



Can Saygin

Senior Vice President for Research
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Activity Report
May 2024 – April 2025

June 2, 2025

The University of Texas
Rio Grande ValleyTM
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Research

Executive Summary

During the May 2024–April 2025 period, I led transformative initiatives that positioned UTRGV for Carnegie R1 status while navigating unprecedented federal funding challenges. Key achievements include securing \$21 million in NRSF funding eligibility, moving steadily toward the historic \$100 million total research expenditures milestone on its 10th anniversary, and maintaining momentum toward Carnegie R1 classification despite \$7.7 million in federal grant terminations. Through strategic crisis management, comprehensive faculty development programs, and operational excellence initiatives, the Division of Research has strengthened UTRGV's research infrastructure and national competitiveness.

We are at \$63.2 million in total research expenditures as of end of May 2025, compared to \$55.8 million in May 2024 (Figure 1). We are on our way to reaching \$100 million on our 10th anniversary at the end of FY25. As shown in Table 1, UTRGV's operational metrics as of end of May 2025 are strong. With four more months left in the fiscal year, there are 424 faculty with proposal submissions and 263 faculty with active sponsored project expenditures; strong indicators of how research culture is changing at UTRGV.

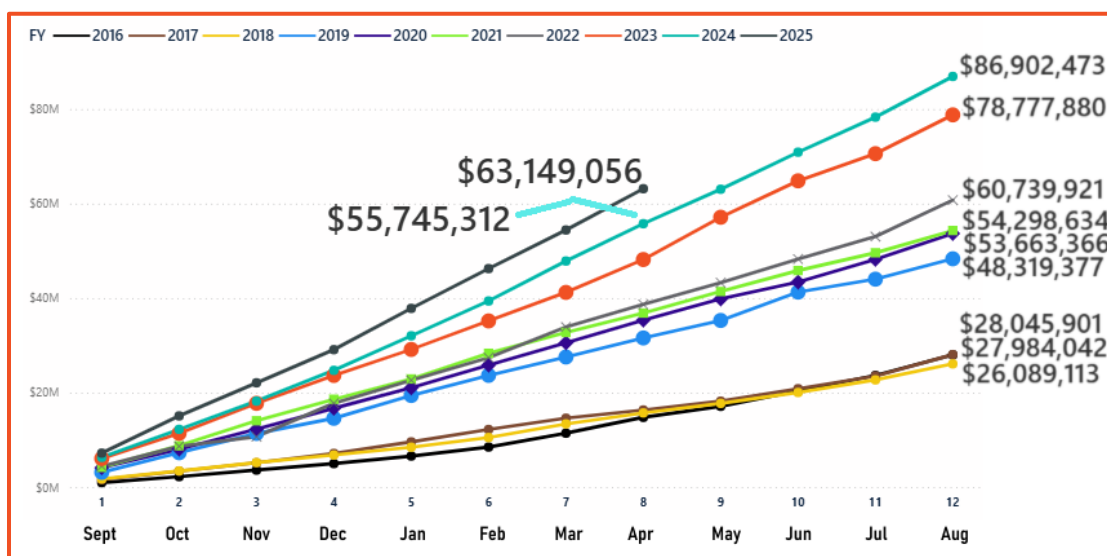


Figure 1. Total Research Expenditures

Table 1. Operational Metrics

Metrics	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
1. No. of Proposals Submitted	493	612	505	467	426	454
2. No. of Awards Received	132	258	247	263	200	201
3. Restricted Research Expenditures	\$28,191,287	\$42,640,123	\$42,412,698	\$27,389,198	\$24,192,826	\$23,139,021
4. Total Research Expenditures	\$63,149,056	\$86,902,473	\$78,777,880	\$60,739,921	\$54,298,634	\$53,663,366
5. No. of Faculty on Proposals	424	421	359	343	235	226
6. No. of Faculty on Awards	136	225	206	227	170	145
7. No. of Faculty with Sponsored Project Expenditures	372	377	347	326	227	221
8. No. of Faculty with Restricted Research Expenditures	263	240	212	194	118	111
9. Total Requested Amount	\$429,802,494	\$775,186,558	\$460,840,450	\$384,882,343	\$388,319,059	\$380,168,209
10. Total Funded Amount	\$42,809,987	\$200,150,228	\$98,789,747	\$97,222,150	\$254,623,853	\$124,215,997

Major Accomplishments

1. Achieving National Research Support Funding (NRSF) Eligibility

Following my successful appeal to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for a revised FY22 GAI/HRI reporting methodology, UTRGV secured approval for an updated reporting protocol that was subsequently implemented for FY23 and FY24 submissions. This strategic advocacy effort resulted in UTRGV achieving eligibility for National Research Support Fund (NRSF) funding in May 2025, securing \$10.5 million annually for FY26 and FY27—a total investment of \$21 million that will significantly enhance UTRGV's research infrastructure and capacity.

2. Crisis Response to Federal Grant Terminations

In response to federal policy changes, UTRGV experienced significant disruption to its research portfolio, with 25 grants and contracts across 12 federal agencies being terminated, paused, or subject to work-stop orders. The total awarded budget impact reached \$20.78 million, with \$10.87 million representing the balance at the time of federal notice and \$7.7 million in terminated balances. The human impact was substantial, directly affecting 23 faculty members, 75 students (including student workers and interns), and 12 staff members.

I have allocated \$500,000 from the Division of Research in emergency salary and wage funding from January through August 2025 to support faculty, staff, and students whose positions were directly impacted by federal grant terminations, ensuring financial stability and continuity of employment during this unprecedented disruption to institutional research operations.

3. Targeting \$100 Million Total Research Expenditures on 10th Anniversary

Through strategic financial oversight and proactive management, I successfully navigated UTRGV toward achieving \$100 million in total research expenditures for FY25 (Figure 2), which will be a historic milestone coinciding with the university's 10th anniversary.

Despite facing \$7.7 million in federal grant terminations due to policy changes, I implemented comprehensive fiscal monitoring protocols, expedited invoicing and billing processes, and collaborated closely with college financial administrators to ensure accurate coding of faculty research salaries and graduate assistantships. These coordinated efforts have maintained expenditure momentum and positioned UTRGV to reach this significant benchmark as defined by NSF HERD reporting guidelines, demonstrating institutional resilience and effective crisis management.

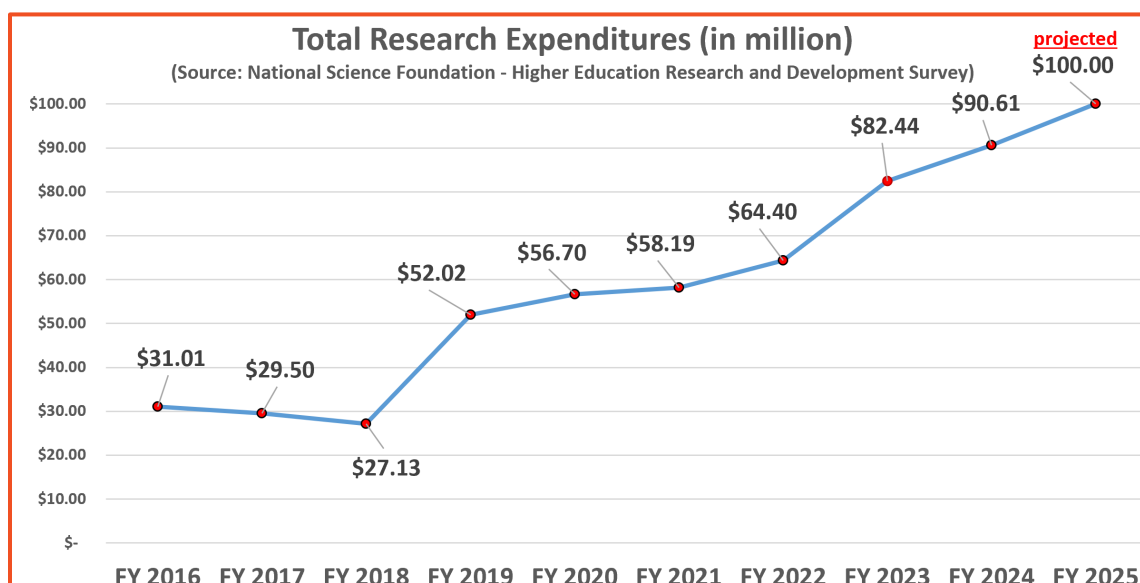


Figure 2. Total Research Expenditures as Defined by the NSF HERD Report

4. Carnegie R1 Classification Progress (2028 Cycle)

Through comprehensive support mechanisms implemented by the Division of Research, I have strategically advanced UTRGV's research doctoral student pipeline to secure Carnegie R1 status in the 2028 classification cycle. My multi-faceted approach encompasses targeted financial incentives and programmatic support designed to accelerate doctoral degree completion.

Key Initiatives:

- Dissertation enrollment and degree completion scholarships to reduce financial barriers for students in their final stages
- Faculty incentive programs for dissertation chairs, including summer salary support to enhance mentorship capacity
- College-specific professional development programming, including dissertation writing workshops and Institutional Review Board assistance to streamline the research process

Progress and Outcomes: Our strategic target requires awarding 210 research doctoral degrees across three IPEDS reporting cycles (July 2023 through June 2026), maintaining an average of 70 degrees annually. As shown in Table 2, As of Spring 2025, we have successfully awarded 96 degrees, demonstrating strong momentum toward our objective. Through careful pipeline analysis and student progression tracking, we have established a clear pathway for additional graduations over the next four semesters. Current projections indicate we will reach 213 degrees by Spring 2026, exceeding the 70-per-year benchmark required for R1 consideration and positioning UTRGV to successfully achieve R1 status in the 2028 Carnegie cycle.

Table 2. Research Doctoral Degrees Pipeline for Carnegie R1 Initiative

6/2/2025	<===== CARNEGIE IPEDS TIMELINE =====>				
PROGRAM	SPRING 2025	SUMMER 2025	FALL 2025	SPRING 2026	Summer-1 of 2026
Business Administration	1	4	3	5	0
Clinical Psychology	0	4	0	0	4
Curriculum and Instruction	8	7	20	31	0
Educational Leadership	3	9	11	0	0
Human Genetics	0	0	0	0	5
Materials Science Engineering	0	0	0	0	0
Math & Stat w/Interdisc Appl	2	4	0	3	2
Physics	0	0	0	7	1
Rehabilitation Counseling	1	8	3	0	0
TOTAL: 146	15	36	37	46	12
SUMMATION	99	135	172	218	230
3-YR AVERAGE	33.00	45.00	57.33	72.67	76.67
% GOAL ACHIEVED	47%	64%	82%	104%	110%
SEMESTER	SPRING 2025	SUMMER 2025	FALL 2025	SPRING 2026	Summer-1 of 2026

5. Comprehensive Faculty Research Development Programs

Through the Research Enhancement team of the Division of Research, I have implemented an extensive portfolio of faculty research development initiatives designed to systematically strengthen research capacity and advance institutional research capabilities across all career stages and disciplines.

Targeted Fellowship and Mentorship Programs: The Faculty Research Fellows program strategically focuses on our seven identified research pathways and includes NIH EARA fellows, with each fellow required to submit at least one large-scale grant proposal while engaging in research mentoring and networking activities. This high-impact program ensures our most promising researchers receive intensive support while contributing to institutional research growth.

Comprehensive Training and Professional Development: I launched the New Investigator Series, a sophisticated collection of online, asynchronous, interactive learning modules hosted on Blackboard that guides new researchers through the complete grant development process, from funding opportunity identification through proposal submission, including institutional support resources. This program has successfully engaged 23 faculty members across Fall 2024 (14 participants) and Spring 2025 (9 participants) cohorts.

The "Discover Your Funding" virtual workshop series trained faculty in advanced funding database utilization through Faculty Insight and Pivot platforms. Through 10 targeted sessions, we reached 67 faculty members, significantly enhancing their capacity for independent funding identification.

Strategic Agency Engagement and Networking: I coordinated strategic faculty visits to key funding agencies, national laboratories, and professional organizations to build critical research networks and opportunities. These high-value engagements included: Oak Ridge National Lab (6 faculty), NEH workshop (5 faculty), NSF and IES visits (4 faculty), COGR meeting (1 faculty), Defense Connect Innovation Summit and Expo (4 faculty), and ORAU 2025 Annual Meeting (4 faculty).

Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Knowledge Transfer: The COMPASS (Collaborative Opportunities for Making Progress toward Strategic Success) "From Silos to Synergy" program creates structured networking opportunities for Faculty Research Fellows to showcase research pathways while mentoring junior faculty. Our Fall event in Edinburg attracted 56 participants, while the Spring AI-themed event in Brownsville engaged 51 participants, demonstrating strong institutional interest in interdisciplinary collaboration.

COMPASS Coffee Chats facilitate knowledge transfer by inviting faculty who recently visited agencies to share insights through structured 30-minute panel discussions, followed by interactive Q&A sessions that encourage ongoing dialogue and relationship building.

Targeted Faculty Travel Programs: The Travel Resources and Investments Program (TRIP) provides strategic travel funding to foster collaboration, support competitive grant proposal development, and enhance doctoral program recruitment efforts. Additionally, through partnership with Faculty Affairs, I support the Faculty Innovation, Development, and Enhancement (FIDE) Mid-Career Faculty Development Workshop Series, including write-in events that provide structured environments for proposal development.

Specialized Funding Opportunity Training: I implemented targeted training on the SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research) and STTR (Small Business Technology Transfer) programs for faculty interested in translational research opportunities, providing comprehensive overview of NSF funding mechanisms and successful proposal development strategies.

6. Research Operations and Service Excellence

The Division of Research Operations has transformed UTRGV's research infrastructure through a commitment to customer service and operational excellence that supports our R1 aspirations. The successful deployment of the in-house-developed ARGO research submission system revolutionized our service delivery, replacing paper-based processes with streamlined digital workflows that have supported over 1,000 submissions, \$1.1 billion in proposals, and \$250 million in awards since 2023. With user satisfaction consistently exceeding 85%, this system exemplifies our customer-focused approach to research support.

Our operational enhancements include the launch of the Contracts and Industry Agreements, Technology Transfer, and Research Integrity units, which have significantly improved service delivery and compliance oversight. These sustained efforts in operational excellence and customer service have been recognized through the Division of Research receiving the 2025 Vaquero Bravo award for the second consecutive year, affirming our dedication to supporting UTRGV's research community with distinction.

7. Research Infrastructure and Facility Development

Major progress was achieved in expanding and modernizing UTRGV's research infrastructure through strategic facility development and renovation projects:

Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility (AMRF): A 14,000 sq-ft industry-grade R&D facility opened on May 5, 2025, providing state-of-the-art capabilities for advanced manufacturing research and industry partnerships.



Marine Ecosystems Research Facility (MERF): A 14,000 sq-ft marine ecosystems facility was approved by the Board of Regents with a budget of \$21.5 million to break ground at Port Isabel in July 2025, with completion scheduled for December 2026.



Work-Economy-Research-Community (WERC) Complex: Part of the CESS (Edinburg) building is being redesigned for renovation to provide industry-grade entrepreneurial development, applied R&D, and incubation services to drive community-based, industry-focused research and development.



Railway Safety Research Facility (RSRF): We are pursuing acquisition of land at the corner of S 5th Ave and W Cano St to establish specialized railway safety research capabilities.



Antenna Arrays & Community Research Garden: The area in front of Casa Bella (Brownsville) is being cleared up for enhanced student use. The Space Sciences Antenna Arrays and the Community Research Garden are being relocated to optimize space utilization and research access.

