

DOCTORAL HOODING
Ceremony

FALL 2025

December 17, 2025

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
RIO GRANDE VALLEY**

MESSAGE *from the* GRADUATE COLLEGE DEAN



Welcome to UTRGV's Fall 2025 Doctoral Hooding Ceremony,

I am excited to welcome you to this special occasion, marking another milestone in our students' academic journey. Today, we come together to celebrate your remarkable accomplishments and the culmination of your rigorous academic endeavors. It is an opportunity to reflect on the challenges you have overcome and the dedication you have shown throughout your doctoral studies.

This year's ceremony is especially meaningful as UTRGV marks its 10th anniversary, a decade defined by growth in research, academic excellence, and student success. Your achievements contribute to this milestone and reflect the strength of our university community.

This ceremony not only signifies the completion of your doctoral degrees but also marks the beginning of a new chapter in your lives as scholars and leaders in your respective fields. Each of you has made significant contributions to your disciplines through your research and scholarly activities.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to each and every one of you, as well as to your deans and faculty advisors who have guided and supported you along the way. To the family members, loved ones, friends, and mentors who have supported you throughout your doctoral studies, we also extend our deepest gratitude. Their encouragement and unwavering support have been instrumental to your success, and we all celebrate alongside you today.

As you embark on the next phase of your journey, I encourage you to continue to pursue excellence and to make a positive impact in your communities and beyond. Remember to cherish this moment and to always remain proud of your accomplishments.

I wish you all continued success and fulfillment in your future endeavors.

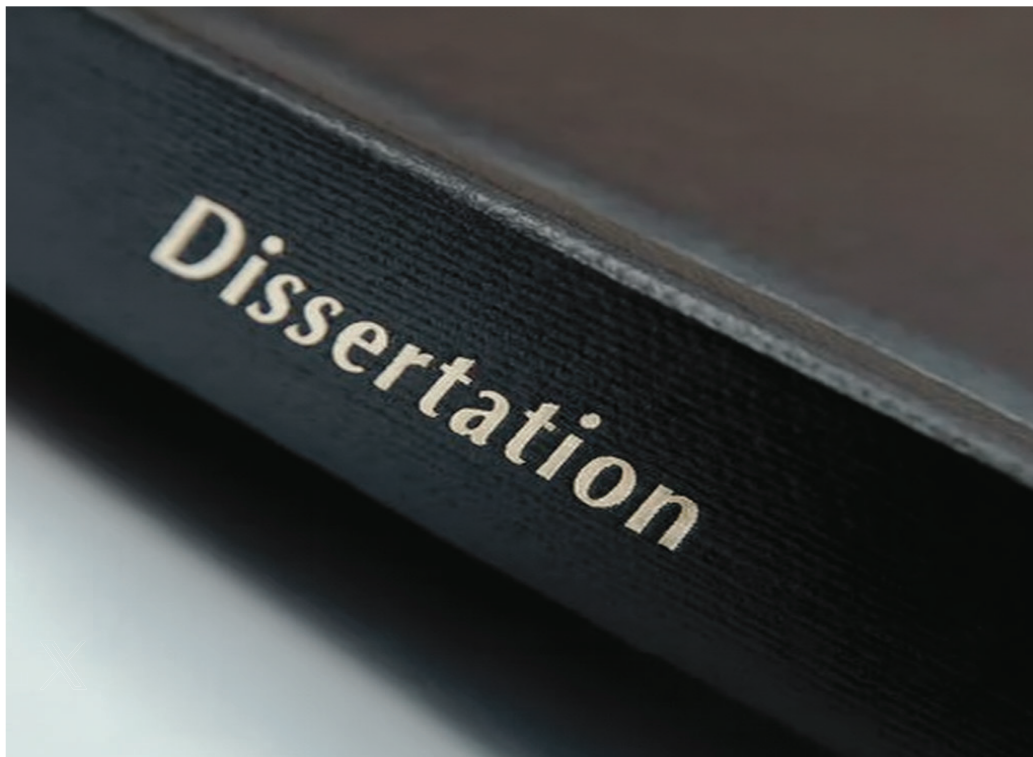
Can Saygin, PhD
Senior Vice President for Research
Dean of the Graduate College

The DOCTORAL DEGREE

The term 'Doctor,' derived from the Latin word for 'teacher,' originally referred to those who delivered public lectures on philosophical topics in ancient Rome. Over time, this term evolved to denote a title of honor for individuals with significant scholarly achievements. By the 12th century, 'doctor' had become a prestigious academic title, first officially recognized at the University of Bologna in Italy, particularly in the field of law.

In contemporary American academia, the doctoral degree signifies the highest level of academic attainment. These degrees are broadly categorized into two types: professional degrees and research degrees. Professional doctoral degrees are designed for advanced training in specific professions such as medicine, law, dentistry, and pharmacy. In contrast, research doctoral degrees, commonly known as PhDs (Doctor of Philosophy), are awarded to individuals who engage in extensive study and make significant, original contributions to their field, often culminating in a detailed dissertation. Notably, the PhD encompasses a wide range of disciplines beyond just philosophy.

An important addition to the landscape of doctoral education is the Doctor of Education or Ed.D., which was introduced by Harvard University in 1921. The Ed.D. was established to meet the growing needs for professional development in education, particularly in leadership and administrative roles. Unlike the PhD, which is focused on theoretical and research-oriented study, the Ed.D. is more practice-oriented, aiming to apply research to practical challenges in education. This degree has evolved over time, expanding from its original focus on educational administration to include various specialties in education. Its development and global adoption highlight the importance of professional expertise in educational leadership and policy.



The DOCTORAL HOODING PROGRAM

Academic Procession

The Provost

The Deans

The Faculty

The Candidates for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration (Ph.D.), Doctor of Curriculum and Instruction (Ed.D.), Doctor of Educational Leadership (Ed.D.), Doctor of Rehabilitation Counseling (Ph.D.), and Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD).

Welcome

Dr. Salvador Contreras, Associate Dean of the Graduate College

Messages

Dr. Can Saygin, Senior Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

Dr. Guy Bailey, President

Keynote Address

Dr. Luis H. Zayas, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Hooding of Doctoral Candidates

Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship

College of Education and P-16 Integration

College of Liberal Arts

College of Health Professions

Closing Remarks

Dr. Salvador Contreras, Associate Dean of the Graduate College

Recessional

The Provost

The Deans

The Faculty

The Candidates for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration (Ph.D.), Doctor of Curriculum and Instruction (Ed.D.), Doctor of Educational Leadership (Ed.D.), Doctor of Rehabilitation Counseling (Ph.D.), and Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD).

Reception

Following the ceremony, join us for light refreshments as we honor and celebrate the accomplishments of our graduates.

CANDIDATES *for* DOCTORAL DEGREES

Fall 2025

Degree candidates' names are followed by their area of major study, dissertation or project title and the name of their doctoral advisor.

ROBERT C. VACKAR COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Dr. Giorgio Gotti, Dean

Taiwo Olaolu Olusola Abraham, Business Administration, Ph.D., Fall 2025, The Influence Mechanism of Chief Sustainability Officers on Firm Sustainability Performance. Chair: Dr. Sibin Wu

Maliha Alam, Business Administration, Ph.D., Summer 2025
Multi-Theoretic Perspective of Backer Decision-Making in Crowdfunding: Interplay of Backer, Founder and AI.
Chair: Dr. Francis Andoh-Baidoo

Solmaz Batebi, Business Administration, Ph.D., Summer 2025
Two essays In Finance: Can Machines Better Predict Insider Trading?, and CSR And Firm Value Following Dividend Cuts: International Evidence. Chair: Dr. Ahmed Elnahas

Khondoker Sayeed Hossain, Business Administration, Ph.D., Summer 2025, Loyal by Nature: How Uncertainty Avoidance Shapes Dispositional Brand Loyalty. Chair: Dr. Peter Magnusson

Yuri Martirosyan, Business Administration, Ph.D., Summer 2025
Blurring the Boundaries Between Human and Technology: A Comprehensive Examination of Social Presence in Human-Technology Interaction Chair: Dr. Xiaojing Sheng

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND P-16 INTEGRATION

Dr. Alma D. Rodriguez, Dean

Yvette Angeline, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Summer 2025
Exploring Intra- and Interpersonal Connection Through Mindful Moments at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Chair: Dr. Pauli Badenhorst

Jennifer Becerra, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025
Navigating Cultural and Professional Identities: A Study of Hispanic Women's Experiences in Aerospace Internship Programs. Chair: Dr. Karin Ann Lewis

Iliana Cantu, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Summer 2025
Reflections of Linguistic Experiences in a Borderland: Influences on Cultural Identity and Teacher Praxis. Chair: Dr. Pauli Badenhorst

Joseph Coppola, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Deep Community Engagement: Faculty Responsiveness Perspectives at a Hispanic Serving Institution. Chair: Dr. James Jupp

Cecilia Angelica Gomez, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

The Lived Experiences of School Counselors, Job Burnout and the Blurred Lines of the Profession. Chair: Dr. Javier Cavazos

Judith Kay Guetzow, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

The Relationship Between Perceived Transactional Distance, Cultural Values, and Online Instruction Among Higher Education Students: A Quantitative Analysis. Chair: Dr. Ming-Tsan Pierre Lu

Alexander Hernandez, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Beyond Binaries, Bridging Divides: Centering Identity, Resistance, and Educational Justice Along the Texas-Mexico Border.
Chair: Dr. Angela Marie Chapman

Hector Leal, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Influence of Peer-Led Team Learning in Students' Chemistry Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement in General Chemistry Courses
Chair: Dr. Ming-Tsan Pierre Lu

Karla Gabriela Lopez, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Factors Influencing Teacher Professional Autonomy and Career Satisfaction: The Effects of Unrealistic Professional Expectations Surrounding Student-Centered and Technology Implementation Tropes. Chair: Dr. Pauli Badenhorst

Vianna Sue Madrid, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Summer 2025

The Community of Inquiry: Examining the Relationships Between the Categories of Teaching Presence and Student Satisfaction in Online Graduate-Level Educational Technology courses.
Chair: Dr. Maria Elena Corbeil

Dulce Martinez Ybarra, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Summer

2025, The Effects of Game-Based Learning (GBL) on Weekly Mathematics Test Performance in 6th-Grade Online Education.
Chair: Dr. Leticia De Leon

Alfonso Mendoza, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Summer 2025

Beyond The Hype: Exploring The Practical Realities, Ethical Concerns, and Privacy Implications on AI in Education.
Chair: Dr. Joseph Rene Corbeil

Fernando W. Milmo, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Voices of Resistance: Multilingual Identity Formation through Translanguaging in Dual Language Bilingual Education.
Chair: Dr. Sandra Ines Musanti

Martha Reyna, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

A Qualitative Case Study: Exploring Distributed Leadership in Instructional Leadership Teams. Chair: Dr. Karin Ann Lewis

Luis Javier Slayton, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Summer

2025, Barriers to Hispanic Post-Secondary Education in Science Fields. Chair: Dr. Seokmin Kang

Jason Ray Wakefield, Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D., Fall 2025

A Study of Preferred Modality of Education and Perceptions of Academic Success of Post 9/11 Student Veterans.
Chair: Dr. Joseph Rene Corbeil

Sofia Cristina Almeda, Educational Leadership, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Exploring Relationships Between Persistence and Degree Completion Across College Readiness, Pell Grant Eligibility, and Collaborative Learning at a Four-Year Public Institution of Higher Education. Chair: Dr. George Padilla

Norma Araceli Cabrera, Educational Leadership, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Educators' Perceptions of Mental Health Services for Middle School Students in a South Texas School District.
Chair: Dr. Velma Menchaca

Tina Rodriguez Garza, Educational Leadership, Ed.D., Summer 2025

The Relationship Between Principal Leadership Behaviors and Teacher Leadership in Secondary Middle Schools in South Texas.
Chair: Dr. George Padilla

Yadira Mejia, Educational Leadership, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Empezando La Carrera: Factors That Impact Career Readiness in First-Time-In-College First-Generation Students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Chair: Dr. Marie Simonsson

Jack Ruelas, Educational Leadership, Ed.D., Summer 2025

Occupational Therapy Educators Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Students Culturally Responsive Care for Diverse Patient Populations.
Chair: Dr. Federico Guerra

Juanita Dionicia Ybarra - Rodriguez, Educational Leadership, Ed.D., Fall 2025

Leadership Crisis In Education: Exploring Factors That Contribute To The Successfulness of Latina Superintendents in South Texas.
Chair: Dr. Velma Menchaca

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

Dr. José Dávila-Montes, Dean

Ines Cano-Gonzalez, Clinical Psychology, Ph.D, Summer 2025

Cyber Intimate Partner Violence, Use of Technology, and Mechanisms: A Mixed Method Approach. Chair: Dr. Ruby Charak

Maria Cecilia Montenegro, Clinical Psychology, Ph.D, Summer 2025

Concerned Voices: A Qualitative Study about Autism Service Access in Uruguay. Chair: Dr. Cecilia Montiel-Nava

Frances Rachel Morales, Clinical Psychology, Ph.D, Summer 2025

Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Latinx Transgender and Gender Diverse Individuals: A Culturally Congruent Application.
Chair: Dr. Alfonso Mercado

Gabriela Ontiveros, Clinical Psychology, Ph.D, Summer 2025

WAIS - IV México versus U.S. versions in the assessment of Mexican Americans. Chair: Dr. Philip G. Gasquione

COLLEGE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Dr. Michael Lehker, Dean

Brandi Nichole Cruz, Rehabilitation Counseling, Ph.D., Fall 2025

Cyberbullying and Mental Health Issues Among University Students. Chair: Dr. Roy Chen

Timothy Michael Curtis, Rehabilitation Counseling, Ph.D., Summer 2025

The Impact of Positive Psychology Use Upon GLS Outcomes for People with Chronic Pain. Chair: Dr. Noreen Graf

Claudia E. Gonzalez, Rehabilitation Counseling, Ph.D., Summer 2025

Job Satisfaction and Vocational Services in Persons with Acquired Brain Injury. Chair: Dr. Rommel Johnson

Elaine Marie Mora, Rehabilitation Counseling, Ph.D., Summer 2025

Neuropsychologist Perspectives on Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Polytrauma Prognosis Regarding Implications for Life Care Planners. Chair: Dr. Irmo Marini

Kayi Nitnda, Rehabilitation Counseling, Ph.D., Summer 2025

Social Participation and Health-Related Quality of Life for Adults With Neurodevelopmental Disabilities: Capabilities Mediation and Employment Status and Social Security Disability Insurance Moderation. Chair: Dr. Bruce Reed

Gabriela E. Rangel, Rehabilitation Counseling, Ph.D., Fall 2025
Hispanic Academic Leadership in the Health and Human Services.
Chair: Dr. Roy Chen

Chia Vang, Rehabilitation Counseling, Ph.D., Fall 2025
Hmong Americans' Attitudes Toward Career Counseling.
Chair: Dr. Barbara Schoen

Laura Alejandra Villarreal, Rehabilitation Counseling, Ph.D., Summer 2025, Methodological and Standards of Practice Concerns in Developing Life Care Plans: A Survey of Life Care Planning Practitioners. Chair: Dr. Irmo Marini

Kendrick G. Anonuevoc, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Evaluating the Implementation of a Self-Regulation Curriculum for Adults with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities at C.A.M.P. University. Mentor: Dr. Eva Anger

Daisy A. Benitez, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Integrating an Occupation-Based Approach to Enhance a Stroke Support Group. Mentor: Dr. Eva Anger

Jesus R. Castillo, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Low Back Pain Awareness & Prevention for Future Occupational Therapists. Mentor: Dr. Roel Garcia

Monica Lizzette Corona, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Occupational Wellness for Sign Language Interpreters.
Mentor: Dr. Thelma Ochoa

Leonardo J. De Los Santos, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Bridging the Digital Divide: Smartphone Training for Service Access and Independence in Homeless Populations. Mentor: Dr. Roel Garcia

Linda Nicole Garcia-Fuentes, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Building Skills for Life: An Occupational Therapy Approach to Childhood Impulsivity. Mentor: Dr. Thelma Ochoa

Daniela Isabel Guerra, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Classroom Management Strategies Utilizing an Occupational Therapy Approach. Mentor: Dr. Lou Rutigliano

Anixa D. Hernandez, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Barriers: An Occupational Therapy Approach to Accessible Travel. Mentor: Dr. Thelma Ochoa

Hector Hernandez, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Occupy Your Power: An Adult LGBTQ+ Coping and Advocacy Workshop. Mentor: Dr. Lou Rutigliano

Paola M. Jasso, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Enhancing OTD Student Preparedness for Rare Pediatric Diagnoses: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice.
Mentor: Dr. Eva Anger

Doralee Lara, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Recognizing Persistent Primitive Reflexes in Children.
Mentor: Dr. Thelma Ochoa

Paloma M. Lozano, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Take A Step to Fall-Free Living. Mentor: Dr. Eva Anger

Nallely Marquez, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Promoting Ergonomic Safety in the Home Health Practice-Driving, Desk Work, and Patient Care. Mentor: Dr. Eva Anger

Esteban Martinez III, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025,
Programa Muevate y Gana – A Physical Activity Program for Adult Day Care Clients. Mentor: Dr. Lou Rutigliano

Imelda Selene Montelongo, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
A Structured Approach to Improving OTD Student Competence and Confidence in Acute and Critical Care. Mentor: Dr. Thelma Ochoa

Jovanni Lee Solis, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Supporting Self Regulation in Early Childhood: A Sensory Space Program. Mentor: Dr. Roel Garcia

Stephanie Trevino, Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Building Safer Interactions by Increasing Autism Awareness for Law Enforcement Officers. Mentor: Dr. Lou Rutigliano

Juan G. Zamora Jr., Occupational Therapy, OTD, Fall 2025
Exploring the Clinical Application of Low-Tech Cooking Devices for Individuals with Visual Impairments: Clinical Perspectives from a Blind Rehabilitation Setting. Mentor: Dr. Roel Garcia

COLLEGE OF SCIENCES

Dr. Lucas Macri, Dean

Baboucarr Dibba, Mathematics and Statistics with Interdisciplinary Applications, Ph.D., Summer 2025
P-adic Cellular Neural Networks With Delay.
Chair: Dr. Wilson Zuniga Galindo

Jeffery Opoku, Mathematics and Statistics with Interdisciplinary Applications, Ph.D., Summer 2025
Congruences for quotients of Klein forms. Chair: Dr. Timothy Huber

Ricardo Reyna, Mathematics and Statistics with Interdisciplinary Applications, Ph.D., Summer 2025
Bayesian Inference For Deep Learning. Chair: Dr. Hansapani Rodrigo

The Academic Regalia

Academic regalia, composed of gowns, hoods, and caps, symbolizes centuries of scholarly tradition and achievement. In the United States, the current system of academic dress was standardized in the late 19th century to reflect the degree level, field of study, and granting institution of each graduate.

At The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, doctoral graduates wear the traditional black gown with velvet panels and sleeve bars, signifying the highest level of academic attainment. The hood, the most distinctive element of regalia, is lined with the official colors of the degree-granting university and trimmed with a velvet border representing the scholar's academic discipline. The doctoral cap is typically a mortarboard, although recipients may also wear a velvet tam as a mark of advanced scholarly distinction.

The tradition of hooding, in which a faculty member places the doctoral hood over the shoulders of the graduate, symbolizes the graduate's transition from student to scholar and their formal induction into the academic community.

Through the symbolism of colors, materials, and design, academic regalia honors the dedication, scholarship, and contributions of those who have reached the pinnacle of academic achievement. It serves as a visible tribute to both individual accomplishment and the enduring values of higher education.



Acknowledgment *of* Contributors

Graduate College

Flavio Alanis, Technology Support Specialist II
Salvador Contreras, Professor & Associate Dean
Kelly Helton, Administrative Coordinator
Eddie Martinez, Program Specialist
Jennifer Mittelstaedt, Administrative Coordinator
David Ortiz, Program Coordinator

Justin Ramirez, Financial Manager
Veronica Ramirez, Executive Director of Graduate Studies
Mari Ruano, Program Coordinator
Paola Saucedo, Program Coordinator
Mari Stevens, Program Coordinator
Volker Quetschke, Professor & Associate Dean

Division of Research

Jesus Alferez, Internal Communications Content Specialist
Maria Gonzalez, Communications Manager
Aide Garza, Administrative Manager
Rene Layton, Director for Budget and Operations
David Lozano, Program Coordinator
Omar Nedzelsky, Operations Manager
Laura Robles, Program Coordinator

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Graduate College