

UTRGV TRiO SSS

Educational and Cultural trip Houston, Texas

Dates of Activity:
Monday, May 22, 2023 – Friday, May 26, 2023

Post-Activity Reflections

This experience was planned to give participants an opportunity to travel to Houston, Texas, and explore the various educational and cultural options available. Participants were considered to attend this opportunity after expressing interest and sharing their hopes to learn. We considered their participation in our program, academic performance, and goals moving forward in their journey to success. There were more than 50 participants who expressed interest and 16 were selected to attend. This trip was included in our budget and the costs associated (lodging, transportation, meals, entrance fees, etc.) were also made possible with some carryover funds from the previous budget.

Day One

This day was mostly a travel day (approximately five hours from our departure location, not including rest stops and lunch stop).

In Houston and on our way to the hotel, we stopped at the **Teo Chew Temple**; we toured the Buddhist temple and learned about the 14 Gods honored there.



The hotel we selected to stay at was the **Hilton Garden Inn, Houston Westbelt**. It is located in Chinatown, which gave us an opportunity to explore the area and the various locales. Our dinner that evening was at family-style restaurant that specializes in Filipino and other Asian foods.



We included group meetings at the end of each day to process the activities of each day, reflect on what we learned, and share highlights with each other; this fostered a stronger sense of community with the group of participants who attended this trip.



Day Two

Our second day included a visit to the **University of Houston**. We started the day meeting with the Graduate Admissions Program Manager, Krystal Sugulleh, who spoke to our participants about the application process, graduate program options, and opportunities for students.



We also met with the Challenger Program staff and our participants learned how this program continues to support their university students.

Our last scheduled meeting was with the Graduate Program Administrator for the College of Education, Britney Womble.



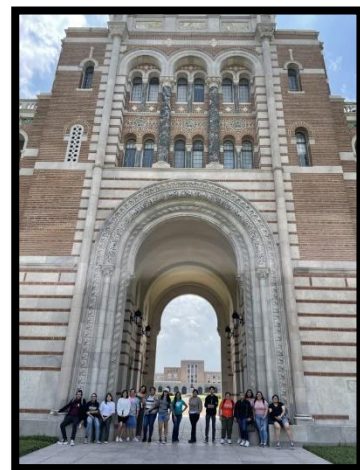
We then visited **Hermann Park Conservancy**. The area has many gardens where we learned about the different trees, roses, and other vegetation species. Our participants also enjoyed the architecture, sculpture walk (ten busts of notable figures from around the world), Japanese Garden, and the various ponds throughout the area.



Day Three

Our trip continued on day three by visiting **Rice University**. Our first scheduled meeting was with the Assistant Dean in the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Jennifer Hunter. The participants learned about the various masters and doctoral programs available, admissions process, and financial opportunities.

We then heard from the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (and Professor of Chemistry and Biosciences), Seichi Matsuda; he shared with the participants different perspectives on continuing your education, mapping your goals, and being a successful graduate student.



One of the highlights of our visit with Rice University was during a graduate student panel; our participants learned from five different graduate students (one was UTRGV alum, Fariha Ahmad!). Our participants were also provided with tours of graduate student research labs at their BioScience Research Collaborative.



The remainder of day three was spent at the **Houston Museum of Natural Science**. Our participants explored and enjoyed learning throughout the exhibits in this 4-floor museum, including: Cockrell Butterfly Center, Morian Hall of Paleontology, Cullen Hall of Gems and Minerals, George W. Strake Hall of Malacology, Morian Cabinet of Curiosities, Evelyn and Herbert Frensey Hall of African Wildlife, Hamman Hall of Texas Coastal Ecology, Farish Hall of Texas Wildlife, Hall of Ancient Egypt, and John P. McGovern Hall of the Americas.



Day Four

Most of day four was spent at **NASA Space Center Houston**. Our first adventure there included a presentation on space exploration and a live demonstration from a current space flight; three of our participants were selected to ask questions to astronauts at the International Space Station (ISS). Our students also learned from an astronaut as she gave an in-person presentation on her educational and professional journey.



Throughout NASA Space Center, participants learned about how science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs can develop into endless and exhilarating professional careers. There were interactive displays and exhibits that included a collection of moon rocks and lunar samples, space artifacts, space suits, history lessons, and more.



We concluded day four by stopping by the scenic area of Kemah Boardwalk to enjoy our last dinner in Houston.

Day Five

This final day was mostly a travel day back to the Rio Grande Valley. After checking out of our hotel and before leaving Houston, we visited the **BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir**. This location is a traditional place of Hindu worship and our participants learned about their community and practices, the intricate architecture and history of their building, and how they celebrate and live in harmony in this place of worship.



Participant Reflections

On our way back home, students reflected on their week-long experience and submitted a final reflection document with their personal statements. The following quotes are excerpts from their personal reflections:



"This trip made me realize the tremendous opportunities out there for me. It made me aware that I am not constrained to the city I was born [in] and the life I have known."

Gabriela Ramirez
Civil Engineering major

"Overall, the tour was an eye-opening experience that has changed my perspective on biology and research. I am grateful for the opportunity to have visited Rice University and I look forward to pursuing a career in bioengineering."

Fernanda Rodriguez
Biology major





“In my college path I have to reconsider my decisions and what drives them, as well as when I find what I want to pursue, truly use the resources given to help me succeed.”

Samuel Zavala
Computer Science major

“The best highlight of this trip was visiting the Houston Museum of Natural Science. As a history major, I’ve always loved learning about the past, especially about our ancestors.”

Julissa Arredondo
History major



“You should not do things alone, rather have a support system that is there for you when you feel bad or need someone to pick you up.”

Andrea Sanders
Integrated Health Sciences major



“I think it’s a beautiful thing to learn about people’s cultural beliefs and getting to experience that made me see a new perspective that I wouldn’t have done or known it was possible to go to temples if it wasn’t for TRIO.”

Marleen Salazar
Pre-Law Philosophy major



“As a first-generation student, college was the unknown, I didn’t know much about community service or organizations. But after this trip, I learned that I was not the only one who didn’t know and it made me feel less lonely.”

Brisa Sanchez
Integrated Health Sciences major

“The main highlight for me was broadening my mind to potential master’s and doctoral programs. I learned what to look for and consider, especially when moving somewhere far from home.”

Cassandra Roque
Rehabilitation Services major

