Serving Marginalized & Underserved Populations

This interdisciplinary, panel-based conference addresses gender-based violence in the Rio Grande Valley. Our goals are: to raise awareness regarding the impact on victims and survivors, to gather stakeholders for honest and productive discussions of how to best address gender-based violence in our area, to educate others on the processes involved, to make transparent the role of victim advocates, and to promulgate a trauma-informed, research-based, victim-centered approach to addressing gender-based violence in the RGV.

Panel Discussion Topics:

- Children as Victims, Survivors, and Perpetrators of Interpersonal and Gender-Based Violence
- Addressing the Needs of Veteran and Military Victims, Survivors, and Perpetrators
- LGBTQ-Identifying Individuals and Unique Challenges in Providing Services
- Responding to the Needs of Persons with Psychiatric Disabilities
- Responding to the Needs of Persons with Physical Disabilities
- Suicide and Social Media and the Confounding Issues with DV and SA
- Immigration and International Students
- Addiction Issues for Victims/Survivors and Perpetrators
- Violence Perpetration and the Elderly
- Communication and Law Enforcement, Especially First Responder
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Serving Marginalized & Underserved Populations
2nd Annual Coalition Against Violence & Exploitation (CAVE) Conference

WEDNESDAY, October 25, 2017

8:30 a.m.  Continental Breakfast and Registration
9:00 a.m.  Welcome and Introduction, Pretest for CEU recipients
9:15 a.m.-  Panel 1 Children as Victims, Survivors, and Perpetrators of Interpersonal and Gender-Based Violence
10:45 a.m.  Moderator: Judge Carlos Villalon, Jr.
            Panelists: Judge Rene Betancourt, Diane Perez, Bianca Lopez, Maricela Medrano, Michael Parson

11:00 a.m.-  Panel 2 Addressing the Needs of Veteran and Military Victims, Survivors, and Perpetrators
12:15 p.m.  Moderator: Major Gerald Resmondo
            Panelists: Tracy Wisdom, Chief Warrant Officer Three Darlene Pittman, Michael Sweeney, Michelle Alvarado, Samantha Tello

Lunch served at 12:15 for registered conference participants

12:45 p.m.-  Panel 3 LGBTQ-Identifying Individuals and Unique Challenges in Providing Services
2:00 p.m.  Moderator: Dr. Cynthia Jones
            Panelists: Chase Valenciano, Gabriel Sanchez, Rosalinda Rosso

2:15 p.m.-  Panel 4 Responding to the Needs of Persons with Psychiatric Disabilities
3:30 p.m.  Moderator: Kim Finn
            Panelists: Evonne Garcia, Cynthia Catchings, Antonio Zarzoza, Amanda Quintanilla, Linda Casas, Frank Martinez, Tonya Paulette, Rosalinda Rosso

3:45 p.m.-  Panel 5 Responding to the Needs of Persons with Physical Disabilities
4:45 p.m.  Moderator: Cesar Eddie Quintanilla
            Panelists: Jerome Fischer, Angel Quintanilla, Dr. Shawn Saladin, Hilda Gracia, Frank Martinez, Leila Flores-Torres

4:45 p.m.-  Survivor: Laura Maxwell
6:00 p.m.  Remember Me: Confronting Violence Against Women in the RGV - Domestic violence awareness documentary screening – free popcorn and snacks for attendees – brief discussion to follow with Director David Carren, Chair of the Theatre Department at UTRGV

5:00 p.m. - 5:15 p.m.  CEU/TCOLE/CLE forms completed

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  Clothesline Project by Delta Xi Nu
In conjunction with the conference: Clothesline Project organized by Delta Xi Nu – exhibit on display outside the Ballroom – T-Shirts available for creation and display on the clothesline for survivors of violence or their loved ones.
THURSDAY, October 26, 2017

8:30 a.m.  Continental Breakfast and Registration

9:00 a.m.- Welcome and Introduction, Pretest for CEU recipients
9:15 a.m.

9:15 a.m.- Panel 6 Suicide and Social Media and the Confounding Issues with DV and SA
10:30 a.m.  Moderator: Dr. Douglas Stoves
Panelists: Francisco Tamez, Michael Sweeney, Andrew Perez, Pablo Lopez

10:45 a.m.- Panel 7 Immigration and International Students
12:00 p.m.  Moderator: Dr. Sandra Hansmann
Panelists: Abraham Diaz, Kim Finn, Michael Sweeney, Florence Nocar, Rebecca Hernandez, Samantha Lopez

Lunch served at 12:00 for registered conference participants

12:15 p.m.- Escalation Training courtesy of the Superheroes
1:15 p.m.

1:30 p.m.- Panel 8 Addiction Issues for Victims/Survivors and Perpetrators
2:30 p.m.  Moderator: Kristina Canfield
Panelists: Fidencio Mercado, Amber Van Schuyver, Nadia Ochoa, Eluterio Blanco, Vianca Vieyra

2:45 p.m.- Panel 9 Violence Perpetration and the Elderly
3:45 p.m.  Moderator: Dr. Juanita C. Acebedo
Panelists: Dr. John Gonzalez, Dr. Lin Jiang, Gustavo Salinas, Dr. Romeo Escobar, Perla Reyes

4:00 p.m.- Keynote Dr. Blanca Ruth Esponda International Issues with Rights and Violence Perpetration
5:00 p.m.

5:00 p.m.- CEU/TCOLE/CLE forms completed
5:15 p.m.

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Clothesline Project by Delta Xi Nu
In conjunction with the conference: Clothesline Project organized by Delta Xi Nu – exhibit on display outside the Ballroom – T-Shirts available for creation and display on the clothesline for survivors of violence or their loved ones.

FRIDAY, October 27, 2017

8:30 a.m.  Continental Breakfast

8:45 a.m.- Welcome and Introduction, Pretest for TCOLE recipients
9:00 a.m.

9:00 a.m.- Panel 10 Communication and Law Enforcement, Especially First Responders
10:00 a.m.  Moderator: Dr. Rosalva Resendiz
Panelists: Dr. Lucas Espinoza, Michael Sweeney, Evonne Garcia, Adan Cruz, Cecilia Mata
"Gender-based violence (GBV) is the general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society. Violence against women and girls constitutes a part of GBV. Men and boys can also be victims of GBV." (Bloom 2008, p.14).
Keynote Speakers

Laura Maxwell

Mother of Sarah Maxwell Montemayor

Biography:

Laura Maxwell was born and raised in Michigan. After high school, she moved to southern California and then on to Oklahoma where she met and married her husband, Wayne. They moved to the “border” of the Rio Grande Valley to serve as missionaries in 1985. They decided that the Rio Grande Valley would be a great place to raise a family and settled down in Harlingen for the past 29 years. Laura homeschooled her three children, Jeffery (37), Sarah (forever 29) and Bryan (29) throughout their lives. She served as executive director for Valley Proud Environmental Council for 10 years, retiring in 2011. She and her husband are raising their daughter’s son who just turned 10. She has served on her grandson’s school PTA board as president as well as a parent volunteer wherever needed. Spending time with family, loving on grandbabies, gardening and camping whenever possible are at the top of Laura’s list of favorite things to do! Laura and Wayne have 12 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren.
Dr. Blanca Ruth Esponda

Biography:

Dr. Blanca R. Esponda is an accomplished Lecturer, Activist and Lawyer. Dr. Esponda earned a Liberal Arts degree from Park University in Missouri, a Law Degree from National University of Mexico (UNAM) and a Juris Doctorate in Public Law from the University of Munich (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitaet-Munchen) in Germany. Not only was she the first woman Senator from Chiapas to represent her state in the Mexican National Senate, but Dr. Esponda is also known for having been instrumental in designing and executing public policies in accordance with the committed assistance of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Six-Year State Development Program to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s).

Her work is designed to reach/assist all children with health and education programs (with the assistance of UNICEF) and to reach many women to raise their awareness and self-esteem with the assistance of UNIFEM. Her work centers on bringing general health programs, as well as sexual and reproductive health programs, to the public at large with the intention of reducing maternal deaths, child mortality at birth and incrementally increasing life expectancy. Dr. Esponda hopes that her work will enhance specific policies to allow indigenous peoples to have their internal autonomy in government, economic and social development and to manage and solve ancient conflicts concerning land ownership disputes due to the differences of two coexisting legal systems – indigenous and constitutional.

Dr. Esponda has worked in the Federal Department of Labor, as Chief of International Relations, and with the International Labor Organization (ILO) of the United Nations (UN), as well as with other Latin American organizations like the Organization of the American States (OAS), based in Washington, D.C. As a lawmaker she presented bills to develop and empower women’s electoral rights, working rights and human rights in general for all the disadvantaged people for whom she has fought since she was a small girl. She worked in the elaboration of the National Women’s Program and she is Co-founder of the National Institute for Women of Mexico, later was appointed as a member of the Institute’s Social Council. At the State Congress, she was President of the Committee for Peace and Reconciliation, formed to end the conflict with the insurgected Zapatista Liberation Army.

Her work has resulted in the creation of the Department for the Empowerment of Women, the implementation of labor and social policies, and the monitoring of compliance of worker’s rights and the advancement of “Decent Work for All” in the Department of Labor, and the Council to Protect Women Against All Forms of Violence as established by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women – Convention Belem do Para.
Michael Sweeney

Training Specialist, TAASA

Domestic Sex Trafficking

Biography:

Michael Sweeney recently returned to TAASA as a Training Specialist. Mike is a decorated 28-year Law Enforcement veteran. From 2014 through 2017 Mike was the Director of Investigations for International Justice Mission in Ghana, Africa working with the Government of Ghana fighting human trafficking and child exploitation on Lake Volta. From 1984-1999 he served the Aurora Police Department in Aurora Colorado, as a Vice & Narcotics Investigator. In 1999, he relocated to the Mississippi gulf coast joining the Ocean Springs Police Department. There he served in roles of Internal Affairs Commander, Operations/Logistics Commander during Hurricane Katrina, and Chief of Investigations. In 2008, Mike attended and graduated from the FBI national Academy in Quantico, Virginia. In 2013-2014, Mike was a Training Specialist with TAASA, focusing on Law enforcement trainings. His specialty is victim interviewing techniques, suspect interviewing, and statement analysis.
Invited Panelists

Juanita C. Acebedo, PhD, RN

Dr. Juanita C. Acebedo received her doctorate from the University of Texas at Tyler in 2016 with a focus on research in breast cancer. She has been in the field of nursing for over 30 years and has worked in various clinical and administrative nursing positions. She is currently in her third year as a faculty member for the UTRGV School of Nursing as an Associate Professor in the Bachelors of Science in Nursing Program.

Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt, J.D.

Judge Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt was born in Edinburg Texas, and graduated from Edinburg High School in 1999. In just 2 ½ years, she completed her bachelor’s degree at the University of Texas-Pan American before earning her law degree from the prestigious University of Texas at Austin School of Law. In 2016, after a decade working in a variety of legal areas, she was elected Judge of the 449th District Court of Texas. According to the Texas Judicial Branch, Rodriguez-Betancourt is the youngest district court judge in Texas. She and her husband, J.R. Betancourt, are the proud parents of three young daughters, Gloriana, Carissa, and Vitalina.

Eluterio Blanco, jr., MAC, LCDC

Eluterio (Jr.) Blanco has been a licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor since 2005 and recently received certification as a Master Addiction Counselor. He is currently a Clinical Assistant Professor and Ph.D. candidate in the School of Rehabilitation Services & Counseling at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Eluterio holds professional memberships with the National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors (NAADAC), the Texas Association of Addiction Professional (TAAP), and is the Immediate-Past President of the Valley Association of Addiction Professionals (VAAP).
published an article on the attitudes of Mexicans Americans towards cannabis use. Other areas of research interests include professional and community stigma toward persons with substance use disorders and he is collecting data on the perceptions of substance use disorders by Mexican American clinicians and clients for his doctoral dissertation.

Kristina Canfield, M.Ed.

Mrs. Kristina Canfield, M.Ed. attended Ohio University in Athens, Ohio where she received her bachelor’s degree in History and a master’s degree in College Student Personnel. During her time at Ohio University, she worked to establish the Collegiate Recovery Community to assist students in or seeking recovery from drug and alcohol addiction on that campus. She also advised the peer health educators and designed programs focusing on health promotion and increasing awareness and education for both mental and physical health among the student population. After graduation, she worked in an inpatient addiction treatment facility providing both case management and assessment/intake services. She then came to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and has been working as the Program Coordinator for the Collegiate Recovery Program (CRP). The CRP works within the counseling center to better assist students in or seeking recovery with their overall well-being. Mrs. Canfield’s interests include recovery advocacy, health promotion, suicide prevention, and alcohol and drug prevention and intervention.

Linda Casas, LMSW

Linda Casas was born and raised in South Texas, and by the age of 22, she had obtained her bachelors and master’s degree in social work from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She worked at Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas and completed phase 1 of NYU border project as a data collector on risk factors and its correlation to risky behaviors among teenagers in the Rio Grande Valley. Linda later became a clinician for Southwestkeys and worked with unaccompanied minors providing mental health counseling services. She is currently a licensed masters social worker at Mujeres Unidas, and has been providing trauma-informed counseling services for approximately two years to victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Linda hopes to become a licensed clinical social worker and plans to continue serving the people of South Texas.

Cynthia V. Catchings, LCSW, CLYL

Cynthia V. Catchings, LCSW, CLYL completed her degree in Clinical Social Work/Mental Health at the University of Texas – Pan American. Her wide-ranging experience includes working as a Case Management Supervisor, a Mental Health Counselor, and a Supervisor II for Adult Protective Services. Cynthia currently serves as Chair of the RGV Human Trafficking Coalition, Co-Chair of the Hidalgo County Domestic Violence Coalition, Co-Chair of the Cameron County Domestic Violence Coalition, and as a member of the NASW-LRGV Steering Committee and the UTRGV Social Work Advisory Committee. She is also a Board Member of the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault and Board Member of the National
Association of Social Workers, Texas Chapter. Cynthia is also currently Executive Director of the RGV Women’s Emotional Wellness Center.

**Assistant Chief Adan Cruz**

Adan Cruz received his Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College in 2006. He dedicated 27 years, from 1989 to 2016, to the Texas Department of Public Safety, from which he retired as Captain in the Criminal Investigation Division. He is currently serving as Assistant Chief with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Police Department. Assistant Chief Cruz will be celebrating 25 years of marriage in December and has 4 children.

**Francisco Tamez-Cavazos**

Francisco Javier Tamez Cavazos is originally from Monterrey, Mexico. He moved to the U.S. around four years ago, seeking a Bachelor’s in Computer Information Systems at legacy institution UTPA, now UTRGV. After three years of undergraduate courses, he obtained his BBA in Computer Information Systems as a Cum Laude graduate. During his undergraduate time, he gained valuable experience working for legacy instruction UTPA in the IT department and for the Office of Research, and in his last semester with UTRGV Division of Research, Innovation, and Economic Development. After graduating with honors, he is now a Security Analyst for the Information Security Office at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

**Abraham Diaz**

Abraham Diaz was born in the city of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. At a very young age, his family decided to migrate to the United States to be able to provide him and his siblings a better educational opportunity and life. His parents took a leap of faith for a better future for their children, where they can now see the fruit that has blossomed. Since a very young age, Abraham saw the struggles that other kids did not have. One of those struggles was the language barrier. After overcoming many obstacles, he felt like he hit a wall when he was in high school. While in high school, he was told
that undocumented students were not eligible to attend college, but decided to challenge that. In the summer after high school graduation, he found that in the State of Texas, all students, no matter their legal status, had access to higher education.

During that same time, Abraham was able to qualify for the newly created DACA program and received his work permit. He was able to continue from high school to college more freely. He was able to graduate at the top of his high school class, with honors, and went on to study at The University of Texas - Pan American, now The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, where he majored in Mexican American Studies and History. While in college, Abraham found out about organizing and fighting for immigrants’ rights when he joined the Minority Affairs Council, an immigrant-student organization, where he felt accepted among the stories of the over 950 undocumented students on campus. Through this organization, he was able to speak on behalf of immigrant students on campus and find resources to help them succeed, organize state wide campaigns through United We Dream to defend college access for undocumented students, among many other things.

Abraham now works as the education specialist at La Union del Pueblo Entero, an organization that has a focus on fighting deportations, providing social services, organizing for streetlights and drainage, etc. He is now overseeing the adult education program, resources for undocumented students, and access to college for students.

Romeo Escobar, Ph.D., LCSW, ACSW

Romeo Escobar is an Assistant Professor in the Social Work Department at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Prior to transitioning into academia, Dr. Escobar worked in both the private and public sector and held positions in administrative, clinical, management, and leadership. He has over 30 years of experience in working with children, adolescents, adults, and older adults in the areas of both mental health and alcohol/substance related disorders. He has a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership Studies from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas and a Master’s Degree in Social Work from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. He is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and recognized as a Private Practitioner by the Texas State Board of Social Work Examiners and is certified through the Academy of Certified Social Workers.

Lucas Enrique Espinoza, Ph.D.

Dr. Lucas Enrique Espinoza is Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice and Affiliate Faculty of Gender & Women’s Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. He earned his Ph.D. in Sociology with a minor in Multicultural Women’s and Gender Studies from Texas Woman’s University. His areas of specialization are Social Organization/Disorganization, Women’s/Gender/Sexuality Studies, Mexican American Studies/Chican@ Studies/Border Studies, & Social Science Research Methodology. His research areas examine culture and identity, Latin@ disparities and social justice rights/issues. He currently is on the Board of Directors for Mujeres Unidas/Women Together Foundation, Inc. He recently worked on the
chapter entitled “The International Law Enforcement Community: Cooperative Efforts in Combatting Human Trafficking” (co-authored with Dr. Rosalva Resendiz) to be published in The Global Handbook of Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery (SAGE, Forth-coming 2018). At UTRGV he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on criminal justice research methods, statistics, criminology, environmental crime, and gender and crime. He can be reached at lucas.espinoza01@utrgv.edu

Kim Nguyen-Finn, MA, LPC-S

Kim Nguyen-Finn, MA, LPC-S, has been a mental health counselor since 1998 and is a Texas Licensed Professional Counselor Board-approved Supervisor. Aside from providing individual, family, and couples counseling for a wide range of issues, including anxiety disorders, OCD, depression, trauma resolution, and gender identity, she is a lecturer and doctoral candidate at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in the School of Rehabilitation Counseling and Services. Currently, Ms. Finn also works in private practice, serves as consulting counselor for UTRGV’s Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention, is an expert witness for domestic violence and sexual assault cases in Hidalgo County, and teach graduate counseling classes for both UTRGV’s Counseling & Guidance and University of North Texas’s Rehabilitation Counseling programs. Ms. Finn was raised in a military household and earned her Masters of Arts in Educational Psychology from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Evonne Garcia, RN, SANE-P, CA/CP SANE

Evonne Garcia is a Registered Nurse and a Certified Adult/Certified Pediatric Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner. She currently works at Doctors Hospital at Renaissance and is the Forensic Nurse Manager of the Safe H.A.V.E.N. Forensic Exam Center at Renaissance. Evonne started her nursing career as an emergency room nurse at Mission Regional Medical Center and after working in emergency for five years, she saw the need for a structured program to help victims of abuse. She took it upon herself to train and start a program that focused solely on patients who were abused by as domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse and trauma. She opened the S.A.F.E. Place at Mission Regional
Medical Center in 2009 and ran the program until February 2017 when she joined DHR and began the same structured program for patients who have been abused. Evonne is a member of several organizations such as the International Association of Forensic Nurses, Texas Association Against Sexual Assault, Rio Grande Valley Human Trafficking Coalition, Hidalgo County Family Violence Task Force, Hidalgo County Child Fatality Review Team, and the Nursing Advisory Board for Texas A&M. She is very active in educating the community and conducting trainings for law enforcement agencies, schools, counselors, and anyone who can encounter a victim at any time. Evonne is very passionate about her job and takes great pride in assisting and advocating for her patients.

**John Gonzalez, Ph.D.**

John M. Gonzalez, Ph.D., LMSW, is an associate professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Department of Social Work. His research interests include older Latinos and mental health services. He has over 20 years of experience in working with adults and older adults in the areas of both mental health and alcohol/substance related disorders. He also authored and co-authored publications on older Latinos and mental health services and older adults overcoming oppression.

**Hilda Gracia**

Hilda Gracia is the Sexual Assault Program Coordinator for Women Together Foundation. Her role is to provide services to survivors and their families. Services provided include 24 hour Hotline, crisis intervention, public education, advocacy and accompaniment to hospitals, law enforcement and court. During her career, she has dedicated thirteen years to working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Hilda Gracia graduated from UTRGV with a Bachelors in Social Work and completed the alternative teaching certification program for Special Education.

**Sandra Hansmann, Ph.D**

Dr. Sandra Hansmann is an Associate Professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). She received her B.S. in Behavioral Sciences at Concordia University Texas and her M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Special Education/Counselor Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Hansmann has been at UTPA/UTRGV since 2005 and she was previously a faculty member at the University of Texas at Austin where she was the Principal Investigator and Director of the Rehabilitation Issues in Mental Illness Program. She teaches courses in assessment and psychology of disability. Dr. Hansmann has authored a number of articles, monographs, and book chapters, and is a regular speaker at national conferences and other professional events, and serves as a judge for Regional and National Ethics Bowl competitions.
Rebecca M. Hernandez, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC

Born and raised in South Texas. I attended both undergraduate and graduate school at the University of Texas-Pan American. I obtained my Masters of Science in Nursing with the Family Nurse Practitioner program.

I am a wife and mother of two lively and intelligent girls as well as three spunky Yorkshire terriers. I love the Rio Grande Valley and the richness of diverse cultures that inhabit the area. I appreciate the value of family and religion that many of the people here.

I have had clinical practice in pediatric intensive care as a registered nurse and worked as a Nurse Practitioner in Family Practice, transitional care, public health care/screenings setting and Internal medicine. For the past 20 months I have worked, as needed, with the United States Customs and Border Patrol Rio Grande Valley sector. I have also been employed as faculty for the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley since its inception in the Fall of 2015. I am employed full time as a Clinical Assistant Professor in the School of Nursing.

Lin Jiang, Ph.D.

Lin (Helen) Jiang (Ph.D.) is an assistant professor in the UTRGV Department of Social Work. She graduated from the University of Denver. She focuses on gerontology. She is the communication chair of the Association for Gerontology Education in Social Work (AGESW) and an emerging scholar representative on the membership committee of Gerontological Society of America (GSA).

Bianca Lopez

Bianca Lopez is currently the Volunteer Coordinator for CASA of Hidalgo County, Inc. and has been with the organization for three years. She recruits and trains volunteers to become Court Appointed Special Advocates who serve as Guardian Ad Litems for children in the Child Protection Court within Hidalgo County who have suffered from abuse and/or neglect. She currently has helped CASA retain 92 volunteers and the organization is continuously growing.

Bianca has her Bachelor’s Degree of Science in Rehabilitative Services from the University of Texas-Pan American and is currently completing a Master’s Degree in Sociology at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Sergeant Pablo Lopez

Pablo Lopez has a combined 15 years of law enforcement experience. He previously worked with the McAllen Police Department, in which he was part of the Auto Theft Task Force and Youth Crimes division. He is currently employed with The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley as a Detective in the Criminal Investigative Division. He is an advanced peace officer, TCOLE instructor, holds a Special Investigator License for SAFVIC and ACAi, and is a certified field training officer. He also worked as an instructor at Kaplan College. During his career, he has received numerous awards, including a Life Saving
Award from McAllen PD in 2003 and Officer of the Year Awards from UTPA in 2014 and from UTRGV in 2015.

Maricela Medrano, LCSW-S, LCPAA

Maricela Medrano is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker-Supervisor and a Licensed Child Placing Agency Administrator. Maricela has been a part of A World for Children since 2005, as a Clinical Director. In 2012, she added the title of Regional Director and she is currently oversees the McAllen and Brownsville offices.

Prior to joining the AWFC family, Maricela worked with adolescence with substance abuse issues. She also has experience working with women and families at a local domestic violence center and rape crisis center. She enjoys working with families and adolescence in particular.

Maricela is a big advocate for the children in the Rio Grande Valley, to ensure a safe return to their biological families. She is very passionate about the mission of A World for Children and works diligently to ensure all of the children and families in Our World are taken care of.

Fidencio Mercado, MS, LCDC, LPC-Intern

Mr. Mercado is a Clinical Associate Professor with the School of Rehabilitation Services & Counseling at UTRGV. He also serves as the Associate Director for the School and Undergraduate Coordinator. He has been a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor (LCDC) since 2006 and a Licensed Professional Counselor-Intern since 2015. He has over 16 years of experience working as a professional in Addictions Counseling. He currently teaches undergraduate courses related to Addictions and has research interests in addictions, spirituality, and multicultural concerns. He also serves as the Chapter President for the Valley Association of Addiction Professionals (VAAP), a chapter of the Texas Association of Addiction Professionals.
Cecilia Mata-Moya, LMSW, CDVC

Cecilia Mata-Moya has been employed by Women Together/Mujeres Unidas since 1998. She worked as a Legal Advocate and later became the emergency shelter manager. After 2 years, she returned to the Legal Advocacy Project as the Manager for the program. She currently manages both the McAllen and Weslaco Satellite Centers and is in charge of the overall functioning of these centers and the following programs: Legal Advocacy, the Batterer Intervention and Prevention Program (BIPP), and the Community Education and Outreach programs.

Cecilia obtained her Bachelor’s in Social work in 2007 and her Master’s in 2013 from the University of Texas - Pan American. She has been licensed with the Social Work Board since 2008. She is a Certified Domestic Violence Counselor. Mrs. Mata-Moya has served as the Co-Chair for the Hidalgo County Family Violence Task Force and the Voces Unidas task force and is currently a member of both. In addition, she has served on the Board for the South Texas Civil Rights Project since 2008. She has conducted many trainings for law enforcement officers, judges, lawyers, and other professionals on family violence and sexual assault issues.

Florence Raven Nocar, J.D., SPHR, SCHRM-SCP

Florence Raven Nocar serves as the Interim Director of the Office of Institutional Equity. In her role, she furthers UTRGV’s commitment to equal access, equity, non-discrimination, and to diversity and inclusion on behalf of staff, faculty and students.

She has a law degree from The University of California, Los Angeles, is a certified mediator, is an ATIXA certified Title IX Coordinator, and has a B.A. in Psychology with Honors from Stanford University. Florence has over 18 years of diversity and inclusion higher education experience. At Stanford, she did thesis work on conflict resolution strategies and was an active member of the Stanford Native American Indian Organization (SAIO). At UCLA, she served as Vice President of the Native American Law Students’ Association and was an active member of the La Raza Law Student Association. She also served as an Associate Editor for the Indigenous Peoples’ Journal of Law, Culture & Resistance. She has provided pro bono legal services to homeless LGBTQ youth through the Outside In Legal Clinic and advocated on behalf of marginalized women through the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). She also served on the Multnomah County, Oregon Diversity committee. In 2011, she was honored with a Diversity Achievement Award presented at the decennial Oregon Bar’s Convocation on Equality.
She has served as one of UTRGV’s Deputy Title IX Coordinators since 2015 and comes with prior Deputy Title IX experience from The University of Texas - Pan American. She was born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley and is also a graduate of the Science Academy of South Texas.

Nadia Ochoa

Nadia Angelica Ochoa graduated from the University of Texas - Pan American in December of 2002 with a Bachelors in Communications. In 2003, she began her career as the Resource Development Manager for the Food Bank RGV, where her responsibilities included overseeing the volunteer program, food drives, and the direct mail campaign.

Under her leadership, the Development Department grew and she was afforded the opportunity to oversee staff who would manage projects that ensured we were reaching and exceeding our goals. After a few years, she wanted a change in her career and so applied and became the Assistant Director to Annual Giving for the University of Texas - Pan American Development Department. It was an amazing opportunity with an incredible supervisor who was a great role model. In fact, the office she worked in was full of talented professionals, so Nadia learned a great deal from everyone.

When she accepted the Executive Director position at the Palmer Drug Abuse Program in 2014, she knew it was a great organization, one she could believe in and be passionate about. Three years later, Nadia is still with Palmer and still feels the same way. The organization’s success is attributed to the outstanding staff that is diligent in working towards our mission every day. We are currently working on a special project with McAllen ISD in hopes to start the first Recovery High School here in the RGV.

Michael Parson, J.D.

Michael Parson graduated from the University of Texas at Dallas with a Bachelor of Arts in Literary Studies and worked as an English teacher in the Galena Park Independent School District. In 2003, he graduated from the University of Houston Law Center with a Doctor of Jurisprudence. In 2011, he joined the Hidalgo County Public Defender’s Office where he helped to establish its Juvenile Section. Currently, he is the Assistant Public Defender of Hidalgo County in charge of juvenile cases.

Tonya Paulette, M.A., LPC.

Tonya is the Director of Student Accessibility Services at UT Rio Grande Valley. Her responsibilities include overseeing the department that is responsible for providing services and supports to qualified students with disabilities so they are able to gain equitable access to all programs, services, and activities sponsored by the university. The department also provides referrals to campus and community resources as well as advocacy and assistance in addressing any attitudinal and/or physical barriers. Tonya works in close collaboration with stakeholders throughout the university to uphold standards and maintain the university’s commitment to students with disabilities.
Tonya has over 20 years of experience in the field of disability services. Prior to working in higher education, she served 14 years in Texas public schools where her roles included Licensed Specialist in School Psychology, Educational Diagnostician, and Coordinator of Autism Services.

Andrew Perez, LPC

Mr. Andrew L. Perez, MA, LPC-S attended the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) where he received his undergraduate degrees in Psychology and Criminal Justice and a master’s degree in Clinical Psychology. Following graduation, he worked as a Mental Health Clinician for the UTMB-Correctional Managed Care Division at a Texas Department of Criminal Justice prison, providing assessment and counseling services for inmates struggling with mental health issues. He then returned to UTPA (which became part of the new University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) and has been working as a counselor for the campus counseling center for the past four years. He has been an active Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Texas for over four years and obtained his LPC Supervisor credential one year ago. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Counseling and is working on his dissertation at this time. He plans to graduate in Spring 2018. Mr. Perez’s professional interests include disabilities, family violence, sexual assault, malingering and feigning, suicide prevention, and counselor supervision.

Diane Perez, MSSW

My name is Diane M. Perez. I received my Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology and my Master’s Degree in Social Work from the University of Texas-Pan American. I have worked with The Texas Department of Family & Protective Services for 13 years, with a focus on the Conservatorship Stage of Services. At this time, I am a Supervisor for a Conservatorship Unit in Hidalgo County. Working in a Conservatorship Unit entails working with families whose children have been legally removed from their care, through legal intervention.

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER THREE DARLENE A. PITTMAN

CW3 Pittman enlisted in the Army Reserves in June of 1989. She was appointed as a warrant officer in August of 2004. CW3 Pittman’s assignments as a warrant officer include Weight Control Officer/EO Trainer, 89th Regional Readiness Command, Wichita, Kansas; Battalion S1(mobilization), 387th CONUS Replacement Battalion, Ft Bliss, Texas; Military Human Resources Technician (garrison) and Plans & Operations Officer (deployed); 103D Expeditionary Sustainment Command, Des Moines, Iowa; Battalion S1, .3 Battalion 378 Regiment 1st Brigade BCT 95th Division IET, Norman, Oklahoma; Senior Human Resource Technician, 4th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), Fort Sam Houston, Texas; and Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP), 1st Sustainment Command (Theater), Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. CW3 Pittman is a graduate of the Headquarters Department of the Army SHARP Baseline 7 Week Certification Course,
Warrant Officer Intermediate Level Education (WOILE), Adjutant General Corps Warrant Officer Advance (Phase 1 & 2) and Basic Courses, Staff Action Officer Course, Advance Non-Commissioned Officer Course Phase 1, 75H10 Personnel Services Specialist (Phase 1 & 2), Basic Non-Commissioned Officer Course (Phase 1 & 2), Battle Focused Instructor Training Course, Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) Equal Opportunity Advisor Course, DEOMI EEO Mediation Course, Fort McCoy EEO Counselors Course, Joint Forces Sexual Assault Response Coordinator Course, and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Trainer (T4T) Course, among other military courses. She was awarded an Associate’s Degree in General Studies from Butler County Community College, an Associate’s of Applied Science from Wichita State University/Schweiter Technical School, a Bachelor of Science Degree in E-Commerce Management from Friends University, and a Master of Business Administration - Global Management from University of Phoenix.

Amanda Quintanilla
Amanda Quintanilla is a Victim Service Specialist with The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Police Department. Amanda graduated from the University of Texas Pan-American with a Bachelors of Art in Psychology and English. Amanda has worked in the Social Service field for over 10 years. She has worked with children to adults with issues ranging from: Drug/Alcohol Abuse, Mental Health Issues, At Risk, and Victims of Domestic Violence. Amanda likes to help others whether it be through her work, or helping in the Community.

Angel Quintanilla
Angel Quintanilla was born with cerebral palsy and is currently a freshman at South Texas College. He started his beaded jewelry business at seven years of age and with the sales, he decided to help children in hospitals. Angel is a kind young man who is always willing to help others in his community. From an early age, he was recognized for his altruistic spirit by KRGV as "A Kid You Should Know." In middle school, he was recognized by Deon Sanders and the Pena Eye Institute as a "Community Hero". He continues to create projects that help children and his passion to help others knows no limits.

Cesar Eddie Quintanilla
Cesar Eddie Quintanilla is the Health Educator for UTRGV. For the past fifteen years, he has dedicated his career to promoting health education among the college community. His health education programs won Health Education Program of the Year in 2014. In 2016, he won meritorious award for his dedication in creating a food pantry for UTRGV students. His is currently the Chair for the UNIDAD coalition, a non-profit organization dedicated to addressing underage drinking and drug abuse prevention. Mr. Quintanilla is dedicated to his community and is always promoting prevention education.
Rosalva Resendiz, Ph.D.

Rosalva Resendiz is an Associate Professor in Criminal Justice at UTRGV. She identifies as a Chicanx indigenous mestiza social justice scholar/activist. Her interests include critical race theory, decolonial theory & methods, postcolonial studies, critical criminology, Chicana feminism, Mexican American/Border Studies, organized crime and social justice. She is the co-author of On the Edge of Law: Culture, Labor and Deviance on the South Texas Border and author of the textbook Gender, Crime & Justice: Critical and Feminist Perspectives. She is author of “Mestiza/o Discourse: Soldaderas in the Corridos of the Mexican Revolution.” She also co-authored “Apache Resistance, 1849-1886” in 50 Events that Shaped American Indian History: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic and “Colonialism and Imperialism: Indigenous Resistance on the US/Mexico Border,” recently published in the Journal of Perspectives on Global Development & Technology. She is co-director and producer of the documentary, In the Land of the Ocelot (currently in postproduction), which focuses on the border wall.

MAJ Gerry E. Resmondo Jr.

A native of West Palm Beach, Florida, MAJ Gerald Resmondo is a 2001 graduate of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS) ROTC program, where he was a Distinguished Military Graduate. MAJ Resmondo also earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Fla.

Most recently, he served as the United States Military Academy’s (USMA) Marketing Officer. In July 2017, MAJ Resmondo assumed duty as the Professor of Military Science for the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

MAJ Resmondo’s awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal with Valor, the Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, Army Achievement Award with four Oak Leaf Clusters, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Army
Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, NATO Medal, the United Nations Medal (Macedonia), and the Combat Action Badge.

MAJ Resmondo is married to his wife, Rosita, and has two daughters and one son.

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**Rosalinda Rossow, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC**

Rosalinda Rossow is valued member of the UTRGV School of Nursing. She currently teaches courses in Health Promotions, Pharmacology, and Family Nursing. Ms. Rossow has earned degrees from Pan American University, The University of Texas - Pan American, and Post-Graduate Degrees from The University of Texas Health Science Center – Houston and Texas A&M – Corpus Christi, specializing in Critical Care Nursing. She has been working in the field as a Family Nurse Practitioner since 1992 and as an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Graduate Program at the UTRGV School of Nursing since 2015.

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**Shawn P. Saladin, Ph.D.**

Dr. Shawn P. Saladin is a Professor of Rehabilitation Services and Counseling and the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs with the UTRGV College of Health Affairs. He currently serves as vice president of the Texas School for the Deaf Governing Board and he has served as a board member for the Deaf Abused Women and Children Advocacy Services in Austin, TX. Dr. Saladin publishes and researches in numerous academic areas, including ethics and healthcare, disabilities, and Deaf culture.

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**Gustavo Salinas**

The mission of Adult Protective Services (APS) is to protect older adults and people with disabilities from abuse, neglect and exploitation by investigating and providing or arranging for services as necessary to alleviate or prevent further maltreatment.

Gustavo Salinas has over 19 years of community engagement experience, with 5 years in leadership roles specific to community development, supported by: management of federally-sponsored
projects designed to improve the region’s conditions and quality of life. Currently, he is the Community Engagement Specialist (CES) for the Adult Protective Services South District. As the CES, his responsibilities include community and media relations, working relationships with non-profit, local, state, and federal entities, public awareness activities and marketing campaigns, grant writing, and project design and implementation. Salinas is also charged with maintaining the volunteer and internship program and facilitating logistics for trainings and special events/conferences. Additionally, he serves as the liaison between APS and the political, business, and faith-based communities. Prior to joining APS, he directed various projects for the UTPA Community Engagement Division including: Texas Rural Cooperative Center, Community Outreach Partnership Center, and Minority Business Opportunity Committee.

Gabriel Sanchez

Gabriel Sanchez works at Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid doing outreach and community education on topics including immigration, special education, and LGBTQIA+ issues. This includes providing training to different nonprofits and community organizations on working with gender and sexual diversity and LGBTQIA+ clients and doing outreach with the LBGBTQIA+ community around TRLA services. In the past, Gabriel has also worked with a variety of non-profits and social service organizations that work with the community.

Douglas R. Stoves, Ed.D.

Doug Stoves has a doctorate in Educational Leadership from Texas A&M Corpus Christi, a Master’s in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Superior, and a B.S. in Biology from Northland College. He is a member of numerous professional organizations, including ACPA and NASPA and the Association of University Housing Officers-International. He served as the Dean of Students at the University of Texas Brownsville from December 2013 until August 2015 when it merged to form UTRGV, where he currently serves as the Associate Dean of Student Rights & Responsibilities and Deputy Title IX Coordinator. Dr. Stoves is committed to student-centered, research-based approaches, and he developed the campus Superhero Project as an active bystander project to address issues of gender-based violence at UTRGV. He also serves as the liaison for the Campus Climate Survey project and has developed numerous other education and intervention trainings to address issues in student conduct.

Leila Flores-Torres, M.A., LSSP

Leila currently works as the Assistant Director for UTRGV’s Student Accessibility Services Office. She obtained a degree in Psychology from Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León in Monterrey, México. She earned a Master of Arts degree in School Psychology from the University of Texas - Pan American and is currently working on her dissertation as a Ph.D. candidate in Rehabilitation Counseling. Leila holds a teaching certificate in bilingual education, a License as a Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP) in Texas, and a license as a Clinical Psychologist in México. Leila’s work experience includes working with K-12 students with disabilities as an LSSP and as a special education supervisor, providing mental health
counseling with bilingual and monolingual Spanish-speaking clients, conducting outreach and health education to underserved communities, and teaching undergraduate level courses in the rehabilitation field. Leila has co-authored several research publications related to culturally sensitive interventions in working with Hispanics, attitudes towards people with disabilities, and a book chapter on fears and anxiety in children. Leila has presented extensively nationally and internationally, in the United States, Mexico, India, and Japan. When not working, she enjoys time with family and friends, reading, drinking coffee from different countries, traveling through Mexican indigenous towns, volunteering, and learning from her mother to cultivate the love for plants and gardening.

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**Chase Valenciano, LMSW**

Chase Valenciano is a mental health professional and a Certified Clinical Trauma Specialist. Chase has presented at Texas University and Colleges conference on suicide prevention among Hispanic clients, mental health diagnoses amongst LGBTQ clients, and also on working with gender non-conforming students and leading effective peer-to-peer groups. Chase has experience working with diverse populations that include adolescent males in the juvenile system, foster care children, and individuals with intellectual disabilities. His mission is to help others reach their true potential in life by overcoming past traumas.

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**Amber VanSchuyver, J.D.**

Amber VanSchuyver is an attorney and Team Manager for the Domestic Violence/Family team at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. (TRLA), in Edinburg, Texas. Ms. VanSchuyver works exclusively with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, primarily on the Texas/Mexico border. She provides holistic services for victims in family law, immigration, and economic justice matters. In addition to litigating on behalf of victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, Ms. VanSchuyver conducts trainings on domestic violence victimization and sexual assault civil legal issues for attorneys, law enforcement, counselors, and other domestic violence and sexual assault advocates throughout the state of Texas. Ms. VanSchuyver received her Bachelor of Arts in Latin American Studies, Political
Science and Spanish from the University of Kansas and her Doctorate of Jurisprudence with Honors from The University of Texas School of Law.

Vianca Vieyra, BSW

Vianca Vieyra has been employed as a Prevention Specialist with Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas since the Fall of 2015. Vianca is tasked with representing the Alliance for Drug Abuse Prevention (ADAP) and Uniting Neighbors in Drug Abuse Defense (UNIDAD) coalitions. Both coalitions focus on the prevention of substance abuse by raising awareness and encouraging community collaboration throughout Hidalgo County.

Vianca is a Houston native who received her BA in Social Work from Prairie View A&M University in August, 2014. Vianca is currently a member of the Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas employee wellness committee and volunteers her time as middle school youth leader for Palm Valley Church in Edinburg.

Carlos Villalon Jr., J.D.

The Honorable Carlos Villalon Jr. was appointed as Associate Judge for the Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West on June 4, 2012, and presides over CPS cases in both Hidalgo and Starr Counties. He also serves as a Commissioner on the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families by Supreme Court of Texas. His court participates as one of eight model courts in the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ Implementation Sites Project. Judge Villalon earned his bachelor’s degree in Political Science from the University of Texas-Pan American in 1991, and after teaching middle school students for two years in La Joya, Texas, he completed his post-graduate education at St. Mary’s University-School of Law, where he earned his Doctor of Jurisprudence degree in 1997. His career as an attorney has spanned both the private and public sectors with an emphasis in Child Advocacy, Indigent Representation, Family Law, and Bankruptcy Law. His previous public service includes practice as an Assistant Criminal District Attorney, Assistant Attorney General, and Regional Attorney with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

Tracy Wisdom, LMSW, CCTP

Ms. Tracy Wisdom is a Rio Grande Valley native, raised in La Feria Texas. Ms. Wisdom served in the United States Marine Corps for eight years and is an OIF/OEF combat veteran who was honorably discharged in 2011. During her time in the service she was appointed as the Battalion Uniformed Victim Advocate (UVA) for victims of sexual assault and the suicide prevention and intervention instructor. Ms. Wisdom provided crisis intervention to Marines in emotional distress and was responsible for assisting in securing protective orders, safety planning, organizing emergency assistance, accompanying Marines to
supportive services such as medical, legal/court or family services programs, providing emotional support, and referrals to both military and civilian resources.

Upon completing her military career, Ms. Wisdom graduated with a Masters of Social Work from the University of Southern California with a sub-concentration in Military Culture. Currently, Ms. Wisdom is serving as a Counseling Specialist II for UTRGV, specializing in working with the veteran population, and she recently earned the Certified Clinical Trauma Professional (CCTP) credentials. Ms. Wisdom is also heading a chapter of a national non-profit, Team Red White and Blue (RWB). Team RWB’s mission is to enrich the lives of America’s veterans by connecting them to the community through physical and social events.

Antonio Zarzoza

Antonio Zarzoza is a Master Peace Officer and serves as the Training Officer and Field Training Coordinator for the UTRGV Police Department. He started his law enforcement career in 2000 with the Hidalgo County Sheriff’s Office where he served in several capacities. Zarzoza was recruited by UTPA Police Department in 2013 to start what is now known as the Advanced Law Enforcement Training Center where he serves as the lead instructor. Zarzoza is a Subject Matter Expert in Use of Force, Crisis Intervention, Defensive Tactics and Officer Safety Training. He is an adjunct instructor for the Texas DPS Academy, the US Department of Justice, The UTSP State Academy and the Hidalgo County Sheriff’s Academy.

Among other specialized instructor certifications, Zarzoza is a State certified instructor for the Sexual Assault and Family Violence Special Investigator Program, Advanced Child Abuse Investigator Course, the Basic & Advanced Instructor Certification Course and the Mental Health Peace Officer Certification Course.

Zarzoza’s most recent law enforcement training highlight is his appointment as Master/Core Instructor for the “Below 100” Nationwide Training Initiative where he travels around the US training other law enforcement officers on best practices and strategies for the reduction of Line of Duty Deaths.

Michelle Alvarado
Mujeres Unidas

Dr. Jerome Fischer
Professor in Rehabilitation Studies

Samantha Lopez
Director of International Admissions UTRGV

Frank Martinez
Military & Veterans Success Center

Perla Reyes
Mujeres Unidas

Ana Rodriguez
Superhero Project

Samantha Tello
Mujeres Unidas Intern

Miguel Venegas
Superhero Project
Cynthia M. Jones, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Director of the Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Dr. Cynthia Jones received an undergraduate degree from Creighton University, a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Missouri, and is currently an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. In addition to areas of Professional Ethics, such as Bioethics, Business Ethics, Technology Ethics, and Academic Ethics, Dr. Jones conducts research and publishes on issues of gender, violence, culture, and marginalization. She has extensive experience as a volunteer for domestic violence and rape crisis programs. She served as a board member for five years, as well as vice chair of the Board of Directors, for Mujeres Unidas/Women Together. Along with Dr. Sandra Hansmann, Dr. Anne Stachura, and local community members, Dr. Jones founded the CAVE (Coalition Against Violence & Exploitation) Project in 2011, to bridge the gap between the community and the campus to provide support, promote research, and organize education and prevention programs to address issues of interpersonal violence. She currently serves as the founding director of OVAVP (Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention) and the Gelman Constitutional Scholars Program, and is the past director and co-founder of the university’s ethics center. Her office regularly organizes trainings and prevention and education events, including Art Against Violence, Stand Up Against Violence, ¿Podrias Caminar Una Milla en Tacones?, Take Back the Night, Remember Me: Confronting Violence Against Women in the RGV, and a local exhibit of Project Unbreakable. Dr. Jones served as the Principal Investigator on a Department of Justice/Office on Violence Against Women grant for addressing sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking on campus and she is the current PI on a grant from the Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice Division for organizing a coordinated response and resource team to address violence victimization. She serves pro bono as an expert witness for the Cameron County DA’s Office on domestic/dating violence and is a survivor of domestic violence. She is also the proud mother of three amazing teenagers, Sophia, Jose, and Genevieve.
Priscilla Palacios, MSSW

Program Coordinator, Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention at
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Priscilla Palacios joined The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, formally The University of Texas-Pan American, in May of 2013, as the Program Coordinator for a Department of Justice/Office of Violence Against Women grant. The grant’s main focus was addressing gender-based violence issues on the university campus by providing direct services to victims and survivors. Prior to working at UTRGV, Priscilla was the Sexual Assault Program Coordinator and the Prevention Education Coordinator at Mujeres Unidas/Women Together in Hidalgo County. During her time with the rape crisis center, Priscilla coordinated numerous events, including their annual 5K run/walk “Walk a Mile in her Shoes”, provided educational and training workshops for numerous schools and agencies, and accompanied clients to the local hospital as a sexual assault advocate, serving over 500 clients in her tenure at Mujeres Unidas. During her time at UTRGV, Priscilla has dedicated her work to helping students, staff, and faculty gain the knowledge, education, and resources available to them, not only on the campuses, but also throughout the Rio Grande Valley. Priscilla began her work as a Victim Advocate after obtaining her Bachelors in Social work in 2007 and received her Master’s in Social Work in 2016. Because Priscilla is a childhood survivor of domestic violence, she has dedicated her career to educating, advocating, and empowering those who are or have been victims or survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Priscilla is the proud mother of one daughter, age 17, and three sons, ages 13, 10, & 4.
Numerous resources exist for victims, survivors, and advocates, including:


Info for each state at: Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network at https://rainn.org/publicpolicy/laws-inyour-state

Stalking resources: http://victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center

General resources for crime victims: http://www.ovc.gov/help/

Information on crime reporting: https://ucr.fbi.gov/

Information on Title IX and Higher Education/K-12 requirements via the Department of Education: http://www.ed.gov/category/keyword/title-ix

Clery Act (for colleges and universities): http://clerycenter.org/

Information on “healthy” relationships: https://www.joinonelove.org/ http://www.loveisrespect.org/

Information on legal needs for sexual assault victims: http://www.victimrights.org/about-vrlc

Local Resources:

UTRGV: www.utrgv.edu/OVAVP

Cameron County:
  Harlingen: http://www.familycrisisctr.org/
  Brownsville: http://www.fowinc.com/
  Cameron County DA: http://www.cameroncountyda.com/Victim-Assistance.htm

Hidalgo and Starr Counties: http://mujeresunidas.org/

Texas Resources:

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA): http://taasa.org/

Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV): http://tcfv.org/
Remember Me:  
Confronting Violence Against Women in the Rio Grande Valley

October 1st marks the start of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This is a time to connect those who suffer from domestic violence and those who work to end domestic violence, celebrate those who have survived domestic violence, and especially take time to remember and mourn those whose lives were lost as a result of domestic violence.

Domestic violence can happen to anyone. In the United States, 1 in 4 women have suffered severe physical violence from an intimate partner. Every year, the Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention at UTRGV remembers victims of domestic violence in the Rio Grande Valley with our Remember Me project, where we raise awareness about those who have lost their lives to domestic violence in our region.

This year we partnered with Professor David Carren from the Theatre Department to develop a documentary with audio recordings narrating the stories of 10 women who were murdered by a current or former intimate partner. Those who have lost their lives to domestic violence cannot tell us about themselves, or what happened to them, and so this project gives them the voice that they no longer have.

Trigger Warning: Violence

Please be advised that these narratives consist of deeply personal, emotional, and tragic events that have resulted in death.

For the past five years, the CAVE (Coalition Against Violence & Exploitation) initiative, and now OVAVP (Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention), has been hosting the "Remember Me: Confronting Violence Against Women in the RGV" project. Remember Me features vinyl body outlines and crime scene tape as a powerful visual representation of gender-based violence leading to murder. Remember Me is a variant of the international campaign Silent Witness, which is described as follows.

Silent Witness International is the leading voice that honors the lives of domestic violence homicide victims through family support, community connections, and advocacy for change. Many women and men die each year in acts of domestic violence in the United States. Each one has a story. Join our efforts to end this tragedy. Because we need to remember their stories. We need to remember their names.

Narratives available at:  
www.utrgv.edu/OVAVP
OVAVP offers a sincere “Thank You!” to all those who made Remember Me possible, including:

Scriptwriter & Director:  
David Carren  
UTRGV Department of Theatre

Voice Actors:  
Clarissa Rivera  
Naomi Cortez  
Jackqueline Alejos  
Daniela Pena Gonzalez  
Luisa Perez  
Angelica Castillo  
Julietta Rivera  
Veronica Chavarria  
Sarah Tamez

Recording and Vocal Coaching:  
Prithvi Palimar

Art Creation and Design:  
Erika Balogh  
Sarah Tamez  
Heaven Mendoza  
Travis Trapp

Research:  
James Severn  
Alma Luevanos  
Priscilla Palacios  
Cynthia Jones
Special Thanks to:

Mrs. Maria Esperanza Gelman

OVAVP
Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention

taasa
Texas Association Against Sexual Assault

Police
University of Texas System

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Women Together
Mujeres Unidas