing academic excellence.

# Our Systems

Navigating the complexities of academic life requires systems and processes that are clear, responsive, and designed with faculty success in mind. At UTRGV, our office continually refines policies and procedures to ensure faculty are empowered and supported at every stage of their careers. We approach policy updates strategically, aligning them with institutional values and the evolving needs of an R1-focused environment. Our commitment to transparency and integrity is reflected in streamlined processes for faculty evaluation, workload reporting, and course assessments—removing barriers and promoting meaningful achievement over mere metrics. By investing in these systems and processes, UTRGV fosters a culture where faculty are valued, supported, and equipped to reach their full potential—professionally and personally—while advancing innovation and institutional excellence.

**UTRGV™**
*Faculty Affairs*

# Policy and Process

In tandem with our commitment to robust faculty development, OFA has approached policy changes with strategic intent and responsiveness to evolving academic needs. Policy updates were carefully crafted to align with institutional values and to empower faculty and academic leaders to thrive in a dynamic, R1-focused environment. These changes were designed not only to support professional growth but also to ensure clarity, transparency, and integrity across all stages of the faculty lifecycle.

Furthermore, OFA has prioritized ongoing enhancements to our institutional processes to ensure they are streamlined, transparent, and responsive to faculty needs. This year, we targeted faculty processes. Each was carefully reviewed and refined to  promote a culture of continuous improvement. By aligning our processes with best practices and institutional priorities, we are committed to providing faculty with clear pathways for achievement, collaboration, and long-term success in our dynamic academic environment.

# Faculty Evaluation Policy and Guidelines

To remain at the forefront of knowledge creation, research innovation, and community service, a university must continuously adapt. Understanding that faculty efforts drive the institution forward, it is essential to offer clear guidance on where their work should be focused to achieve rewarding results. To better connect faculty performance with institutional values and our primary mission, we reviewed and drafted our faculty evaluation policy and departmental review guidelines.

These revisions aim to ensure alignment with proven practices, institutional priorities, and operational transparency. The central goal of this initiative is to emphasize quality, quantity, impact, and significance. The departmental review guidelines support significant achievements, thoughtful choices, and a culture that appreciates impact.

## 41%
### Completion Rate of Guidelines

### Revised College and Departmental Evaluation Guidelines

A university template was created outlining the institutional expectations for teaching, research, and service. Culturally shifting from quantity based practices to recognizing the quality, impact, and significance of the work. These exact expectations are restated in 06-503 and 06-504 policies. All Colleges and Departments aligned their expectations with institutional standards.

### HOP 06-503 & HOP 06-504 Institutional Policies Revised

Tenure-Track and Tenured faculty evaluation policies were revised to reflect transparent institutional standards, an efficient evaluation process, and improved committee reviews. The implementation of TEAC and PFEAC guide faculty's pursuit of quality, impact, and significance for tenure and promotion.

# OFA Website

Building upon its commitment to faculty support and institutional transparency, OFA has developed a new website designed for intuitive navigation and ease of use. The site features a streamlined, easy-to-follow program and development table, allowing both faculty and university leadership to quickly locate and understand the full range of available programs across the institution.

This central hub also includes more training videos and direct, clearly labeled links to faculty-relevant policies and guidelines, ensuring users can easily access the information most pertinent to their roles. Functioning as a comprehensive one-stop shop, the new OFA website empowers faculty by consolidating essential resources, guidance, and development opportunities in a single, accessible location.

This initiative not only enhances user experience but also strengthens engagement and efficiency, supporting faculty and leadership as they navigate and thrive within the university community.
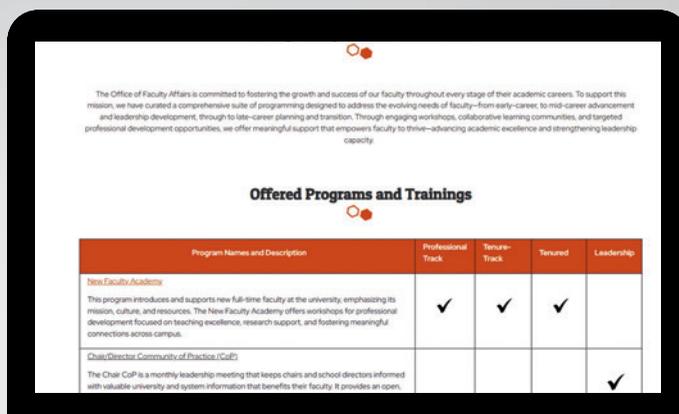
# Digital Faculty Handbook

In response to faculty, OFA created a new digital Faculty Handbook. It offers a centralized resource for faculty to easily access essential information on policies, teaching, research, service, and more. Designed to promote academic excellence and engagement, it supports faculty in navigating their roles efficiently while staying connected to key institutional resources.
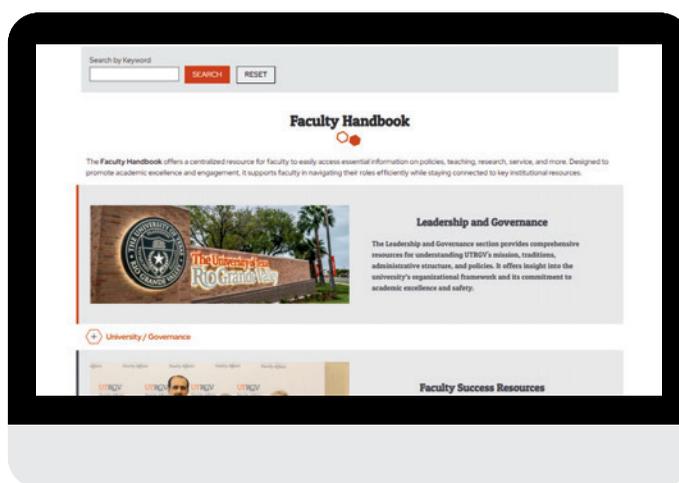
# Faculty Portfolio Tool, Workload Reporting, Course Evaluations

OFA aims to make university processes more efficient and transparent, allowing faculty and administrators to devote more time to fulfilling the university's mission. Streamlining faculty processes is ongoing. This year, Academic Affairs increased its investment in Watermark to enhance the Faculty Portfolio Tool (FPT) and introduced new features to improve faculty experiences. Course evaluations from Watermark were integrated with Brightspace, the new LMS, making them easier for faculty to access and boosting response rates. Additionally, faculty workload reporting was simplified, granting greater autonomy at the college level.

## $33.7K
**Increased Investment in**

**watermark**

## $268K
**Increase in Total Travel Support to Faculty**

## Increased Faculty Travel Support

OFA increased the institutional investment in faculty travel support. Recognizing that the cost of presenting scholarly works has risen substantially in the last few years, OFA increased travel money for faculty to disseminate their scholarship and amplify the institution's prestige.

# What's Next

This year, we strengthened the foundation for faculty success through bold initiatives that redefined leadership development, streamlined processes, and expanded opportunities for growth. Our accomplishments are more than milestones—they are catalysts for innovation, collaboration, and impact.

As we chart our course for 2025-2026, the Office of Faculty Affairs is committed to bolstering partnerships with other units across campus. We recognize that the challenges and opportunities ahead are best met by fostering collaboration and supporting a spirit of shared purpose. Our vision for the coming year is to amplify our collective strengths and ensure that the impact of our faculty is felt across every corner of our institution.

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**Rio Grande Valley**™

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