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Vol. 7
Issue 3

Vackar CHRONICLES



University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Robert C. Vackar College of
Business and Entrepreneurship

Welcome

As a new semester begins, we reflect on the accomplishments of 2024–2025—a year shaped by your dedication and excellence. Your teaching, mentoring, and service have driven our college forward, creating a culture of purpose, professionalism, and pride. Let’s carry this momentum into the new term, supporting one another and continuing to foster learning and leadership. Thank you for all you do, and here’s to a successful semester ahead.

Inside This Issue

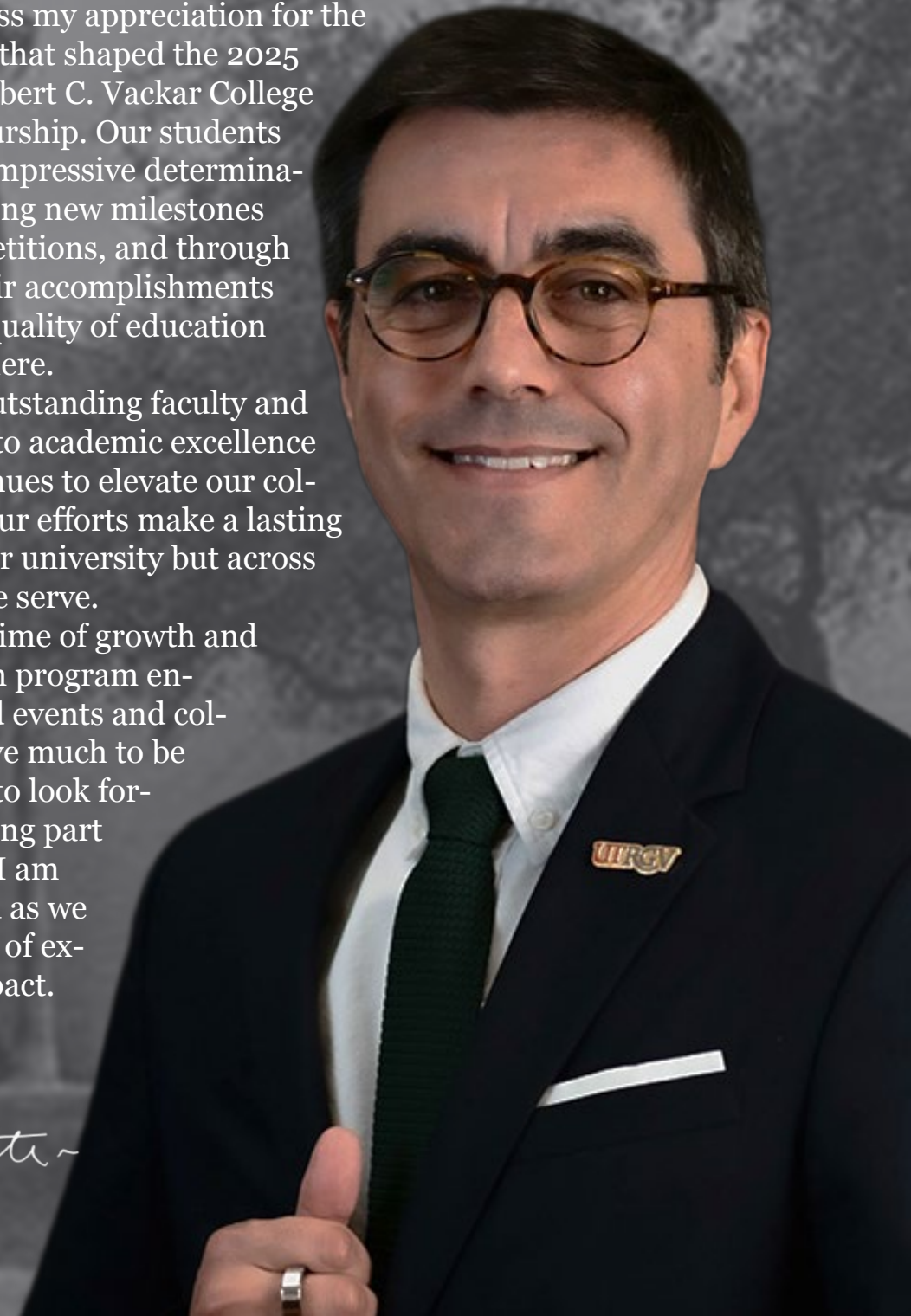
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Dean’s Message

As we prepare to embark on a new semester, I want to take a moment to express my appreciation for the dedication and hard work that shaped the 2025 academic season at the Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship. Our students continue to demonstrate impressive determination and creativity, achieving new milestones in the classroom, in competitions, and through innovative initiatives. Their accomplishments speak volumes about the quality of education and support they receive here.

I also want to thank our outstanding faculty and staff, whose commitment to academic excellence and student success continues to elevate our college and its reputation. Your efforts make a lasting impact, not only within our university but across the broader community we serve.

This semester has been a time of growth and forward momentum. From program enhancements to student-led events and collaborative projects, we have much to be proud of—and even more to look forward to. Thank you for being part of our continued journey. I am excited for what lies ahead as we build on our shared vision of excellence, innovation, and impact.



This study examines how shared motivations between crowdfunding founders and backers—rooted in basic human values—impact the success of reward-based campaigns. Analyzing Kickstarter data, researchers focused on four values: self-transcendence, self-enhancement, openness to change, and conservation. They found that value alignment generally improves success, especially in openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation, though excessive alignment may weaken this effect. In contrast, alignment in self-enhancement consistently boosts success. Linguistic conformity also helps but can dilute the effect of certain values. The study highlights how shared values shape crowdfunding outcomes.

[Link to article](#)

Leader state emotions in organizations



AI and autonomous technologies are reshaping how organizations create value. A new framework outlines how key features—autonomy, learning, complexity, and physical presence—affect what intelligent machines can offer. Value isn't one-size-fits-all. It depends on how people interact with these technologies and the context in which they're used. While intelligent machines can enhance performance and decision-making, they also introduce new challenges. The framework helps leaders, researchers, and policy-makers weigh these trade-offs and apply AI more thoughtfully in organizational settings.

[Link to article](#)

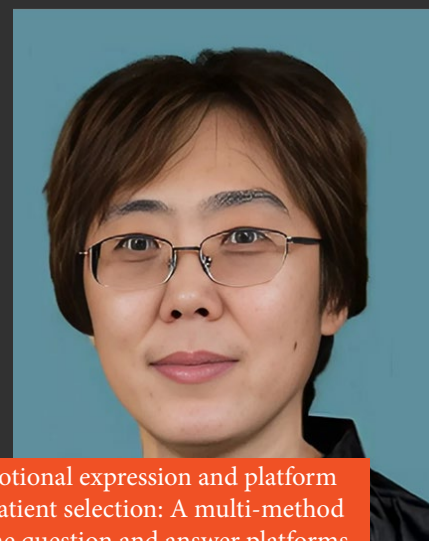
A Review of Artificial Intelligence, Algorithms, and Robots Through the Lens of Stakeholder Theory

Michael Matthews
Assistant Professor
Management

On health Q&A websites, patients without medical training often struggle to choose which doctor's response to trust. This study explored how emotional cues—like empathy and encouragement—affect patient choices. Using platform data and an experimental study, researchers found that doctors who express warmth and understanding are more likely to be selected by patients. The research also showed that default, pre-written responses can influence choices, sometimes making doctors seem less engaged. Patients were more likely to trust responses that made them feel empowered and personally understood, while feeling ignored or treated generically led to disengagement. These findings highlight the need for emotionally intelligent communication and thoughtful platform design to improve digital healthcare experiences for patients.

[Link to article](#)

Effects of emotional expression and platform prompts on patient selection: A multi-method study on online question and answer platforms



Bin Wang
Chair/ Professor
Information Systems

Peer Development Groups (PDGs) are small groups of professionals with similar roles who meet regularly to support one another's personal and leadership development. While these groups are gaining traction in professional settings, their use has often been inconsistent and loosely defined. This research brings clarity by outlining what makes PDGs effective—from shared status and open dialogue to a flexible, supportive structure. It also introduces a new framework that connects the key elements of PDGs to meaningful outcomes, offering useful guidance for both researchers and organizations. The findings highlight PDGs as a practical, research-backed way to foster mutual growth in the workplace.

[Link to article](#)

Unveiling the nature of peer development groups: A systematic review, conceptual framework, and research pathways



S.R. Aurora
Assistant Professor
Management



Achieving Reward-Based Crowdfunding Project Success: An Examination of Value Congruence

Success on platforms like Kickstarter depends not just on ideas, but on connection. This study shows that shared values between founders and backers—like openness, ambition, and empathy—can boost campaign success. However, too much similarity may reduce that effect, except when it comes to personal ambition, which consistently helps. Using similar language also improves outcomes, though it can lessen the impact of shared values. The takeaway: connect through values and language, but avoid overdoing the sameness.

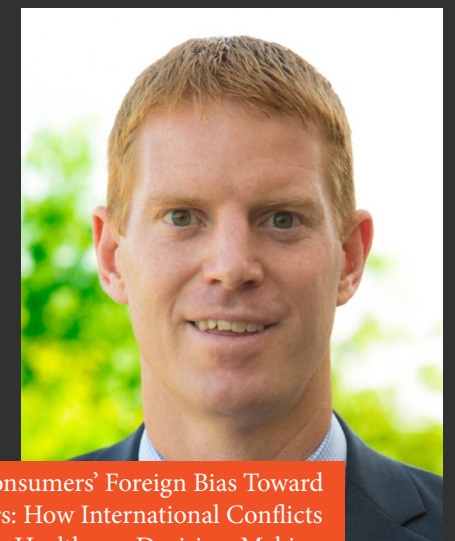
[Link to article](#)

Francis Andoh-Baidoo
Professor
Information Systems

Healthcare shortages have led many countries, including the U.S., to rely heavily on foreign professionals. But new research shows that international conflicts can influence how patients view providers from certain countries. When a conflict is in the news, patients may—often unconsciously—see providers from the opposing nation as riskier, making them more likely to switch doctors or leave negative reviews. This “foreign conflict bias” highlights how global events can affect local healthcare interactions and offers important lessons for building trust and reducing bias in patient care.

[Link to article](#)

Reexamining Consumers' Foreign Bias Toward Service Providers: How International Conflicts Shape Consumer Healthcare Decision-Making



Peter Magnusson
Chair/Professor
Marketing

HIGH Impact Publications

Haiyan Zhou <i>Professor</i> <i>Accountancy</i> Link to article	Levent Kutlu <i>Associate Professor</i> <i>Economics</i> Link to article	Armando Lopez-Velasco <i>Assistant Professor</i> <i>Economics</i> Link to article	Andre Mollick <i>Professor / Associate Dean</i> <i>Economics</i> Link to article	Firat A. Fuat <i>Professor</i> <i>Marketing</i> Link to article Link to article	Peter Magnusson <i>Chair/ Professor</i> <i>Marketing</i> Link to article	Xiaojing Sheng <i>Professor</i> <i>Marketing</i> Link to article	Arturo Vasquez-Parraga <i>Professor</i> <i>Marketing</i> Link to article
Jean-Baptiste Tondji <i>Associate Professor</i> <i>Economics</i> Link to article	Incheol Kim <i>Associate Professor</i> <i>Finance</i> Link to article	Francis Andoh-Baidoo <i>Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article Link to article Link to article	Sunyoung Cho <i>Associate Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article	Monika Rabarison <i>Professor</i> <i>Finance</i> Link to article	Chiquan Guo <i>Professor</i> <i>Marketing</i> Link to article	Xuan Wang <i>Associate Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article	Geng Sun <i>Assistant Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article
Ehsan Ghasemi <i>Assistant Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article	Ahasan Harun <i>Assistant Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article	Murad Moqbel <i>Associate Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article	Jun Sun <i>Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article Link to article	Leon Schjoedt <i>Assistant Professor</i> <i>International Business and Entrepreneurship</i> Link to article	Mark Kroll <i>Professor</i> <i>International Business and Entrepreneurship</i> Link to article	Wanrong Hou <i>Associate Professor</i> <i>Management</i> Link to article	Sibin Wu <i>Professor</i> <i>Management</i> Link to article
Bin Wang <i>Chair/ Professor</i> <i>Information Systems</i> Link to article Link to article	Sibin Wu <i>Professor</i> <i>Management</i> Link to article	Deniz Atik <i>Associate Professor</i> <i>Marketing</i> Link to article Link to article	Sunaina Chugani <i>Assistant Professor</i> <i>Marketing</i> Link to article	Debjani Ghosh <i>Lecturer I</i> <i>Management</i> Link to article	Jorge Gonzalez <i>Professor</i> <i>Management</i> Link to article	Richard Rodriguez <i>Part-Time Lecturer</i> <i>Management</i> Link to article	

Faculty Recognitions



Dr. Azucena Herrera Honored with UTRGV Teaching Excellence Award

Congratulations to Dr. Azucena Herrera, Clinical Assistant Professor of Management, on being selected as the UTRGV 2024–2025 Teaching Excellence Award winner! Officially recognized on May 8, this honor highlights her dedication, talent, and impactful presence in the classroom. Her commitment to teaching excellence continues to inspire students and colleagues across the university. In addition to this prestigious recognition, Dr. Herrera also represented RCVCOBE in the Spring 2025 B3 Library Research Guides initiative, led by the Office of Bilingual Integration and the Library. She contributed to the development of Spanish, bilingual, and culturally relevant business resources—now available through the UTRGV Library—to support B3 teaching and research with cultural and academic intentionality. Thank you, Dr. Herrera, for your outstanding contributions and for continuing to elevate RCVCOBE and the UTRGV community!

Dr. Elisa Taveras-Pena Receives Prestigious Research Fellowships



Dr. Elisa Taveras-Pena, Assistant Professor of Economics, received two nationally competitive fellowships recognizing her contributions to applied microeconomics and research on economic well-being in Hispanic communities. She was awarded the REStat Fellowship to attend the NBER Summer Institute, where she participated in the Labor Studies and Children and Families Workshops in July 2025. She was also named a fellow by the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families, receiving support for her research on multi-generational households and Hispanic mothers' labor market outcomes. Congratulations to Dr. Taveras-Pena on these well-deserved honors!



Dr. Reto Felix Receives Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award for Spring 2026

Dr. Reto Felix, Associate Professor of Marketing, has been selected for a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award to spend four months at the University of Málaga (UMA) in Spain. During the Spring 2026 semester, he will collaborate with faculty in UMA's Department of Economics and Business Administration, contributing to both teaching and research initiatives. Congratulations to Dr. Felix on this well-deserved honor!

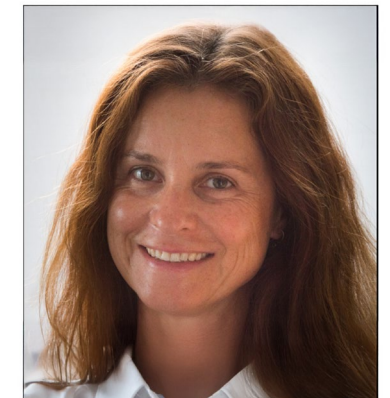


Dr. Michael Abebe Co-Edits Research Handbook Featuring Contribution by Ph.D. Student Nowmi Nowrin

We are excited to share that The Research Handbook on Turnaround Strategies, co-edited by Dr. Michael Abebe, Professor of Management, has been published by Edward Elgar Publishers in April 2025. This project, which began in Fall 2022, is a peer-reviewed systematic review of the latest research on organizational decline and turnaround. The handbook features contributions from top scholars across six countries — Ghana, Finland, India, Spain, the Netherlands, and Switzerland — in addition to the United States. A special congratulations to Ph.D. student of Management, Nowmi Nowrin for her chapter contribution to this important work!

Dr. Deniz Atik Receives Prestigious Research Award

Congratulations to Dr. Deniz Atik, Associate Professor of Marketing, for receiving the Literati Award from the Journal of Social Marketing in 2024. She was recognized for her co-authored publication with Zeynep Ozdamar Ertekin titled “The restless desire for the new versus sustainability: the pressing need for social marketing in the fashion industry.”



Recognizing Dr. Adoh-Baidoo's Scholarly Service to CADFP



Dr. Francis Andoh-Baidoo, Professor of Information Systems, was recognized for his outstanding service in reviewing applications for the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program (CADFP) in Fall 2024. His expertise supported the evaluation of project proposals and scholar applications aimed at fostering collaboration between African-born academics in North America and institutions in Africa. His contributions helped strengthen curriculum development, research partnerships, and graduate student mentoring across countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Congratulations to Dr. Andoh-Baidoo for his impactful work in advancing global academic partnerships!



Honoring Excellence in Global Engagement

UTRGV proudly announces Mr. Michael Flores, Professor of Marketing, as the recipient of the 2025 International Study Programs Faculty Award (ISP-FA). This honor recognizes significant contributions to teaching, research, and service that advance global engagement. Mr. Flores has developed and led multiple successful study abroad programs, demonstrating exceptional recruiting, planning, and dedication. As RCVCOBE Study Abroad Faculty Liaison, he supports faculty in program development, organizes study abroad fairs, assists students, and provides onboarding support for first-time study abroad leaders. His efforts extend beyond RCVCOBE, strengthening education abroad opportunities across all UTRGV disciplines.



Dr. Tondji Joins Mentoring Program for NSF Grant Success

Dr. Jean-Baptiste Tondji, Associate Professor of Economics, received a grant from a mentoring program to boost NSF grant applications from faculty at Minority-Serving Institutions. The program is conducted by investigators from Spelman College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dr. Tondji is among the six mentees selected for the program's third cohort. During this one-year program, they will receive valuable feedback on their NSF proposals. The institutions of mentees received funding for release time in the fall semester of 2024 to support extra attention to proposal development. We wish Dr. Tondji all the best in this research endeavor.

Program Details are available here.



Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Xiaojing Sheng

We are delighted to share the exciting news that Dr. Xiaojing Sheng has been appointed as the new PhD Program Director for the Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship.

Dr. Sheng brings with her a wealth of academic experience and a longstanding commitment to excellence in research, teaching, and service. She earned her PhD in Business Administration (Marketing) from the University of Tennessee – Knoxville in 2009 and joined the University of Texas–Pan American (now UTRGV) later that same year. Since then, she has steadily built a distinguished academic career, culminating in her promotion to Professor of Marketing in 2021.

Throughout her tenure at the College, Dr. Sheng has made significant and lasting contributions. Her work as a scholar has been both prolific and impactful, particularly in the areas of Service Research and Tourism and Travel Research. Her research has not only contributed to advancing knowledge in her field but has also elevated the visibility and scholarly reputation of the College on a national level.

In addition to her research accomplishments, Dr. Sheng is a passionate and effective educator. She has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to student success, mentoring graduate students and fostering an environment of academic rigor and curiosity. Her leadership style is characterized by collaboration, vision, and a clear dedication to the long-term growth of our academic programs.

In her new role as PhD Program Director, Dr. Sheng will take the lead in advancing the strategic priorities of our doctoral program. Her goals will include promoting high-quality academic research, supporting timely degree completion—with a particular emphasis on reducing time-to-degree closer to the four-year mark—and enhancing student support and mentorship. She will also work closely with faculty and administration to further develop the program's national profile and reputation as a center for cutting-edge business scholarship.

We are confident that under Dr. Sheng's leadership, the PhD program will continue to thrive and evolve in alignment with the College's research mission and commitment to academic excellence.

Please join us in congratulating Dr. Xiaojing Sheng on this well-deserved appointment. We look forward to the continued growth and success of our PhD program under her capable direction.

Popular Press Mentions

Dr. Geng Sun

Best Reviewer Award, Decision Sciences Journal

Dr. Pingshu Li

Best Reviewer of the Year (2024) award for Human Resource Management

[Link to article](#)

Dr. Xuan Wang

NIH AIM-AHEAD Fellow

Dr. Michael Abebe

[Link to article](#)

Dr. Francis Kofi Andoh-Baidoo

UTRGV Distinguished Guest for International Education Week

Dr. Chiquan Guo

[Link to article](#)

[Link to article](#)

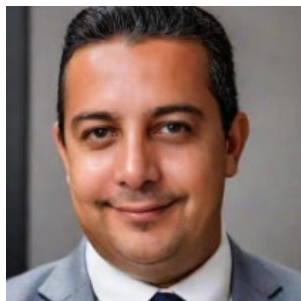
PhD Researchers Breaking Through with Journal Publications



Haidar, M.
Business Strategy and
the Environment



Sangboon, K.
Journal of the
International Council for
Small Business



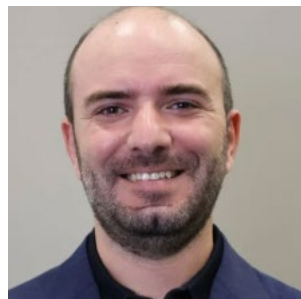
Faress, F.
Journal on Innovation
and Sustainability RISUS



Alam, M.
Information and
Computer Security



Raji, Mustafa



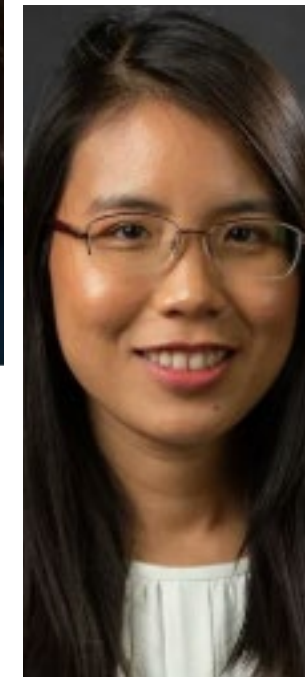
Yuri Martirosyan

International Marketing Review

Celebrating our PhD Graduates New Positions Await this Fall



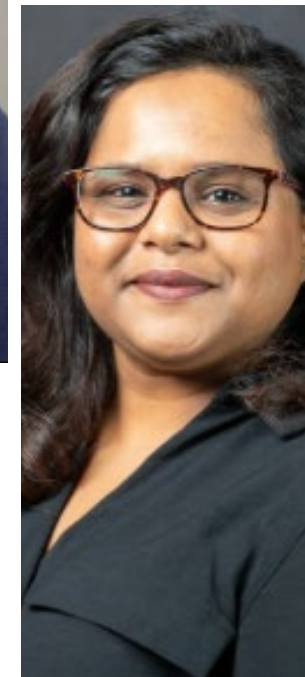
Solmaz Batebi
Assistant Teaching
Professor
University of
Washington Bothell
Bothell,
Washington



Gia Han Doan
Visiting Assistant
Professor
Business
Hendrix College
Conway, Arkansas



Yuri Martirosyan
Assistant Professor
Marketing
The University
of Akron
Akron, Ohio



Maliha Alam
Visiting Assistant
Professor
Miami
University in Ohio
Oxford, Ohio



Khondoker Hossain
Assistant Professor
Central Connecticut
State University
New Britain,
Connecticut

PhD Students with Conference
Acceptances



RCVCOBE Celebrates Excellence at Annual Awards Ceremony 2024-2025



On May 15, 2025, the Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship hosted its annual Awards Luncheon, celebrating the achievements and contributions of its faculty, staff, and PhD students. Faculty were recognized for excellence in teaching, research, and service, while staff were honored for their dedication and commitment to the college’s mission. The luncheon also highlighted the accomplishments of PhD students, whose scholarship and leadership represent the future of business research and education. It was a meaningful occasion that reflected both the pride and community spirit that defined RCVCOBE.



PhD Awards

Yuri Martirosyan MD Ismail Haidar
Solmaz Batebi Maliha Alam
MD Ismail Haidar Taiwo Abraham
Xuan Wang

Outstanding Faculty of the Year Awards

Deborah Gonzales Leon Schjoedt, PhD
Andre Mollick, PhD Xuan Wang, PhD
Ghada Ismail, PhD Reto Felix, PhD
Hale Kaynak, PhD

Staff Awards

Chong Hong Tan Annabel Muniz
Persephonie Martinez

Faculty Awards

Reto Felix, PhD Jennifer Welbourne, PhD
Maria Leonard Michael Abebe, PhD



Making a Difference: Societal Impact at RCVCOBE

At the Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship (RCVCOBE), our mission goes beyond academic excellence—we are committed to driving positive change in our community and beyond. As part of our alignment with the AACSB's 2020 accreditation standards, we actively pursue initiatives that generate meaningful societal impact at local, regional, national, and international levels.

Focus Areas for Impact

Guided by the unique socio-economic landscape of the Rio Grande Valley and our strategic mission, RCVCOBE is targeting two key areas:

- Sustainable Economic Growth and Development
- Community Health and Well-being

RCVCOBE strives to prepare students for workforce success, support entrepreneurial ventures, and address pressing community health issues—all while collaborating closely with local businesses, startups, and civic leaders.

Academic Year 2024-2025



The VIP Idea Lab Dr. Sylvia Robles and CEO

The VIP Idea Lab at UTRGV's RCVCOBE addresses a critical gap in entrepreneurship education by integrating Sustainable Design Thinking (SDT) and the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) framework. Launched in 2023, it provides an immersive, interdisciplinary experience for students, faculty, staff, and local entrepreneurs, promoting inclusive innovation, human-centered problem-solving, and community impact.

People impacted by this program: 743 to date

March 2025



Trade Wars on the Horizon: What Could Happen Next? Drs. Maroula Khraiche, Jean-Baptiste Tondji, and Salvador Contreras

Round table discussion on tariffs and their potential impact on the Rio Grande Valley. The webinar was hosted by the RGV Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

People impacted by this program: 30

October 2024 - 2025



I-Corps Dr. Russell Adams

Conduct customer discovery training and field exercises to improve the commercializability of innovations

Economic Impact: \$50,000
People impacted by this program: 80

July – August 2025



Harnessing interdisciplinary research to address border and economic issues Dr. Jean-Baptiste Tondji

Border and economic studies workshop at an international conference in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from July 28 to 30, 2025, on the theme "Mathematics for a Contemporary World." The primary purpose of the academic event and outreach activities is to disseminate the research's outcomes, collaborate with other researchers, provide training to undergraduate and graduate students, and build long-term collaboration between institutions. 100 people attended, including students, early-stage faculty, and educators.

Economic Impact: Not measured
People impacted by this program: 100

August - December 2025



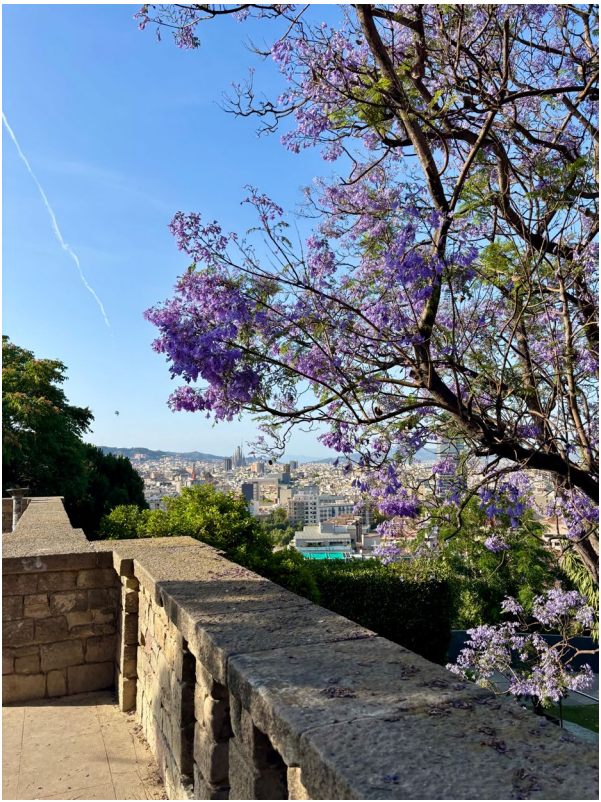
Enacting Solutions Prof. Maria Leonard and Enactus

Enacting Solutions is a pilot program funded by Vantage Bank that matches small businesses in the City of Edinburg, TX with students from the Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship to complete a capacity building project at the business through paid micro-internships. This initiative is done in partnership with the Edinburg Chamber of Commerce and the UTRGV Career Center. 15 businesses are currently participating.

Economic Impact: \$8,000
People impacted by this program: 30

Vackar Student Scholars Program Celebrates Successful Cohort Completion

The third cohort of the Vackar Student Scholars (VSS) Program concluded with a poster presentation and recognition ceremony, highlighting the impactful research conducted by students and their faculty mentors. The VSS program offers competitively selected undergraduate and master’s students the opportunity to engage in faculty-mentored research throughout the academic year, supported by a scholarship stipend. This year’s cohort included seven undergraduate and two master’s students, with projects covering topics such as AI, marketing, fiscal policy, and economic development. Participants also completed workshops on research fundamentals, including literature reviews, IRB protocols, and statistical analysis, and were introduced to academic career pathways. The program is coordinated by Dr. Jennifer Welbourne. Congratulations to the 2025 VSS scholars and their mentors on a successful year of research and academic growth.



In 2024–2025, RCVCOBE students took their learning beyond the classroom and into the world, participating in dynamic study abroad programs across the Netherlands, Switzerland, Barcelona, Italy, South Korea, and Brazil. Each destination offered unique business-focused coursework, cultural immersion, and opportunities to connect classroom knowledge with real-world global experiences. Students returned with broadened perspectives, strengthened cross-cultural communication skills, and insights into international markets—valuable as-

sets in today’s interconnected business environment. Many first-time travelers received guidance through advising sessions, helping them navigate program options, travel planning, and funding resources. To make these experiences possible, the college awarded \$40,000 in scholarships through the RCVCOBE Study Abroad Award. These funds reduced financial barriers, allowing more students to engage in transformative global learning opportunities that will shape both their professional paths and personal growth.



RCVCOBE Students Gain Global Perspective Through Study Abroad

- Dubai
- South Korea
- Barcelona
- Italy
- Switzerland
- Netherlands





The Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship proudly celebrated the achievements of its master's students with two Graduate Program Hooding Ceremonies, each marking an important milestone in the lives of our graduates. The Fall 2024 Hooding Ceremony, held on December 12, 2024, in the Ballroom, featured keynote speaker Mr. Orlando Castaneda, MBA, Market Executive at JPMorgan Chase & Co. A double UTRGV alumnus with degrees in Finance and Management, Mr. Castaneda brought more than 15 years of leadership experience in banking and finance, including senior roles at JPMorgan Chase and BBVA in the USA. His message encouraged graduates to embrace challenges as opportunities for growth.



Surrounded by proud family, friends, faculty, and staff, the event recognized the hard work, dedication, and academic excellence of each graduate. The hooding ceremony symbolized a significant academic milestone and the transition into the next phase of their professional journeys. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the Class of 2023–2024—your achievements are a testament to your perseverance and commitment, and we couldn't be prouder!



Graduation Hooding Ceremony

The Spring 2025 Hooding Ceremony, held on May 13, 2025, at the PlainsCapital Bank Theater, brought together faculty, staff, families, and friends to celebrate more than 60 graduates. Dean Dr. Giorgio Gotti opened the evening with congratulatory remarks, followed by keynote speaker Cindy Castaneda, a proud UTRGV alumna who earned her BBA in Management (2007) and MBA (2009). With over 15 years of experience in commercial banking, Cindy currently serves at Bank of America and has held leadership positions at Amegy Bank and BBVA Compass (now PNC). She inspired graduates to lead with integrity and resilience in their professional journeys.

Both ceremonies were a testament to the hard work, determination, and success of our graduate students—reflecting the excellence and pride of the RCVCOBE community.

MS in Business Analytics Expands to Include Artificial Intelligence

The Department of Information Systems has redesigned its Master of Science in Business Analytics to a Master of Science in Business Analytics and Artificial Intelligence starting Fall 2025 to reflect the growing importance of advanced AI technologies in business decision-making. The updated curriculum features new and updated curriculum in machine learning, deep learning, and generative AI using Python, equipping students with cutting-edge skills to harness data for strategic insights and innovation. This update ensures graduates are well-prepared to lead in the evolving landscape of data-driven industries.



VOICE



The Vackar Office of Involvement and Center for Engagement (VOICE) at the Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship is dedicated to supporting student success and excellence. As a dynamic hub, VOICE empowers College of Business students by enhancing engagement, refining business writing skills, and building career readiness. Our mission is to cultivate well-rounded professionals who are prepared to lead and innovate in an ever-evolving global business landscape.

[Click here to see Annual Report](#)



USITCC Regional Competition 2024

Under the mentorship of Ms. Ana Canedo, lecturer of information systems, six ITSA students participated in the USTICC South Central Student Conference from November 6 to 9. ITSA President Harris Britton won first place in Database Design. All students enjoyed the competitions and networking opportunities with fellow IT students and professors from other institutions.



Enactus UTRGV Honored at Vaquero Leadership Awards

At the 2024–2025 UTRGV Vaquero Leadership Awards on May 1, 2025, hosted by the Center for Student Involvement, Enactus UTRGV received two top honors: Service Project of the Year for their initiative “SOAR” and Student Organization of the Year.



UTRGV Financial Literacy Summit Inspires Future Leaders

On April 11, 2025, UTRGV, in partnership with GEAR UP and Wells Fargo, hosted the Financial Literacy Summit at Region One. Students from eight districts joined UTRGV to explore personal finance and careers in finance. Sessions on budgeting, investing, and wealth-building were led by experts from the Federal Reserve, Deloitte, Eide Bailly, Strategic Insights, and Wells Fargo. An alumni panel also shared real-world career insights, highlighting UTRGV's commitment to student growth and financial empowerment.



Cansgiving Food Drive Supports Over 1,000 Families Across the RGV

From November 22–27, 2024, the annual Cansgiving Food Drive helped feed over 1,000 families across the Rio Grande Valley. In collaboration with UTRGV's Vackar College of Business, RGV Food Bank, McAllen Elks Lodge, Enactus, and seven community centers, food was distributed at key sites throughout the region—just in time for Thanksgiving.



RCVCOBE Students Advance Leadership at 2025 ALPFA Convention

RCVCOBE students proudly represented UTRGV at the 2025 ALPFA National Convention in Las Vegas, joining thousands of students and professionals for one of the nation's premier Latino leadership events. Centered around the theme "MOMENTUM: Leaders in Motion," the convention emphasized leadership through collaboration, wellness, and impact. Throughout the event, students took part in professional development workshops, connected with top industry recruiters, and explored career pathways in business. The experience offered a dynamic space to grow as future leaders while building lasting relationships and expanding their professional networks. Their presence at the convention reflects RCVCOBE's strong commitment to preparing students to lead with confidence, purpose, and a global perspective.

BAP Students Attended 2025 Annual Meeting in San Antonio

Beta Alpha Psi at UTRGV proudly represented the university at the 2025 Beta Alpha Psi Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas. Centered on the theme "Leading With Purpose. Driving Change," the event gathered top students and professionals in accounting, finance, and information systems from across the nation. UTRGV students participated in a variety of workshops, networking sessions, and leadership events designed to build professional skills and foster collaboration with chapters from across the country. Their involvement highlighted the chapter's continued dedication to excellence, growth, and representing UTRGV on the national stage.



Enactus UTRGV Represents the U.S. at 2024 Enactus World Cup in Kazakhstan

Following their victory as the 2024 Enactus USA National Champions, Enactus UTRGV proudly represented the United States at the Enactus World Cup, held from October 2–4 in Astana, Kazakhstan. Joined by Faculty Advisor Maria Leonard, Dean Dr. Giorgio Gotti, and 14 students (including two alumni), the team presented their work, connected with peers from around the world, and experienced Kazakhstan's rich culture and global perspectives on innovation.



Bank on INT! Internship Program Officially Launched

Thanks to a historic MOU signing, nine UTRGV students are getting a jumpstart on their careers. Edinburg EDC, in partnership with UTRGV and the Edinburg 2040 Initiative, has officially launched the Bank on INT! paid internship program. This 10-week initiative allows undergraduate students to earn school credit while gaining hands-on experience in the banking industry at regional institutions including Freedom Bank, Rio Bank, Texas National Bank, Lone Star National Bank, and Greater State Bank. By combining academic learning with real-world practice, the program builds essential skills, creates career pathways, and strengthens the future workforce of the Rio Grande Valley.

RCVCOBE Student Receives IT Scholarship

Ms. Elisami Salinas-Rios, a BBA in Information Systems student, received the San Antonio IT Initiatives Fund Scholarship in May 2025 because of her excellent academic performance. Ms. Ana Canedo, Lecturer in Information Systems, was her faculty mentor.

UTRGV Student Wins Global Championship in Glo-Bus Simulation

Roberto Trevino, a UTRGV student guided by Dr. Sibin Wu in his strategic management class, won the Glo-Bus Simulation Invitational Grand Championship, outperforming top students from the U.S., Canada, and Switzerland. After leading his class at UTRGV, Roberto was invited to the global competition, where his strategic decision-making, data analysis, and adaptability earned him the top spot. He described the experience as an intense but rewarding challenge that tested his skills and determination. Congratulations to Roberto for this impressive international achievement and for showcasing UTRGV excellence on the world stage!

4th Annual School of Accountancy Awards Gala

The School of Accountancy at RCVCOBE proudly hosted its 4th Annual Awards Gala on May 2, 2025, at the Radisson Hotel McAllen Airport. The evening brought together students, faculty, alumni, and community partners for a celebration of excellence and achievement. Guests enjoyed keynote remarks from Mr. Paul Penler, dinner, and a showcase of student organization activities from the past year. A highlight of the night was awarding over \$100,000 in scholarships to outstanding accounting students. The Gala also recognized the Top 10 Undergraduate and Graduate Students and honored Professor Deborah Gonzalez with the Faculty Excellence Award. The Gala was a memorable evening highlighting the talent, dedication, and community spirit that make the School of Accountancy thrive.



RCVCOBE Students Represent at the Texas Capitol

As part of UTRGV's 10th Anniversary Celebration, students from across the university were invited to the Texas State Capitol in Austin for a special day of recognition highlighting UTRGV's impact over the past decade. Representing the Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship (RCVCOBE), Valeria Escobedo Garcia and Nicole Wilson proudly joined fellow Vaqueros, university leadership, and state officials in commemorating this milestone. It was a meaningful moment to showcase both the achievements of our college and the incredible progress UTRGV has made in just ten years.

UTRGV App Lab Hosts Swift Development Workshops

Oscar Ramos, App Lab Manager welcomed 8 Undergraduate UTRGV students at the UTRGV App lab located inside the Center for Innovation and Commercialization. This was a 3-hour workshop where students learn the basics of Swift Development on iOS Mobile Devices by playing on Playgrounds, building on Xcode, and rehashing the knowledge on Kahoot. We thank them for visiting us and we look forward to see them again in the Intro to App Dev with Swift LV 2 in the near future! Over half of the students mentioned they had never visited the CIC Before. Our workshops allow current students to visit this amazing UTRGV Facility for the first time. Let's Code!

UTRGV Team Wins 2nd Place at 2024 HSI Battle of the Brains



The team was led by graduate students Natalia De La Garza (MBA, Team Captain) and Javier Becerril (MS in Computer Science, Co-Captain). Undergraduate team members included Luis Carlos Castañeda Salazar (Finance, Junior), Galaxia Castro (Accounting, Junior), Alyssa Castillo (Accounting, Junior), Arely Zuniga (Accounting, Senior), Patricia Alanis Ramirez (Marketing, Senior), and Cesar Montalvo (Mechanical Engineering, Senior). They were mentored by Russell Adams, Chair of International Business and Entrepreneurship (RCVCOBE), and Dr. Noe Vargas, Assistant Professor of Mechanical Engineering (College of Engineering and Computer Science).

An interdisciplinary team of UTRGV students earned 2nd place overall and achieved the second-highest semifinalist score at the 2024 HSI Battle of the Brains Competition, held October 2–5 at the KPMG Lakehouse in Orlando, Florida. Competing against teams from 15 Hispanic-Serving Institutions nationwide, students were tasked with developing an innovative solution in just 24 hours and presenting it to executives from global companies. In addition to the competition, students participated in professional development activities including workshops, panels, a career fair, and company tours with leading organizations such as Amazon, Visa, Dell Technologies, Capital One, Electronic Arts, eBay, Thrivent, and title sponsor KPMG. Congratulations to the team for proudly representing UTRGV with innovation, collaboration, and professionalism on a national stage!

IMA Student Leadership Conference Inspires UTRGV Chapter Officers

In Fall 2024, officer representatives from the UTRGV student chapter of the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA) attended the National Student Leadership Conference (SLC). This prestigious event brought together students from across the country for leadership training, career-focused panels, and networking with peers and industry professionals. Participants explored topics such as leadership, technology and innovation, and the value of CMA certification. UTRGV officers also took part in a career expo, where several received internship offers as a direct result of their engagement. The experience highlighted the chapter's ongoing commitment to professional development, collaboration, and active campus involvement.



UTRGV IASA Students Shine at IIA Global Student Conference

In April 2025, the executive board of UTRGV's Institute of Internal Auditors Student Association (IASA) traveled to Orlando, Florida to participate in the IIA Global Student Conference, held at Disney World. The event gathered students and professionals from around the world for networking, leadership development, and a competitive case study challenge. UTRGV students Tamara Flores and Valeria Escobedo advanced to the final round of the competition, with Escobedo's team earning 2nd place overall. This outstanding performance reflects IASA's commitment to professional growth, leadership, and national engagement.



UTRGV Marketing Students Shine at National Digital Marketing Championship

The UTRGV Marketing Department proudly represented the university at the National Collegiate Digital Marketing Championship held at Baylor University. Led by faculty mentors Michael Flores and Mary Ann Aguilar, our students performed excellently and finished #2 in the nation! Among the standout performers was Dairine Flores, who secured 3rd place individually and won two rounds of Viral Competitions, earning her the title of team MVP. Joshua Ramirez placed in the Top 5 in the Man vs. Machine competition, while Seth Vega achieved a Top 20 individual ranking. Congratulations to all the students and faculty involved on this remarkable achievement and for making UTRGV proud on the national stage!



UTRGV Business Students Gain Real-World Insights at Spurs Career Day

On April 4, 2025, 47 business students participated in Spurs Career Day in San Antonio, led by Michael Flores and Dr. Peter Magnusson. The event offered students a unique, behind-the-scenes look at the operations of Spurs Sports & Entertainment and Visit San Antonio. They engaged in panel discussions with industry professionals on topics such as sports marketing, event planning, and destination branding. Marketing lecturer Michael Flores emphasized how these experiential opportunities help students deepen their understanding of the sports and tourism industries. The day concluded with a San Antonio Spurs game, giving students a firsthand view of how classroom concepts translate into real-world applications.



Students Participate in 10th Anniversary Viva Fresh Expo Through EDGE Program

Mr. Jesse Jones, Marketing Lecturer, led a group of students through the EDGE (Encouraging Discovery & Growth in Education) initiative to attend the 10th Anniversary Viva Fresh Expo in Houston—one of the region's top networking events for the fresh produce industry. Through mentorship provided by the Texas International Produce Association (TIPA), students were paired with 2 to 10 industry professionals who guided them through the expo. They explored career paths, engaged with employers, and learned about internships and job opportunities—all at no cost. Congratulations to our students and to Mr. Jones for representing the College and taking full advantage of this valuable professional experience!



Mr. Eloy Garza Recognized at the White House for Experiential Learning Program

Mr. Eloy Garza has earned national recognition for his innovative experiential learning program. The initiative transforms students into marketing consultants by partnering them with over 30 businesses across Texas, California, and Mexico to develop real-world strategies. Garza's model emphasizes essential workforce skills such as data analytics, communication, and problem-solving. In recognition of his efforts, he was invited to the White House in October 2024 to contribute to discussions on expanding Latino participation in cybersecurity education. Congratulations to Mr. Garza on this outstanding achievement and for making a lasting impact on student success and community engagement!



Celebrating Excellence: UTRGV Student Awards



The Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship proudly recognizes Leslie Hernandez, MBA graduate student, as the Student Employee of the Year, awarded by the UTRGV Career Center and Human Resources Department for her dedication, professionalism, and contributions to the university community. MBA students José Hernandez Limas, Erika Mejía de la Garza, and Marco Vela received honorable mentions, showcasing the high standards within our program. In addition, Luis Leal and Michael Ramos were nominated for Supervisor of the Year, honoring their exemplary leadership and commitment to professional growth across our College.

Graduate Fair Showcases Master's Programs in Edinburg and Brownsville

Earlier this month, The Graduate College hosted a successful Graduate Fair on both the Edinburg and Brownsville campuses. All RCVCBE master's programs were represented, providing prospective students the opportunity to meet faculty and staff, learn about program offerings, and discover the many opportunities that graduate education at UTRGV has to offer. The event served as an engaging platform for future students to explore academic paths that align with their career goals.



GBLA Hosts Wellness Workshop with Dr. Yovann Salinas

On May 2, 2025, the Graduate Business Leaders Association (GBLA) hosted an engaging virtual workshop led by Dr. Yovann Salinas, Director of Counseling & Mental Health at Region One ESC. The session explored the effects of stress on both mind and body, offering practical self-care techniques to manage daily pressures. Participants engaged in mindfulness exercises, light stretching routines to release tension, and learned strategies to strengthen emotional resilience. The event provided actionable tools to support overall mental and physical well-being for students navigating academic and professional demands.



RCVCOBE Students Connect with Employers at “Meet the Accounting Professionals” Event

Beta Alpha Psi, in collaboration with ALPFA, hosted the “Meet the Accounting Professionals” event to provide RCVCOBE students with direct access to professionals in the accounting industry. Representatives from firms and organizations including Garza & Morales CPAs, Texas Society of CPAs, Carr Riggs & Ingram, Region One ESC – Students First, Mariela Ruiz, CPA, PLLC, and Burton, McCumber & Longoria, LLP attended the event. Student organizations such as IMA and IASA helped facilitate engaging peer-to-peer and professional interaction. Students explored career paths, asked questions about industry expectations, and gained valuable insight into recruiting trends. Several participants received internship and job offers, emphasizing the impact of networking on career readiness. Beta Alpha Psi and ALPFA continue to champion RCVCOBE students’ professional development through meaningful industry engagement.



Aloha Adventure: RCVCOBE Hosts First Hospitality & Tourism Conference

Over 200 high school students from across the Valley attended Aloha Adventure, RCVCOBE’s first Hospitality and Tourism Management Conference, held October 17, 2024 at Region One ESC in Edinburg. Through dynamic, hands-on workshops led by industry experts, students explored careers in event planning, hotel ownership, and restaurant entrepreneurship—gaining real-world insights into one of the fastest-growing industries in Texas.



Center for Innovation & Commercialization (CIC) Drives RGV Growth

The UTRGV Center for Innovation & Commercialization (CIC) engaged 1,894 participants, including 180 high school students, through programs and events that support entrepreneurship and economic growth in the Rio Grande Valley. Over the year, CIC hosted seven business competitions, awarding \$47,000 in scholarships and prizes, and generated an estimated \$273,510 in economic impact. More than 100 startups were served, with 11 ventures showcased to investors, resulting in \$130,000 in secured funding. With the support of 93 mentors, reviewers, and judges contributing over 390 volunteer hours, CIC offered initiatives such as the Be Your Own Boss Boot camp and Workshop, Big Idea and Business Plan Competitions, TechConnect networking events, and Lunch & Learn speaker series. Collaborations with the Rio Grande Valley Angel Network and community partners further strengthened regional entrepreneurship, while programs reached students from middle school to the university level.

[Link to report](#)

CBEST Advances Partnerships and Impact

The Center for Border Economic Studies (CBEST) had a productive 2024–2025, advancing its mission to promote sustainable economic development in the U.S.–Mexico border region. Highlights included launching a new logo and LinkedIn page, publishing Border Business Briefs, and forming partnerships with public health and academic organizations. CBEST expanded outreach through VOICE, engaged in conferences and roundtables to strengthen faculty and research collaborations, and co-hosted an interdisciplinary workshop in Cameroon, further enhancing its international presence. These efforts reflect CBEST’s growing role in addressing economic challenges through research, partnerships, and community engagement.





Dr. Daphne Wang Honored for Outstanding Academic and Professional Achievements

Since joining Jacksonville University in 2015, Dr. Daphne Wang has made significant contributions to the Davis College of Business & Technology through her commitment to teaching, research, and service. She has taught and mentored students across undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs, consistently demonstrating both academic rigor and student-centered care.

A first-generation college graduate and immigrant from Taiwan, Dr. Wang spent over 20 years in Texas raising four children while earning her MBA and Ph.D. in Business Administration (Finance). Her jour-

ney reflects extraordinary perseverance and dedication to education. She is also a Certified Management Accountant (CMA).

Dr. Wang has actively served the JU community through roles on several key committees—most notably as chair of the Planning and Budget Committee and Instructional Resources Committee, and as a long-standing member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Her research accomplishments include 18 published journal articles, 48 conference presentations, and over \$160,000 in grant funding. Her academic excellence has earned her the Walker/Wells Fargo Endowed Chair of Finance, the JU Faculty Excellence Award in Scholarship/Research, and induction into Phi Kappa Phi and Beta Gamma Sigma honor societies.

She also previously served as faculty advisor for the JU Dolphin Student Investment Fund, guiding students in the prestigious CFA Research Challenge.

Dr. Wang's dedication to student success, scholarly impact, and institutional leadership continues to elevate the mission of Jacksonville University. We are proud to recognize her contributions and celebrate her achievements.

ABOUT RCVCOBE



RCVCOBE MISSION STATEMENT

The Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship promotes student success and serves as a catalyst for innovation, knowledge discovery, and economic development in South Texas, Northern Mexico, and beyond. We do so by offering relevant academic programs, committing to impactful research, and fostering community engagement and sustainable partnerships in a way that supports the university's mission.

RCVCOBE VISION STATEMENT

The Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship will positively impact its local and global stakeholders through the discovery, integration, application, and teaching of business- focused knowledge addressing the critical needs of society.

RCVCOBE CORE VALUES

Our Commitment to Excellence

Invest in our students' success by offering high quality and relevant academic programs.

Our Dedication to Thought Leadership

Promote rigorous and high-impact scholarship. Improve the academic reputation of RCV through impactful engagement with the scholarly community.

Our Passion for Empowerment and Impact

Empower and support our students, faculty, and staff to make a difference in their communities through high impact teaching and learning practices.

Our Role as Agents of Transformation

Cherish and support our positive role in the economic transformation of the Rio Grande Valley.

I want to thank you for the dedication and hard work that made 2025 season of growth at the Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship.

Our students reached new milestones, supported by the commitment of our exceptional faculty and staff. Your efforts continue to strengthen our college and its impact.

Thank you for being part of our journey. I look forward to all we'll accomplish together in the months ahead.



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