



Courtesy photos

In a screen grab from the virtual symposium, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Assistant Director for Student Rights and Responsibility Alexandra Hughes speaks on institutional racism and controlling the language we use.

## Hidalgo ISD invests in mental health

F.A.C.E. Program helping families navigate changes

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

The world has been facing many changes and mental health is more important than ever.

Hidalgo Independent School District's F.A.C.E. (Family And Community Engagement) Program is taking the time to consider how the community feels about the "new normal."

Amando Gonzalez a licensed professional counselor for Hidalgo ISD and one of the F.A.C.E. program's leaders, he stressed the importance of emotional and mental health.

"COVID-19 is a very real issue we're facing," Gonzalez said. "It's our job to help the community remain focused and to adjust. It's normal to feel some discomfort with the uncertainty. Students are becoming more and more stressed with the transition from learning hands on to completely online. Parents are taking the load as they've become not only care providers but teachers as well in a sense because they're the immediate adult that's consistently there."

"We do our best to let the community know that they're not just students and parents they're family. It's sad to say, but the students, the parents, everyone is experiencing death around them. They're having a family member who passed away from the virus or somebody they know has passed from it. It's affecting us all in the worst kind of ways and it takes a toll on the body and the mind."

"We're always a phone call away and have our frequent F.A.C.E. Institutes to show the community that we're there for them," Gonzalez concluded. "We send out frequent newsletters and links which we're able to monitor and the parents really take advantage, we get many clicks and visits every day."

# UTRGV symposium series: Changing narratives and creating inclusivity

BY SOL MEZTLI GARCIA  
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's political science department has launched a new platform for women to discuss politics, race and gender: a virtual panel series called "Say Her Name."

Panelists for the series' first episode, which was broadcasted live Thursday, were former Dallas County Sheriff and Gubernatorial Candidate Lupe Valdez and UTRGV Assistant Director for Student Rights and Responsibility Alexandra Hughes.

The event was moderated by UTRGV political science assistant professors, Sylvia Gonzalez-Gorman and Natasha Altema-McNeely.

The discussion began by asking the panelists about the challenges they met while fostering a more inclusive environment at their work.

Valdez answered by stating she had to fight the system as sheriff, including coworkers that had been abusing inmates.

"When I had to bring them up for murder, half the officers were mad at me, and the other half were cheering me on," she said. "It's a painful situation, but nothing good is ever done simply."



Former Dallas County Sheriff and Gubernatorial Candidate Lupe Valdez discusses the importance of holding those who abuse power accountable during the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's newest symposium on politics, race and gender.

Hughes agreed change requires time and creating inclusivity in higher education means looking at the history of education, such as universities that wouldn't allow women to attend until the 1970s. By understanding how education has been historically exclusive, it makes it more important to evaluate if current education continues to exclude.

"One of the troubles that I've had is really saying in our curriculum and the way that we're even teaching things," Hughes said. "Such as how to research, how to even study

— are we doing it from a very Eurocentric white lens? What does that look like in our roles as educators, for our students in K to 12?"

Hughes added she's also had to confront people who don't believe students face institutional racism or other exclusivity-related issues, such as problems with representation for students in faculties.

"Even at our institution, our institution is 89.7% Hispanic-Latino serving," Hughes said. "That's what we're classified as an institution, but if you look

at the amount of professors, and then if you look at staff, only about half — a little under half — of the demographic of professors match that of the students," she said.

Valdez then discussed that while working to become sheriff, there were few Hispanics, African Americans and women in management. To combat this, she sought a more equal number of men and women of different ethnicities in her staff.

"I made a whole bunch of people deputies: African American, Hispanic, Asian, females. I made

them qualify, and if they didn't qualify, we'd tutor them," she said. "We wanted to get them in there (and) make sure we represent the community."

In turn, Hughes said all issues that Black and brown communities face in higher education are the same issues they found anywhere else.

"If we're looking at the issues that are impacting black and brown people in higher (education), it's the same things that we're fighting for. We're

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## Donna ISD swears in its Board of Trustees

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

The Donna Independent School District Board of Trustees held a swearing-in ceremony for the newly elected and re-elected board members during a special board meeting Nov. 12 at the Bennie LaPrade Stadium.

Taking the oath of office were newcomers Fernando Castillo, Jose L. Valdez and Jose Rogelio Reyna as well as incumbent Eva Castillo Watts, who was re-elected to serve another four years.

Each one was sworn-in by state

Rep. Armando Martinez, District 39 (D-Weslaco). They, along with current Trustees Dr. Maricela Valdez, Col. Roberto Perez and David De Los Rios will make up the new school board.

During the meeting, the school board also elected new leadership appointing Valdez as president, De Los Rios as vice president and Valdez as secretary.

The incoming Board of Trustees underwent the first of a series of Lone Star Governance trainings Nov. 13 and 14, offered by the Texas Education Agency.



Courtesy photo

Pictured from left are Board Member Eva Castillo Watts, Board Member Fernando Castillo, Superintendent Dr. Hafedh Azaiez, Board Member Dr. Maricela Valdez, Board Member Jose L. Valdez, State Representative Armando Martinez, Board Member David De Los Rios, Board Member Jose Rogelio Reyna, and Board Member Col. Roberto Perez.

# McAllen High students advance in All-State Mariachi process

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Four students plus one alternate from McAllen High School have advanced in the TMEA All-State Mariachi process.

This is the first year for the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) to hold All-

State Mariachi auditions. The students who advanced to the second round include:

>> Jesús Villegas (1st Chair Trumpet)

>> Ashley Treviño (1st Chair Violin)

>> Natalie Carmona (1st Chair Guitar)

>> Austin Rosález (1st Chair

Vihuela)

>> Daniel López (4th Chair Trumpet/1st Alternate)

Additionally, McAllen High also earned the most first chair spots in its region which extends from Roma to PSJA.

“Students and directors have been working hard for the last few months in prepa-

ration for this challenging audition process that involves not only being phenomenal instrumentalists on their respective instruments but also involves them being proficient vocalists,” McAllen High Mariachi Oro Director Alex Trevino said. “Mariachi is the only music division in the

state that requires their students to be outstanding on both instruments and vocals.”

TMEA Region XV is the biggest and most competitive Region in Texas spanning 15 school districts, at least 35 schools with mariachi programs and hundreds of students.

## SYMPOSIUM

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advocating for, even outside of higher (education),” Hughes said.

“Things like affordable housing, issues with food security, reproductive justice challenges, the prison industrial complex. Everything is interconnected.”

Valdez was then asked about the criminal justice component, which discussed factors such as systematic oppression, racism and classism — these were subjects that served as the platform during her candidacy for governor.

Altema-McNeely asked, “How do we reconcile this with the killings of women of color, such as Breonna Taylor, who was killed in Louisville, Kentucky, Sandra Bland, who was killed here in Texas, Vanessa Guillen, who was also killed in Texas and many other women?”

Valdez’s immediate answer: “Accountability, and who’s at the top?”

The former gubernatorial nominee stressed the importance of voting and the necessity of removing officers “that come in as warriors, not as guardians.”

“I’ve heard people say, ‘You can’t change anything by voting.’ Yes, you can,” she said. “The people you put as a DA, the people you put in as sheriff, the people you put in as commissioners, they have a lot of decisions to make.”

Asked what her strategy has been to help the Latino community better understand the significance of the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, Vanessa Guillen and other women that have been killed by law enforcement, Hughes explained that the system is doing what it was meant to do.

“We have to recognize that this system was not built for people of color here. People often say to me, ‘The system’s broken.’ I say ‘No, it’s not. It’s doing exactly what it was designed to do,’” Hughes recounted. “If we’re looking at the founding of things, and the systems and the laws in our country, if we look at even the founding of police, they were originally slave patrol, right?”

Since the Rio Grande Valley is “geographically isolated,” Hughes said she has seen many Valley residents that do not recognize their privilege that police officers look like them. Because of that lack of recognition, they may not understand those who face different situations.

“When ... your police officers look like you...When you see (that), it makes so much of a difference. It really does, and it’s that difference that, unfortunately, people cannot necessarily understand,” the assistant director said.

Changing the language used can express the systematic impacts that racism has had, Hughes said.

“Instead of slaves, what if we said hostages? Instead of slave owners, what if we said human traffickers? Slave catchers at the time, that was police. Plantations were death camps,” she said.

“When we change the language that we use, the significance of those events and the impact systematically on our country, makes a difference.”

As the symposium

came to a closing, the virtual audience could ask final questions to either panelist.

Valdez was asked what progress she had seen in Texas law enforcement regarding race and ethnicity and how those situations differed in areas where Hispanics or Latinos were the dominant geographic.

Valdez referenced some of her previous work that helped inmates secure a job after their sentence and said those who are part of the community that are elected in leadership positions know what issues are prevalent in that community.

“The demographics do change where the majority is Hispanic, because hopefully, they will also elect Hispanic people to get the job done,” she said. “The Rio Grande [Valley], your area, is one of the best examples. A lot of the sheriffs there ... are part of the community.”

Hughes was then asked which resources do students have the most difficulty accessing this year and how race and ethnicity contribute to that difficulty.

Hughes answered because of COVID-19, students are facing many struggles, starting with financial costs for basic technology, but also food security struggles and safety at home. A lot of these issues are often tied to socioeconomic status, which is then tied to race, she said.

“You have this added layer of now having to get through what’s going on racially in this country on top of what we’re talking about with COVID and everything else,” Hughes said.

Gonzalez-Gorman concluded the first series of the symposium by thanking the panelists for speaking on race, gender and law enforcement.

“The takeaway from this first series is that change is not easy, especially when you’re trying to achieve equity for communities of color,” she said.

Changing narratives, creating inclusivity in UTRGV symposium series

When women are left out of the narrative, it’s up to them to raise their voices and demand to be heard. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley’s political science department is sharing those voices in its new symposium series on politics, race and gender.

The first episode in this series, “Say Her Name,” was broadcast live Thursday and moderated by UTRGV political science assistant professors, Sylvia Gonzalez-Gorman and Natasha Altema-McNeely.

Its panelists were former Dallas County Sheriff and Gubernatorial Candidate Lupe Valdez and UTRGV Assistant Director for Student Rights and Responsibility Alexandra Hughes.

The discussion began by asking what challenges the panelists had met while creating more inclusive environments in their work.

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requires time and creating inclusivity in higher education means looking at the history of education, such as universities that wouldn’t allow women to attend until the 1970s. By understanding how education has been historically exclusive, it makes it more important to evaluate if current education continues to exclude.

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“Even at our institution, our institution is 89.7% Hispanic-Latino serving. That’s what we’re classified as an institution, but if you look at the amount of professors, and then if you look at staff, only about half—a little under half—of the demographic of professors match that of the students,” she said.

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In turn, Hughes said all issues that black and brown communities face in higher education are the same issues they face anywhere else.

“If we’re looking at the issues that are impacting black and brown people in higher ed, it’s the same things that we’re fighting for. We’re advocating for, even outside of higher ed, ... things like affordable housing, issues with food security, reproductive justice challenges, the prison industrial complex,” Hughes said. “Everything is interconnected.”

Valdez was then asked about the criminal justice component, which discussed factors such as systematic oppression, racism and classism, that had been part of her platform during her candidacy for governor.

Altema-McNeely asked, “How do we reconcile this with the killings of women of color, such as Breonna Taylor, who was killed in Louisville, Kentucky, Sandra Bland, who was killed here in Texas, Vanessa Guillen, who was also killed in Texas and many other women?”

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people you put in as sheriff, the people you put in as commissioners, they have a lot of decisions to make.”

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*Sol Meztli Garcia is a student at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.*

# STRONGER

# Together.



Now more than ever, staying connected counts. As your local newspaper, we are committed to helping bridge the gaps created by the COVID-19 pandemic. From neighborhood business re-openings and local news to virtual events and ongoing support services, check in with us daily to stay connected to your community.

Let’s be here for each other.

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