

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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Staff Senate

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 20, 2025, 9:00 am – 11:00 am

Teams

I. Call to Order – 9:05

Mirayda called the meeting to order.

II. Roll Call / Establishment of Quorum – 9:05

Ricardo Lopez, Secretary

24 present

III. Welcome & Introduction – 9:06

Rolando Segovia, Staff Senate President

Rolando welcomed everyone to the staff Senate general meeting for February. Elizebeth Salinas motioned the approval of meeting minutes for December 2024 and January 2025, with Melissa Martinez and Mayra Garcia seconding the motion. The minutes were approved without opposition or abstention.

IV. Guest Speakers

a. Brian Carpenter, Lieutenant

UTRGV PD

Brian Carpenter introduces The Spring Break No Refusal event will be held on Wednesday, March 12, 2025, from 10:00 to 11:00 AM at the Plains Capital Bank Theater located in the Student Union on the Edinburg campus. This important event is a collaboration between the UTRGV Police Department, the Hidalgo County District Attorney's Office, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

- i. **Guest Speaker and Activities:** The event will feature a presentation from "When Sean Speaks," an organization that shares the powerful story of Shawn Carter, a drunk driving crash survivor. After the presentation, there will be a press conference with a Q&A session featuring District Attorney Terry Palacios and representatives from

MADD. Assistant Chief Van Sluss will emcee the event, and students who attend will have a chance to win UTRGV-themed giveaway items.

- ii. **No Refusal Policy:** The “No Refusal” policy means that if you are suspected of driving while intoxicated and refuse to provide a breath sample, officers can quickly obtain a warrant to conduct a mandatory blood draw. Judges are on call to issue these warrants immediately. This policy is in place during certain high-risk times, such as Spring Break, to help reduce impaired driving incidents.
- iii. **Regional Enforcement:** While Cameron County enforces No Refusal policies year-round, Hidalgo County currently does not. However, more counties are moving toward always-on No Refusal enforcement. The goal is to increase awareness and accountability to help prevent alcohol-related crashes and fatalities in our community.
- iv. **The Importance of Responsibility:** Alcohol affects people differently, and even a few drinks can push someone over the legal limit of 0.08 BAC. Some individuals may appear fine but still be impaired. That’s why having a designated driver or using a ride service is always the safest option. Making smart decisions can prevent life-altering consequences.
- v. **Community Impact:** Everyone has been touched in some way by the effects of drunk driving—whether directly or indirectly. Amanda Quintanilla emphasized the importance of community engagement, inviting both students and staff to attend the event and ask questions. This is a valuable opportunity to speak with law enforcement, the DA’s office, and MADD representatives.
- vi. **Substance Impairment Beyond Alcohol:** Driving under the influence (DUI) includes impairment from drugs or other intoxicants—not just alcohol. This distinction is important and can sometimes be confusing, but the message remains the same: impaired driving is dangerous and illegal.
- vii. **Ongoing Challenges:** Despite educational efforts, alcohol-related incidents continue across Texas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, alcohol consumption even increased. Today, drinks come in a variety of forms and strengths, making it easier for people to

unknowingly become impaired. Continued outreach and education are essential in promoting safety and responsibility.

- b. *Dr. Carlos Martinez Menendez, Assistant Professor, Neurology School of Medicine*

Dr. Carlos Martinez Menendez presents the neurology clinic. The neurology clinic at the Institute of Neurosciences in Harlingen focuses on treating various neurologic diseases, including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. The Alzheimer's Center for South Texas aims to improve access to care and facilitate research on neurodegenerative diseases

- i. **High Prevalence of Neurodegenerative Diseases:** The Rio Grande Valley has an unusually high incidence of neurodegenerative diseases, possibly due to factors like pesticide exposure, the historical presence of an Agent Orange processing plant, and high rates of diabetes and other vascular risk factors. There is a need for better access to healthcare and specialized treatments.
- ii. **Preventative Measures and Lifestyle Modifications:** Regular exercise and a healthy diet are crucial in minimizing the risk of developing Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. Recommended foods include lean meats, fish, beans, nuts, and leafy green vegetables, while processed sugars and high-salt foods should be avoided. Taking B vitamins and vitamin D supplements is also suggested, especially as one gets older.
- iii. **Challenges in Access to Care:** Patients in the Rio Grande Valley face challenges in accessing high-quality neurologic care due to geographic isolation from major medical centers and a shortage of healthcare providers, particularly neurologists. Better coordination of resources and personnel is needed to ensure patients receive the care they deserve.
- iv. **Community Engagement and Education:** Efforts are being made to increase awareness of neurodegenerative diseases in the community through talks to retirement communities and local health plans. Early evaluation for individuals with a

family history of Alzheimer's is important, and interdisciplinary care teams are needed to support patients and their caregivers.

- v. **Research and Upcoming Developments:** Ongoing research and upcoming developments include the establishment of a neurology residency program and potential clinical trials for new treatments. Recent approval of new Alzheimer's treatments and efforts to increase access to diagnostic studies and specialized medications are also underway.

c. *Marco Moreno*, Organizational Development Specialist

Human Resources & Talent Development

Marco Moreno presented the Mentoring U program, which focuses on developing leadership skills across different stages of one's leadership journey. The program connects mentors and mentees from various departments, fostering strong and meaningful relationships and practical leadership skills.

- i. **Program Goals and Benefits:** The primary goal of the Mentoring U program is to build a strong leadership community at UTRGV by developing talent and retaining it within the university. The program benefits both mentors and mentees by providing opportunities to learn from each other's experiences and perspectives, enhancing collaboration across the university.
- ii. **Application and Participation:** Applications for the Mentoring U program are open until February 26, 2025. Mentors are required to have at least two years of leadership experience and be in good standing. Mentees should be in a leadership role, supervising staff or student workers. Participants are expected to meet at least six times during the six-month program, with additional program meetings.
- iii. **Program Structure and Support:** The program includes pre-program meetings to set expectations and provide a framework for the mentoring relationship. Monthly topics and resources are provided to guide discussions, focusing on leadership competencies such as talent development, communication, and critical thinking.

Meetings can be scheduled at the convenience of the mentor and mentee, preferably during working hours.

V. Committee Reports

- a. Jeremy San Miguel, Communications Committee Chair
 - i. Social Media: Encouraged staff to follow social media for upcoming programs and events.
- b. Alexis Ochoa, Constitutions & Elections Committee Co-Chair
 - i. Elections: Planning for the 2025 staff Senate elections after spring break. Encouraged staff to participate in the nomination and election process.
- c. Omar Nedzelsky, Business Processes & Staff Support Chair
 - i. Feedback Submissions: Discussed suggestions regarding parking enforcement, educational activity leave for staff graduates, and vacation leave reminders.
 - ii. Response: Provided updates on previous submissions, including a response from HR benefits regarding student loan payment matching contributions.
- d. Lesly Orozco, Staff Success Committee Co-Chair
 - i. Employee Appreciation Week: Finalizing details for the event. Encouraged staff to look out for updates.

VI. Public Comments & Questions

Dr. Mirayda Torres-Avila, Parliamentarian

a. Updates and Announcements:

- i. Electric Charging Stations: Berta Guerra inquired about the likelihood of UTRGV getting electric charging stations for vehicles. Omar Nedzelsky mentioned it was a pending feedback submission.
- ii. Employee Appreciation Week: March 1-9, 2025. Activities include a door decorating contest and an appreciation breakfast.

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- iii. Appreciation Breakfast: Scheduled for March 6 in Edinburg and McAllen, and March 7 in Brownsville and Harlingen.

VII. Adjourn – 10:28

Matthew Moncus moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Matthew Lerma. Meeting adjourned at 10:28 by Dr. Mirayda Torres-Avila.

Prepared by Ricardo Lopez