

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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Staff Senate

Meeting Minutes

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

Teams

I. Call to Order – 9:03

Mirayda called the meeting to order.

II. Roll Call / Establishment of Quorum – 9:04

Ricardo Lopez, Secretary

18 present

III. Welcome & Introduction – 9:05

Rolando Segovia, Staff Senate President

Rolando welcomed everyone to the staff Senate general meeting for March. Minutes for February were tabled.

IV. Guest Speakers

a. *Cordelia Rasa*, Director of Animal Lab Resources

Laboratory Animal Resources

Cordelia introduced Biomedical Research Awareness Day (March 25-27 at Brownsville, Harlingen, and Edinburg campuses)

i. **Event Overview:** Biomedical Research Awareness Day (BRAD) is happening next week across three UTRGV campuses: Brownsville on March 25, Harlingen on March 26, and Edinburg on March 27. Visitors are encouraged to stop by the tables to ask questions and engage with staff.

ii. **Program Purpose and UTRGV Involvement:** BRAD, established in 2016, promotes understanding of the ethical use of animals in biomedical research. UTRGV has participated for eight years, highlighting the importance of transparency and education.

- iii. **Ethical Framework and Alternatives in Research:** UTRGV follows the 3Rs principle: Reduce, Refine, and Replace animal use in research. This includes implementing enrichment strategies like “rat tickling” to enhance welfare and exploring alternatives such as zebrafish and organ-on-a-chip technologies.
 - iv. **Need for Animal Models:** While alternatives are growing, animal models remain essential for studying complex diseases and developing treatments. Examples include pain management drugs like morphine and research on newly identified conditions.
 - v. **Reuse and Study Duration:** Some animals may be reused in compatible studies, aligning with reduction goals. Research timelines vary from short-term experiments to long-term disease modeling.
 - vi. **Environmental and Behavioral Considerations:** Environmental stimuli, including noise and human interaction, can impact research outcomes. Close observation of behavior and conditions is essential for accurate, ethical research.
 - vii. **Veterinary and Biomedical Benefits:** Research also advances veterinary care—contributing to prosthetics, diabetes treatment in animals, and improving quality of life for companion species.
 - viii. **Event Engagement Plans:** BRAD outreach will include interactive games, educational materials, and trained staff to engage students and raise awareness about animal research practices and ethics.
- b. *Emilia Trevino*, Associate Director for Talent Acquisition & Salary Administration
Office of Human Resources
- Emilia Trevino from Human Resources discussed the upcoming National Student Employment Appreciation Week, encouraging nominations for Student Employee of the Year and Supervisor of the Year. She provided details about the events planned for the week and the importance of recognizing student employees.

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- i. **Call for Supervisor Support:** Supervisors are encouraged to promote attendance by allowing student employees time to attend the events. Participation and engagement rely heavily on supervisors' support and flexibility.
- ii. **Daily Events Schedule:**
 - Monday (April 14)**
 - Morning:** Donuts & Coffee (Grab-and-Go) from 10:00–10:30 AM.
 - Afternoon:** “Crafter-noon Tea” with a Stress & Time Management Workshop in collaboration with the Counseling Center.
 - Also on Monday: The Summer Part-Time Job Fair hosted by the Career Center. Departments can send job slides to be promoted if unable to attend.
 - Tuesday (April 15):**
 - Brownsville Campus:** Student Employee & Supervisor Awards Ceremony (Invite-only). Recognition will be given to those nominated, with this year seeing a record number of submissions thanks to campus-wide support.
 - Wednesday (April 16):**
 - Edinburg Campus:** Awards Ceremony continues at the Student Union Theater.
 - Thursday (April 17):**
 - Morning:** Muffins & Coffee (Grab-and-Go).
 - Afternoon:** Nachos & Career Prep Session in partnership with the Career Center, supporting students’ professional development.
 - Friday (April 18):**
 - “Luck & Laughter” Lotería Event at game rooms on both Brownsville and Edinburg campuses. Students will enjoy games, prizes, and a fun wrap-up to the week.
- iii. **Additional Highlights:** The Career Center is inviting external companies hiring for summer positions, offering students expanded job opportunities beyond campus. Departments are encouraged to show appreciation through small gestures like treats or group lunches. For Work-Study questions, departments should reach out to Financial Aid at workstudy@utrgv.edu, as funding is limited and handled on a first-come, first-served basis.

- iv. **Closing Remarks:** Thank you to all who support and uplift student employees. Your participation helps ensure the success of this celebration and affirms the vital role students play in our campus operations.

- c. *Samantha Lopez*, Director, Interdisciplinary Programs (Puentes Grant)
Interdisciplinary Programs & Community Engagement
Samantha Lopez, Director of Grants at UTRGV, introduced the Fuentes (Puentes) Grant— a 5-year, \$3 million U.S. Department of Education initiative focused on improving graduation rates and lowering drop/fail rates at UTRGV by fostering a stronger sense of belonging among students.
 - i. **Faculty and Staff Workshop Overview:** The grant offers two types of faculty workshops and one staff workshop annually. Faculty workshops focus on creating new ethnic studies courses or inclusive assignments. The staff learning collaborative consists of 10 student-facing staff and includes 4 workshops from September to May.
 - ii. **Workshop Structure and Incentives:** Workshops are held about every six weeks, usually on Fridays from 12:30–4:00 PM. Participation is considered professional development and does not require leave. Staff receive a \$200 gift card per completed workshop (up to \$800 total) upon attendance, participation, and assignment completion.
 - iii. **Application Requirements:** Applicants must provide a brief letter of support from their supervisor confirming release time. The application includes questions about departmental role, goals for participating, and availability. Applications will open next week and remain available for about 30 days.
 - iv. **Student Context and Goals:** UTRGV students often face unique challenges such as working full-time, caretaking, or lacking transportation. The goal of the grant is to help staff and faculty better understand and support these realities through professional development and collaboration.
 - v. **Student Partner Involvement:** Staff participants are paired with student partners through Sol-HSI. These students offer feedback and perspectives during the

workshops. While not mandatory, their insights help participants develop more student-centered practices.

- vi. **Institutional Collaboration and Future Planning:** The grant is currently housed under the College of Liberal Arts but originally intended to be under Student Success. There is interest in expanding partnerships and potentially institutionalizing the collaborative beyond the five-year grant period.
- vii. **Outcomes and Testimonials:** Faculty and staff have already reported improved student engagement and more welcoming environments. Participants shared stories of students expressing that they felt seen and heard, highlighting the immediate impact of workshop strategies.
- viii. **Retreat and Workshop Logistics:** A retreat is held in September with current and past participants and supervisors. Monthly workshops follow, with most occurring September–October and February–April. Meals are provided for in-person sessions.
- ix. **Contingency Planning:** In light of potential changes to the Department of Education funding, the team is exploring alternative funding sources to sustain the initiative.

V. Committee Reports

- a. Jeremy San Miguel, Communications Committee Chair
 - i. Door Decorating Contest: High participation and school pride; photos on social media.
 - ii. Graduation Campaign: Staff graduating from UTRGV can submit photos for recognition.
 - iii. Call for Presenters: Staff invited to present programs or initiatives at future meetings.
- b. Alexis Ochoa, Constitutions & Elections Committee Co-Chair.
 - i. No current issues with constitution/bylaws.
 - ii. Nominations & Elections Process is beginning soon.
- c. Omar Nedzelsky, Business Processes & Staff Support Chair

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- i. No new feedback submissions since February.
- ii. Pending department updates are pending.

d. *Krystal Marroquin*, Staff Success Committee

- i. Committee chair not present; no update provided

VI. Public Comments & Questions

Dr. Mirayda Torres-Avila, Parliamentarian

a. Updates and Announcements:

- i. Biomedical Research Presentations to be held in Brownsville and Edinburg as part of the awareness event.
- ii. Zoom AI Companion & Microsoft Copilot now available tutorials on Viva Engage and Messenger.
- iii. Reminder to encourage student appreciation during Student Employment Week (e.g., treats, thank-yous).

VII. Adjourn – 10:15

Omar Nedzelsky moved to adjourn the Staff Senate general meeting for the month of March, and Dina seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 10:15 by Dr. Mirayda Torres-Avila.

Prepared by Ricardo Lopez