

# ENGAGE

*Transforming Lives Through Engaged Partnerships*

## DIVISION OF GOVERNMENTAL & COMMUNITY RELATIONS NEWSLETTER



### FROM THE DESK OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR GOVERNMENTAL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

*Veronica Gonzales*

**Veronica Gonzales,**  
Vice President for Governmental &  
Community Relations

#### WELCOME TO ENGAGE

When you think of spring, you think of growth, emergence and new beginnings and this spring marked the beginning – the commencement – for 3,100 graduates at UTRGV. I had the honor of reading the names of our proud graduates at one of the ceremonies and watching them walk across the stage to accept their degrees and seeing the smiles and pride in their families' faces was a great reminder of how important our work is at UTRGV.

Student success is at the core of everything we do. Our administration, faculty and staff remain committed to doing all we can to help our students reach their goals and become productive members of our society.

Spring of every other year is also the time when our legislators meet for 140 days in Austin to make funding decisions and make and amend laws. The 85th Texas Legislative Session began on January 10 and ended May 29 and was, by some accounts, the most difficult session in decades due to less

monies being available at a time when our state continues to experience population growth and increased needs. The session was especially difficult on higher education. President Guy Bailey and our Governmental Relations team were hard at work to ensure that legislators were aware and educated about UTRGV's priorities and funding needs.

On behalf of UTRGV, I want to thank our Valley legislative delegation for their commitment and support to higher education during this challenging session. In July, we will have a special newsletter devoted to the legislative session and provide insight on how our campus community will be impacted by the decisions made in Austin.

To our newest graduates and to their families, congratulations on this important milestone! Graduation ceremonies are called commencement because they are just the beginning. Graduates, go out and inspire the world and always remember that UTRGV is your university – your home.

## MEET THE TEAM

**Veronica E. De La Garza**

Director of State and Local  
Governmental Relations

**What do you like about your job?**

What fuels me every day is the fact that all aspects of my job are connected to our students and community. I have the honor of promoting our students and university to local, state and federal elected officials and agencies.

**What drives you in your job?**

Being in a position to benefit our students by helping to provide the infrastructure and tools they need to succeed in school and in the workforce.

**What do you envision in the next five years for UTRGV?**

UTRGV is in a position to become the nation's premier Hispanic serving institution and a game changer for Texas. Our location allows us to educate the Texas workforce and push the next frontier of research in land, space and sea.

**What do you do to relax?**

I love to travel, reconnect with friends and when I am home I love being an aunt to four little munchkins and a godson that I adore.

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**STUDENTS WATCH GOVERNMENT IN ACTION**

Eleven UTRGV students spent the spring interning at the State Capital during the 85th Legislative Session. The students selected for the Rio Grande Valley Legislative Internship Program (VLIP) were assigned to the Austin Capitol offices of a Rio Grande Valley legislator. "It has been a great experience working as an intern," said Ann Jacobo. "Although working as a legislative aide was rigorous at times, knowing that my work could make a major impact on the daily lives of Texans made it worthwhile."

The students helped legislators and staff in administration, engaged in research and writing assignments, stewarded legislation, organized events and performed tasks at the Texas Capitol. They were required to work 40 hours a week and complete assignments in two online political science courses.

"What a wonderful opportunity for our students to see government in action," said Richard Sanchez, Associate Vice President for Governmental



UTRGV student interns with Governor Gregg Abbott at RGV Day in Austin.

Relations. "Having worked in the State Capitol, I know our students are leaving with valuable experiences that I hope will lead them on a path to public service careers."

The VLIP program would not have been possible without the assistance from Dr. Ruth Ann Ragland, UTRGV Senior Lecturer in Political Science and the UTRGV Foundation for providing the funds to help cover the student's expenses while living in Austin.

**EXPERT ON HISPANIC TRENDS VISITS UTRGV**

In March, Dr. Mark Hugo López, director of Hispanic Research at the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., offered his expertise on the growing importance of the Hispanic population in Texas and the United States in a recent visit to UTRGV.

López studies the attitudes and opinions of Latinos, Hispanic views of identity, the political engagement of Latinos in the nation's elections, and Latino youth.

"Having national experts such as Dr. López give talks on issues of particular interest and relevance to our region is one of the ways for UTRGV to engage our communities," said Dr. Marie Mora, associate vice-provost for faculty diversity. "

The Division of Governmental and Community Relations, and the Department of Economics and Finance, in the Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship coordinated the visit.

**GOVERNOR ABBOTT LEADS FORUM ON ZIKA VIRUS AT UTRGV**

Veronica Gonzales, UTRGV Vice President for Governmental and Community Relations meets with Governor Abbott at the Zika forum.

Texas Governor Gregg Abbott led a panel of experts at a forum on the Zika virus at the UTRGV Brownsville campus on May 5.

The UTRGV Office of Governmental Relations assisted the Governor's Office in planning the forum that included community leaders and health officials from Cameron and Hidalgo Counties.

The panel also featured biology faculty members, Dr. Christopher Vitek, associate professor of medical entomology, and Dr. John Thomas, assistant professor of virology.

"We're on the frontline in the Zika fight here in deep South Texas and I am very proud that we have two respected experts from our faculty who have quite a lot of experience," said Dr. Guy Bailey, UTRGV president.

Vitak and Thomas participate in a multi-institutional consortium, which focuses on Zika research and monitoring.

To learn more about the Zika virus, please visit [www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html).



## ELECTRIC CAR COMPETITION COMES TO THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

UTRGV and GreenPowerUSA Foundation are bringing the GreenpowerUSA Challenge South Texas to the Rio Grande Valley. Through this partnership, middle and high school students will have the opportunity to experience the excitement of building and racing single seat, electric cars.

The GreenpowerUSA Electric Car Challenge uses motorsport to inspire students to excel in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies. Only 20 teams will have the opportunity to compete in the race that will take place in March of 2018.

"What an opportunity for our students. They will not only design these cars using SIEMENS 3Dsoftware, but will test what they have learned at the competition," said Velinda Reyes, UTRGV Assistant Vice President for Community Programs and Operations. "Participating in this competition



Students from Santa Rosa School District proudly display the electric car they built at the STEM Earth Day Fest.

will help prepare our students for the STEM workforce of tomorrow." UTRGV and its award winning program, HESTEC, Hispanic Engineering, Science, and Technology Week, is partnering with GreenPowerUSA Foundation.

Schools have until July 15 to purchase the electric car kit. For information about the GreenpowerUSA Challenge South Texas competition, please visit [www.utrgv.edu/greenpower](http://www.utrgv.edu/greenpower).

## STUDENTS REPRESENT UTRGV AT NATIONAL COMPETITIONS

Hard work, long hours of practicing after school and on weekends paid off for several middle and high school students from South Texas. They earned the right to compete at national competitions with their peers from throughout the United States, after placing at the regional events hosted at UTRGV.

"We are very proud of all our students," said Javier Garcia, Director of STEM Programs for UTRGV. "I want to thank everyone who made it possible for our students to experience these competitions."

In May, Vanessa Quintero, Brownsville Lopez High School; Bianca Castro, UTRGV Math and Science Academy; Jose Ramirez and Analaura Trevino of Weslaco East High School, attended the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in Los Angeles, California.



Vanessa Quintero, Brownsville Lopez High School represented UTRGV at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair.

Teams representing Harlingen High School, Harlingen Early College High School, Los Fresnos High School, Rio Hondo High School and San Isidro High School went to the National Sea Perch Challenge in Atlanta, Georgia in May.

In April, students from Richard King High School and Baker Middle School of Corpus Christi were represented at the National Science Bowl held in Washington D.C.

## CODER SUMMIT SPARKS STUDENT'S INTEREST IN COMPUTER SCIENCE



High school students work together during the Latinos On Fast Track (LOFT) Coder Summit at UTRGV.

The Office of Community Relations collaborated with the Hispanic Heritage Foundation and the U.S. Army to host the Latinos On Fast Track (LOFT) Coder Summit on March 30.

"We want to continue to shatter stereotypes and redefine the landscape of technology by tapping Latino coders across the country from the Rio Grande Valley to Silicon Valley," said Jose Antonio Tijerino, president and chief executive officer of the Hispanic Heritage Foundation.

The summit brought together students interested in computer science for workshops on coding, career paths, tech interview process roleplay, interactive discussions with experts, and opportunities to expand networks in tech space.

## MEET THE TEAM



**Javier Garcia**

Director, STEM  
Community Outreach

### What do you like about your job?

I like the fact that I am able to offer knowledge in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) to future generations. Along with that, I always like to emphasize to students how interrelated STEM is with other disciplines when it comes to our communities and careers.

### What drives you in your job?

What drives me in my job is the flexibility that I am given to be creative with the projects that we coordinate. Flexibility allows our staff to serve as a resource for students, staff, faculty and our surrounding communities.

### What do you envision in the next five years for UTRGV?

I envision better communication among our campuses. The lower and upper valley have very unique qualities that have yet to be utilized. Our Division is a great model that supports this concept.

### What do you do to relax?

I like the outdoors. I enjoy running, camping and all activities that are outdoors.

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## MEET THE TEAM

**DR. DORIS MENDIOLA**

Data and Research Manager

**What do you like about your job?**

Whether it is with a new community partner, a faculty member, or a student, there is always an opportunity to connect them with opportunities at our university. The best part of my job is to connect all of those entities.

**What drives you in your job?**

I like knowing I am making a difference. Whether it is helping to develop our nonprofit partners or supporting our faculty and students, I enjoy knowing that my job really does make a difference for others.

**What do you envision in the next five years for UTRGV?**

I envision UTRGV to be a thriving institution where research, teaching and service are common practices at all levels.

**What do you do to relax?**

I enjoy playing my guitar, taking road trips on my Harley, and spending quality time with my family and friends.

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## UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS HONORED FOR ENHANCING RESEARCH AND TEACHING

In the spring, UTRGV honored faculty, individuals and community organizations for their engaged work in two separate ceremonies.

"We understand that meaningful community partnerships are the core of an engaged university

and necessary for faculty and students to take teaching and learning outside of the classroom walls. We applaud our partners for helping our communities and university," said Cristina Trejo-Vasquez, Assistant Vice President for Community Engagement and Assessment.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP CHAMPIONS AWARD



Dr. Beatriz Tapia holds the Community Engaged Scholarship Champions Award. With her is Veronica Gonzales, Vice President for Governmental and Community Relations and Dr. Doris Mendiola, Data and Research Manager.

The South Texas Environmental Education and Research (STEER) Program in the School of Medicine transforms students by providing a

community-based educational experience that allows them to make the connection between the environment, public health and medicine.

"We are delighted to receive this award that recognizes our purpose of reuniting medicine and public health," said Dr. Beatriz Tapia, director of the STEER Program. "This program has served as a national model for other medical schools to incorporate environmental health into their curriculum."

The award recognizes and promotes the scholarly work faculty are doing in partnership with communities in the Rio Grande Valley.

The award is sponsored by the Division of Governmental and Community Relations, and the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Diversity.

To learn more about the STEER program, visit <http://www.utrgv.edu/som/steer/>

## DISTINGUISHED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PARTNER AWARD



Traci Wickett, president and chief executive officer of United Way of Southern Cameron County, accepted the award for both United Way entities.

Solid Waste Management of the City of Edinburg, United Way of South Texas, United Way of Northern Cameron County and the United Way of Southern Cameron County received the Distinguished Community Engagement Partner Award for 2017.

Ramiro Gomez, Jr. Director of Solid Waste Management worked with Dr. Dean Kyne, Assistant

Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, to develop and design two courses for students to learn real-life issues in managing solid waste and finding solutions.

"We are in the planning stages of another project which will look at debris management after disasters in the Rio Grande Valley," said Celene Gonzalez, account manager with Edinburg Solid Waste Management.

The United Way organizations collaborated with the Offices of Community Engagement and Assessment and the Vice President for Student Success to launch a state-of-the-art, mobile-friendly volunteer and service-learning management system called the Engagement Zone.

"I thank everyone who has enabled this collaboration between United Way and UTRGV to flourish," Traci Wickett, president and CEO of United Way of Southern Cameron County.

Currently there are 190 community organizations and 9,747 UTRGV students, faculty and staff using the platform.



## FESTIBA 2017 REACHES FAR AND WIDE



Rene Saldana, Jr. shared the magic of reading with students at Morningside Elementary in Brownsville.

FESTIBA 2017 made a huge impact on the UTRGV campuses and communities of the Rio Grande Valley. From Feb. 27 to March 5, 130 events were held across

the Rio Grande Valley, with over 15,500 students and the public in attendance.

There were academic presentations, workshops, competitions, presentations and book signings by authors and poets, artistic presentations, and musical concerts. Many UTRGV faculty also took the opportunity to engage their students in a variety of different research topics. United States Poet, Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera, and award-winning CBS News national correspondent, Mireya Villarreal, headlined the GEAR UP days with their presentations.

"We are thrilled by the number of people who took part in FESTIBA," said Dr. Dahlia Guerra, Assistant Vice President for Public Art. "It is a massive undertaking to plan all these events and we thank everyone for making FESTIBA a great success".

To learn more about the impact of FESTIBA, please visit [www.utrgv.edu/festiba/](http://www.utrgv.edu/festiba/)

## BROWN FOUNDATION SUPPORTS DISTINGUISHED ARTISTS SERIES

Thank you to the Brown Foundation for their generous support of the Distinguished Artists Series. This series is a great opportunity for university students, and the communities of the Rio Grande Valley to experience world-class performances by nationally and internationally renowned artists.

The inaugural Fall event for the Distinguished Artists Series brought the acclaimed Ballet San Antonio to present workshops, masterclasses, and two public performances to over 1,200 in attendance. During FESTIBA, internationally renowned artists

Mariachi Sol de México de José Hernández provided mariachi workshops for over 600 middle school and high school music students. Students representing 20 schools from across the Rio Grande Valley participated.

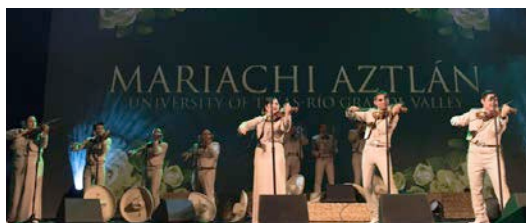
The final event of the Distinguished Artists Series was the "Music on the Border" Chamber Festival, featuring internationally renowned guest performers, pianist Christopher Taylor and cellist Cheng-Hou Lee. The very talented world-class artists presented master classes and a public concert.



## DÍA DE LOS NIÑOS, DÍA DE LOS LIBROS CELEBRATED

Children and books were the center of attention for UTRGV's first Día de Los Niños, Día de Los Libros festivity that celebrates children and motivates them to be lifelong readers.

The fun afternoon included free books, celebrity readers, and a performance by UTRGV's Mariachi Aztlán. The Office of Public Art, the South Texas Literacy Coalition and the Dustin M. Sekula Memorial Library hosted the event on April 29.



Rene Saldana, Jr. shared the magic of reading with students at Morningside Elementary in Brownsville.

## STUDENTS REPRESENT UTRGV AT NATIONAL VENUES

Students in Mariachi Aztlán and Ballet Folklórico bring honor and pride to UTRGV and the Rio Grande Valley wherever they travel. They recently performed together at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C and a New Mexico Christmas Tour with stops in Albuquerque, Socorro, Hobbs, and Artesia. Plans are underway for a summer tour. During Spring Break, Mariachi Aztlán conducted student workshops at California's University of San Diego and the Chicago Public Schools Mariachi Festival in Chicago, Illinois.

## MEET THE TEAM



**Maria Romero**  
Student Assistant

### What do you like about your job?

The work place can be hectic and demanding at times, but it is just as fun and rewarding. I am proud to work under the supervision of Dr. Dahlia Guerra. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to be part of an amazing team.

### What drives you in your job?

I give my all because I know the events I help plan are for my community. The importance of my work can be seen through the impact the events have on the children we serve.

### What do you envision in the next five years for UTRGV?

Our campuses are beautiful and continue to grow, but many of our students do not realize the many resources that are available. In the future, I would like to see more student involvement and school pride because we really do have a good thing going for us, and as future leaders, we need to step up and make a difference.

### What do you do to relax?

To relax, I enjoy working with my hands. I am currently taking a metal working class. I also enjoy skateboarding, playing the ukulele, and have recently joined the university's soccer team.

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UTRGV and Texas Southmost College joined together to welcome Mr. Amigo, Fernando Landeros Verdugo and mark the 80th annual Charro Days on Feb. 23. Please go to this [link](#) to view more photos.

# FESTIBA 2017

Festival of International Books & Arts



FESTIBA hosted more than 130 events across the Rio Grande Valley. Learn more about FESTIBA at [www.utrgv.edu/festiba](http://www.utrgv.edu/festiba)





STEM Earth Day Fest featured a variety of fun and educational events geared to family, community and schools on April 22. Please go to this [link](#) to view more photos.



## “Mujeres in RGV Politics” Panel



Veronica Gonzales, Vice President for Governmental and Community Relations, served as the moderator for a panel that featured four female Rio Grande Valley mayors. Please visit this [link](#) to view the news release and photos.



The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

# HESTEC

Hispanic Engineering, Science and Technology Week

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**OCTOBER 1-7, 2017**



**CHANGING THE**  
**WORLD**  
**THROUGH STEM**



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## ELECTRIC CAR

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