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2024-2025

LETTER FROM

Hi,

If you're reading this, I have met my goal after finding myself in a position I've never thought I'd be in.

Looking back on the past three years, I have gained so much respect not only for the staff I've worked with but also for the legacy Pulse has built over the past 10 years. It has been an honor to guide a talented team in the production of Pulse Magazine 10th issue, "Restart."

"Restart" will take you on a journey throughout the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's growth as the university celebrates its 10th anniversary.

Student success is highlighted by showcasing alumni legacy from the University of Texas at Brownsville and their transition from students to professionals.

To us, "Restart" signifies new beginnings and second opportunities, which is why we chose to feature students who have taken the challenge of facing a new generation and renewing their college experience.

During this celebration, UTRGV's Athletics and Spirit programs make history as our football, drill team and marching band take on the field in Fall 2025. I welcome you to dive into their stories and learn more about their challenges and experiences throughout a historic milestone.

THE EDITOR

As I write this letter, I reflect on all the help and guidance I have received during my three years with Pulse magazine and how it has built me into a better leader and person.

If I could go back to my first day as a photo editor, I would tell myself to have trust in God, as he put the right mentors and coworkers in my path, but most importantly a Student Media family that pushes me outside my comfort zone every day.

Thank you to our faculty adviser, Dr. Agbese, for helping the staff throughout the fall and spring semesters and for being of great guidance. Thank you, to former Student Media Director Azenett Cornejo for always having the right advice.

Thank you to my section editor, graphic editors and designers, writers, photographers and social/online editor. "Restart" could not have been done without all your hard work and dedication.

Thank you to Student Media Program Coordinator Jesus Sanchez for supporting me since my first day at Pulse and for being the mentor a student employee deserves. A final and special thank you to my family for being my shield and the safe space I can always rely on.

Without further ado, I welcome you to Pulse OX, "Restart."

Sincerely,

America Salazar

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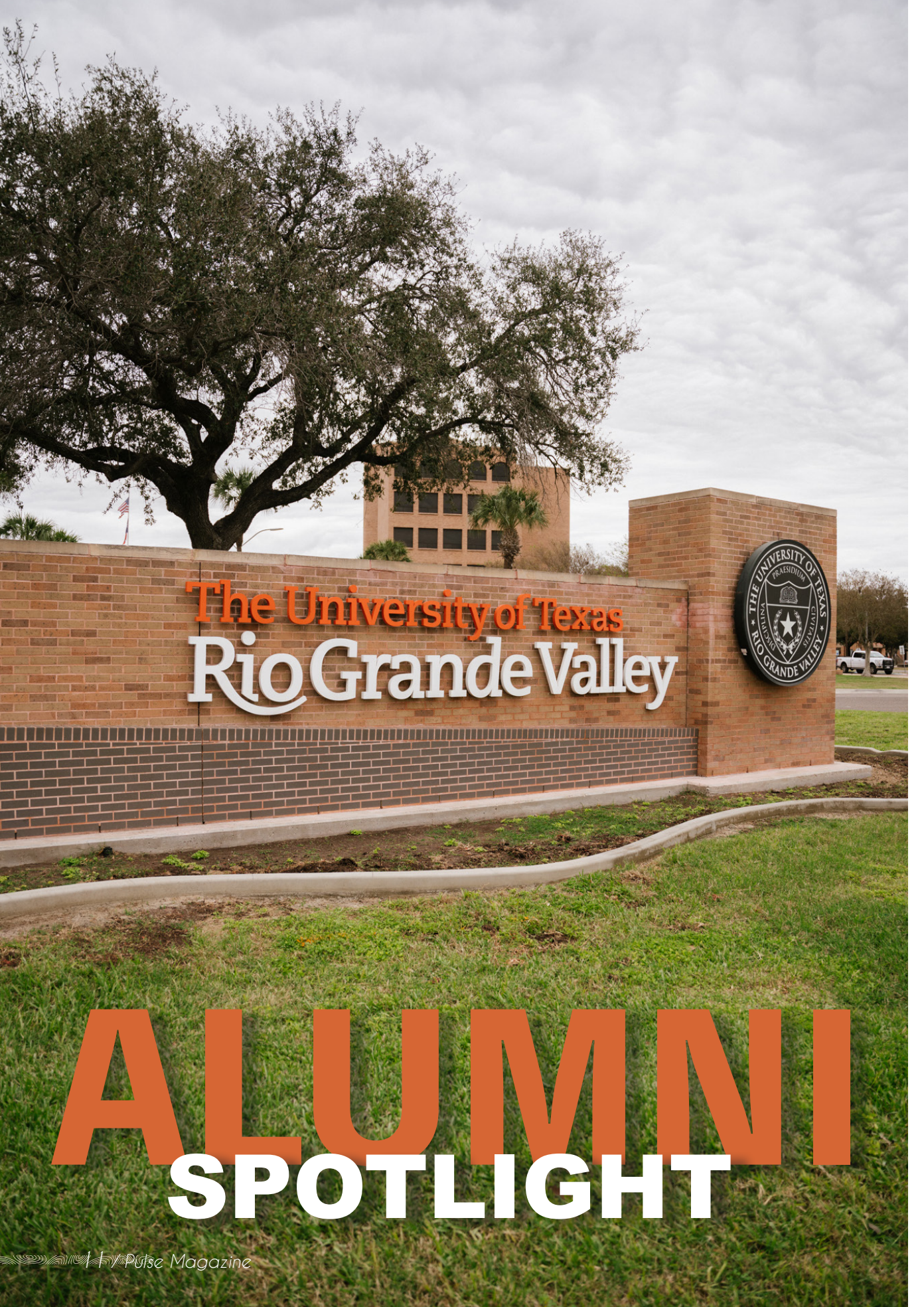
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GO COMMUNITY



A photograph of a brick wall sign for The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The sign features the university's name in orange and white lettering. To the right is a brick pillar with the university's circular seal. In the background, a large tree and a building are visible under a cloudy sky.

The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

From Class to Career

Story by Derick Lara

Photos by Derick Lara

Throughout the history of UTRGV and legacy University of Texas at Brownsville, thousands of students have received their diplomas and moved on to the next chapter of their life. In this article, we will shine a light on three of those UTRGV and UTB alumni.

Yaw Sam, CEO of Brand Geniuz, came to the U.S. in 2016 from Ghana, a country in West Africa, and is now leading his own company as well as teaching students about the world of marketing and content creation as a lecturer at UTRGV.

Sam graduated from UTRGV with a marketing bachelor's degree in 2020 and received his master's degree in Business Administration in 2022.

He said his participation and willingness to be involved within the university allowed him to gain experience as well as create meaningful connections that would set him up for success after college.

"I think most of the things I've learned or experienced and all the opportunities I've received have been because of UTRGV," he said. "I received the Texas Business Hall of Fame Award because of my involvement at UTRGV and just being

there consistently, asking questions and getting involved with different organizations and everything. That gave me a huge opportunity and opened up so many doors for me. UTRGV set me up for where I am today."

He said being the CEO of his own company requires him to take on a variety of different tasks to ensure business is running smoothly.

"I like to call [the job of the CEO] a chief everything officer," he said. "Everything from handling the team, making sure everyone is working efficiently, building new systems with the team, client relations, executive strategy moving forward and other things like finances and all that."

According to Sam, Brand Geniuz uses a personal approach to market businesses through videography by creating a sense of connection with the social media audience.

"We do this by educating people and entertaining people with the content in a way that they feel is relatable," he said. "People want to see people. They don't want to see graphics of some idea of what the business looks like."

Aside from being the CEO of his own company, Sam also teaches social media & eMarketing at UTRGV.

He said his class is centered around introducing his students to situations and tasks they would face in their future careers.

"I [teach] genuinely because I love it," he said. "I wanted to find a way to give back because I strongly believe that the best way to learn is by doing."

According to Sam, his classes revolve around social media fundamentals and collaborations with local businesses.

"I really wanted to bring the real world experience of what I've learned into the classroom," he said.

Sam encourages college students to slow down and to appreciate where they're at in life. He said, "it's not about making lots of money" but more so about feeling fulfilled and living a happy life.

"A lot of times, students feel that there is a [race] to be successful," he said. "You have to appreciate the journey you're on and appreciate where you're going. Enjoy those moments because you never get them back."



Gonzalo Salazar, the superintendent of Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District has held his position for 19 years and has been working in public education for over 35 years.

In 2024, Salazar was the recipient of the Region One Superintendent of the Year award and was also a finalist for the Texas Association of School Board's 2024 Superintendent of the Year award.

He is a legacy University of Texas at Brownsville and UTRGV alum where he earned his bachelors of arts and sciences with an emphasis in bilingual education and his masters in educational administration.

He continued his educational journey by receiving his doctoral degree in educational leadership by doing an autoethnography, which is a written piece of work that captures a person's story and experiences through creative writing, research and data. His ethnography was focused on his journey of being a superintendent of a school district and how that journey has shaped who he is as a person.

Salazar mentioned how being a superintendent is a very rewarding occupation and how he enjoys seeing students develop over time.

"My favorite part about the job is seeing students graduate," he said. "We get to see all the kids who were struggling learners and reluctant to come to school, graduate with honors or with dual enrollment credit. To see the kids mature and graduate and say thank you as they come off the stage, and to be there to wish them all the

best, sending them off to be very well prepared members of the community, that's my favorite part."

Having to work hard to get to where he is today, he said his father played a significant role by guiding him and emphasizing the importance of pursuing a higher education.

"I come from very humble beginnings and I had to go to work," he said. "I worked for about seven years before

learned as much as I could," he said. "In May of 2018, I got my doctoral degree, and in a way, I did that to model lifelong learning and to achieve a higher level of proficiency. Education opened doors for me and



starting my education program. My father instilled in me the promise that education holds and how it can provide a brighter future for kids so I knew that's what I wanted to pursue."

After starting his educational journey, Salazar has made it his mission to continue to move forward by earning a higher level of education throughout his life.

"Once I got into [education], I embraced every opportunity and

it was everything my father said it would be."

He encourages students to take the challenge to a higher education by continuing their scholastic journey and to never stop pursuing knowledge.

"You're not done learning when you become Superintendent," he said. "Even if you get your doctorate degree. I learn something new every day, and I learn from people from all walks of life. You have to be willing to listen if you're going to learn."



“You’re not done learning when you become superintendent.”

Alejandra Guerrero, a UTRGV alumni, is continuing their academic pursuit towards a materials science and engineering doctorate at UTRGV.

Guerrero initially wanted to be a math teacher while she was earning her bachelors degree, but shifted her focus to mechanical engineering midway through her undergraduate studies.

"I actually enrolled in mathematics back in 2012 and then I think it was halfway through my undergrad studies that I came across an intro to engineering course and I just fell in love with engineering," she said.

Guerrero then discussed why she is so passionate about mechanical engineering.

"I think it's just how we can incorporate different aspects of math, science and physics to solve real life problems," she said. "You always have to be improving on your current results and you have to be keeping up with all the new technology that is around."

She said that her focus within the field

of engineering is centered around lithium ion batteries.

"[UTRGV] has a research lab that specializes in lithium ion batteries," she said. "We're studying the effects of materials on the batteries that operate the Tesla [vehicle], your phones, everything, we're studying all that."

She mentioned how she appreciates the assistance that UTRGV and her academic advisors provided her with.

"My adviser provided [me] with the resources to become successful," she said. "He incorporated our lab research into careers that we could pursue. He helped me land my first job and connected me with people from the industry. I like the community aspect of the university and that they show that they care about the students that actually show interest."

She then motivated students to not be fearful about what is to come and to take an active role in shaping their own future.

"Don't be scared," she said.

"At the beginning I didn't know what I was going to do. It's never too late to change majors if you feel like that would accommodate whatever you're interested in at the time. Take advantage of all the facilities and opportunities that the university provides. [Stay] involved and you never know, you might find your next life changing opportunity in the university."





The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley



PRINTING A PIECE OF VALLEY CULTURE

With five years of experience, Palo Santo, a local printmaking company, represents the Rio Grande Valley culture through unique clothing and collaborations with local artists and businesses.

This local printing company is currently co-owned by Devin Garcia and Andy Peña.

As a Valley native, Garcia is not a stranger to the artistic community with an extensive background in the music industry.

"I was a booking agent for 12 years, national working artists, booking concerts and throughout the country," he said.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Garcia said his day job in the concert industry was put on hold for over a year. Peña and Garcia took this pause as an opportunity to discover the printmaking world.

"We really didn't know anything about [printmaking,] it was kind of a hobby," Garcia said.

With no experience, the owner took on the challenge and started screen printing in Peña's garage trying to find a way to help the small business community during a financial hardship back in 2020.

"You couldn't go grab a

coffee like you'd normally do so a lot of people were trying to find new ways of income," Garcia said. "We found ourselves quickly being asked by a lot of our friends and people around the community for help to screenprint."

As Valley children, Garcia and Peña used to have their own favorite burger and taco place, and loved hanging out in cool little spots. Now, they get to work alongside these small businesses and get to "reintroduce" themselves to the community.

"We're a small business helping other businesses have merchandise and other things they can offer to their customers."

"We really love to work with local businesses," Garcia said.

With the business growing, Palo Santo has worked its way up from Peña's garage to a 200 square foot facility with nine employees and have founded a clothing brand, 9INE 5IVE 6EIS, which David Salinas is a partner of

In addition to helping small businesses, 9INE 5IVE 6EIS has become a place for local artists to use their skills to showcase the 956 community.

"A lot of the shirts will have 956 connotations, but will have work from artists from the Valley," said Erik Salazar, a Palo Santo employee. "They give their own kind of flavor of what they see is going on in the Valley."

Raised in Port Isabel, Sandro Galicia is one of the first artists who has worked alongside the brand.

According to Galicia, his first task was to create a design that incorporated tlacuaches and the 956 numbers.

"I started everything out with sketching, I try to work with different ideas that pop up in my head," he said. "I try to envision the [design] as much as I can and then throw it into paper and then I go digital."

Galicia said his collaboration with 9INE 5IVE 6EIS helped him get out of his "imposter" syndrome.

"[The design] mostly helped my mentality style," he added. "I like that people really love the design and saw that connection with the Valley, you had the tlacuaches and the literal 956."

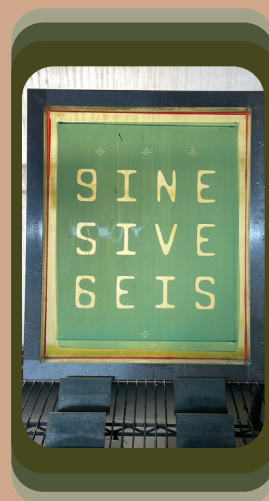
Story by America Salazar
Courtesy Photos by Devin Garcia



9INE 5IVE 6EIS model wears '956 mode' tee.



From left to right, 9INE 5IVE 6EIS co-owners Devin Garcia, David Salinas and Andy Pena, pose at Palo Santo Prints in McAllen.



Above:
Screen of 9INE 5IVE 6EIS logo impression.
Left:
9INE 5IVE 6EIS model wears tlacuache tee designed by Sandro Galicia.





PALO
SANTO





Left: 9INE 5IVE 6EIS model uses logo tote. Above: 9INE 5IVE 6EIS model wears blue 956 Felt Letter Cap.

you had the tlacuaches and the literal 956.”

Not only did Galicia’s confidence grow, but his design opened doors for him to showcase his artistic skills.

“There’s been a couple of organizations and people that have come up and asked for designs as well,” he said.

Recently, Galicia worked on a Valentine’s design for 9INE 5IVE 6EIS and said it was great incorporating tlacuaches and bringing everything back together from the design he created over a year ago.

Galicia described his art style as cartoony, colorful and anything that would make people laugh.

“Also, a lot of Valley imagery,” he added. “Taquerias, you’ll go down the streets and see llanteras that has really cool bright designs.”

Palo Santo employees are additional artists who can have the opportunity to showcase their skills through collaborations.

Erik Salazar, has been working with Palo Santo for over a year and will be working on his first design while being in charge of the reclaiming portion of printmaking.

“I work in the back, in the washroom, I’ll get the screens that we already made prints of and start the process of taking the ink off, and getting them prepared to get recorded for the new image,” he said.

Salazar’s introduction to printmaking goes back to his college career at the University of North Texas where he earned a bachelor’s degree in fine arts.

He described his first year in Palo Santo as a “boot camp” where he got the chance to remember the printmaking process and learned how to work at a larger scale.

“In the art room, you can make a [one to five] series, here we are making around 600 shirts and they’re not for you, they’re for a customer,” he said.

Salazar said Garcia and Pena have built leadership around helping their

employees improve and finding ways to increase their screens quality.

“They’re very open to suggestions and feedback, we’re the ones doing the work and they’re in there with us too,” he added. “The fact that they listen to us makes the job a lot easier.”

According to him, Palo Santo’s exposure to their customers is mostly done by posting their shirts and products on social media.

The printing company also does a pop up every year during the summer that demonstrates the behind the scenes of Palo Santo alongside different vendors.

“[The pop up] is usually over our shop, and we’ll do live printmaking or some type of engagement with the customers,” Salazar said. “We’ll invite other vendors to come by and sell their products.”





ENTRE EL PASADO Y FUTURO DE ARTISTAS LOCALES

Story and Photos by Nikole Salinas

Amidst the ever-growing-and-changing community of the Rio Grande Valley, local artists and creatives are working together to support one another and create new artistic environments and opportunities.

One such group enacting change is “Entre,” a film-and-archive-center in Harlingen. “Entre” supports local upcoming filmmakers and artists and has debuted its first artist residency known as the Artists in Radical Residency (AIRR) program.

According to C. Diaz (they/them), an “Entre” founder and the facilitator of its AIRR program, described “Entre” as “an artist-run creative cooperative.”

Founded in 2021, “Entre” connects artists and locals in the Valley through their love of art and culture. The center’s mission, according to its website, “is to provide access, knowledge and skills in filmmaking and archival practices.”

Diaz, who was born in Rio Grande City and grew up in McAllen, has worked with various film and archive centers in California and New York. They returned to the Valley in 2021 with the goal of establishing “Entre.”

According to Diaz, Andres Sanchez, a friend and “Entre” co-founder, was an important part of the film center’s creation as both of their “values are very aligned.”

“Entre” is also “the first of its kind here in the Rio Grande Valley and it’s been really, really sweet,” Diaz added.

“Entre” also has an archive of home videos that Valley locals have donated. According to Diaz, “Entre”’s archive initiative “focuses on the collection, preservation and exhibition of oral history and home movies from the region.” The archive also offers transfer services to digitize film from other formats like DVDs, 16 mm, 8 mm, digibeta, Betamax and videocassettes.

Diaz also explained that the center is important because creatives and artists should be able to access film and video resources, “especially in a place down here in the Rio Grande Valley where we’re really cut off from a lot of larger metropolitan areas.”

Apart from building a creative resource center and archive, “Entre” has worked closely with several local organizations to create a sense of community.

“We’ve been able to garner a lot of support and work with so many different community members and organizations down here, not just in the Valley but also outside of the Valley, who have provided such great support for our work,” Diaz said.

Local and grassroots organizations can also use “Entre” for meetings, gatherings and informational sessions. This way, Diaz said, they can give back to the community. But they said they wanted to do more. The answer was the AIRR program.

Diaz said the idea for AIRR was born at the Echo Park Film Center in Los Angeles. Echo Park had an artist-in-residence program that Diaz participated in in 2016.

While at Echo Park, the support and encouragement they received boosted their resolve as an artist.

“That’s when I [knew] I could call myself an artist because everyone was just so generous and encouraging. No one was really competitive or judging you for your ideas or that you didn’t know how to do something. If you wanted to learn how to do something, they would teach you,” Diaz said. They wanted to bring that feeling to the Valley.

According to “Entre”’s website, AIRR “provides financial, material and creative support for two emerging RGV artists to create a new film/video work.” AIRR is only open to Valley residents and aims to provide artistic opportunities that are not common in the Valley.

“The whole point is like an experiment. We want [the artists] to experiment with using these mediums to create something new that maybe they haven’t tried before or don’t have the space in their life to do,” Diaz explained.

The program began in 2024. Applicants had to submit two project proposals. The first proposal would be the main project they would work during the residency while the other would be a community event that they would organize with “Entre.”

The residency’s first selected artists were Juan Solis and Andrea Flores, who are from Brownsville and Mission, Texas respectively.

Diaz said the winners were paired with a mentor and given “free rein” to “Entre”’s gear and equipment. The residency lasted three months, during which Solis and Flores received a \$1,000 stipend.

“I think it’s very important for people to have these opportunities to explore interests outside of just basic work and life stuff, being able to be supported not just financially, but creatively and materially,” Diaz said.

They described the residency as an “exploratory period” for selected artists. Therefore, finishing a film during the residency is not a requirement. The unique environment and expectations of the AIRR program are the root of its “radical” namesake. Solis, who graduated from UTRGV with a degree in English, said the residency gave him the opportunity to work on his documentary film, “This Soul the Body Sows.”

He said the documentary explores “what it means to be an artist.” He interviewed various community members and artists from different backgrounds.

The artist said he decided to apply to the AIRR program after a flyer for the residency caught his eye at a coffee shop. He said it appealed to him because it seemed like a unique experience conveniently “close to home” that would allow him to balance his everyday responsibilities and his art.

Describing his experience in the AIRR program, Solis said, “It’s good to experience a residency for the first time, especially somewhere close to home.” He said he received a lot of support that helped him become more confident in himself and develop his art further.

The Brownsville native’s journey in art began with music. “I started as a musician when I was about 14 to 15. I think the inclination to be an artist was always there,” he said. He also liked writing and described it as his “main medium.” However, he liked exploring different outlets for his art. Film was one outlet that he felt drawn to.

“I always wanted to explore different mediums and film was a big one. You know, just falling in love with movies early on, I think being impacted by some of those movies growing up, just knowing that I always wanted to do that,” he said.

The residency, he added, gave him the chance to create a film and did “a great job of nurturing the idea that I’ve had and letting me explore that idea and providing me with different resources.”

For Flores, the AIRR program was an unexpected avenue that helped her “process the grief” she felt after losing her mother two years ago. She said her community event and final project, a short film titled, “Vuelve a Mi”, were very personal because art had become an outlet for expressing her deep feelings.

“I think that’s something that maybe I didn’t realize, was how much it was gonna bring out of me,” she said. She said that the themes of “change, loss, and acceptance” were prominent influences in her work. Her community event was a session on memory sharing.

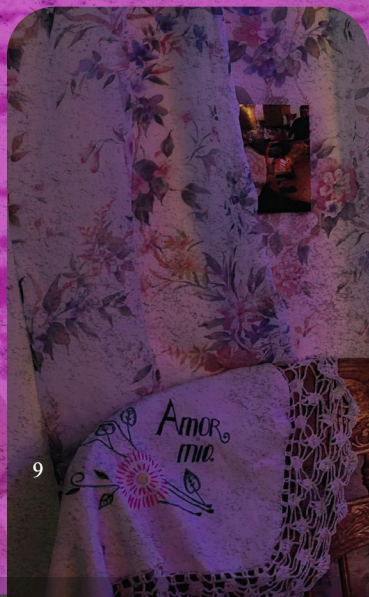
Flores’ experience at “Entre” also helped her feel more connected to the community and her own artistry. Prior to applying for and participating in the AIRR program, Flores said she did not have experience with filmmaking.

“This residency, just as a whole, has been the first thing that I’ve done since my mom’s passing. So it felt almost like the first step to getting back to making things, and not being so afraid to live life,” she said.

Flores encouraged other artists and creatives to let go of any doubts they might have toward pursuing their artistic inclinations.

“If you feel like you have something that is in your mind and you want to bring it to life, you should just try,” she said.

After the residency, “Entre” held a public end-of-year event to showcase Solis’ and Flores’ final projects. Diaz said they hope the AIRR program will become an annual event for local artists.



WE ARE

Story by Nikole Salinas
Graphics by Devin Garza

After a hiatus pause from their college life at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, students shared what motivated them to take on the challenge of returning to campus.

Thirty percent of first-time, full-time, degree seeking students enrolled at UTRGV will receive a baccalaureate

within four years, while 55% of first-time, full-time, degree seeking students enrolled at UTRGV will receive a baccalaureate degree from UTRGV within 6 years, according to the Office of Strategic Analysis and Institution Reporting at UTRGV.

For most students, pursuing a college degree marks the beginning of a new chapter in their lives for the next four to six years. For others, however, life can send students on a different path before returning to finish their degrees.



Lourdes Ruiz,

a senior pursuing a degree in music technology, is one such student who experienced a unique path toward pursuing her degree. Originally pursuing a major in Music Education, Ruiz decided to take a break from student life after feeling overwhelmed with the college environment.

“Long story short, it was weird because I always felt like I was giving everything, but I was not getting stuff done. It came to the point that I wanted to quit school because I was so burned out,” Ruiz said.

She focused on managing her physical and mental health during her time away from school. With some extra time, she was able to find work as an audio/video technician that allowed her to gain experience in a field she was passionate about. “The stars aligned,” Ruiz said.

It was her AV tech job that helped Ruiz feel motivated to return back to school.

“I told my boss, like, yeah, I’m studying for this and that. And then he said, ‘Well, give me your diploma and I’ll pay you as an engineer.’” ... “I was like, OK, that motivated me even more,” she said.

When continuing her studies, Ruiz made it a goal to focus on herself rather than comparing her college experience to others.

“Comparison is a thief of joy, right? And I know their way is not my way. We have different paths than our old classmates,” she said.

Victor Hernandez,

a freshman pursuing a degree in addiction studies, shared a similar sentiment when he decided to continue his education.

Hernandez returned to school after a 10 year hiatus from his studies. Like Ruiz, he felt motivated by his peers from work to continue his education. He cited two of his coworkers, both of whom pursued their degrees, as a main point of inspiration. “[They] would kind of ask me, like, ‘Hey, how come you don’t go back to school? ... You know, like you can do this.’”

He explained how he initially had hesitations about returning back to school, “Part of me was worried ‘cause I felt like I hadn’t been to school in so long.”

The concern of money and financial aid was also on Hernandez’s mind as a result of failing one of his classes during his last year before taking a break from college. Determined to not only just pass his classes, Hernandez dedicated more time

and focus to also raise his GPA.

“I got all As. I got my GPA up from 2.723 and now I’m back on track and I’m actually eligible for financial aid now,” he said.

Now in his second semester back at UTRGV, Hernandez said he feels a lot more confident and comfortable with where he stands academically.

Ruiz encourages those unsure about continuing their education to “Just do it. Just go ahead and do it if your heart desires it so bad, just go ahead and do it. Perseverance is the key.”

“You might feel out of place, but nobody will treat you out of place because we’re all here for the same reason. We’re all trying to move forward in our journey.”



SO BACK



Secondhand clothes and accessories fill racks and shelves at Remenace Vintage.

LET'S GO THRIFTING!

Behind the Scenes on One-Of-A-Kind Finds and Fast Fashion

Story by Gloria Aguilar
Photos by Derick Lara

Trending on social media platforms and here in the Rio Grande Valley, local businesses and environmentalists have provided behind the scenes on the impact of thrifting vs. fast fashion to our environment.

Mariel Rodriguez, a UTRGV international business senior who upcycles clothing said she's always participated in buying second-hand with her grandmother because they hated wasting money on clothing many people were giving them away.

What has been on the rise with thrifting in the Rio Grande Valley is how many people are creating a business from second hand clothing.

Jason Munoz, owner of Remenace, a thrift store in Mcallen Texas, said during the pandemic when people couldn't work their jobs and had more time on their hands they started realizing they could make money from reselling and upcycling clothing.

According to these business owners, thrifting is the activity of seeking out "second hand clothing that already comes with a story." Munoz said it was like a "treasure hunt" that is "fun and rewarding".

For these business owners, one of the reasons they prefer thrifting is how sustainable it is.

"I love thrifting... a lot of the fabric that you get from thrifting still lasts a long time," said Rodriguez.

Rodriguez started to use her social media platform as a business to customize those thrifted pieces she purchased for herself first and then for her followers.

**"Second hand
clothing has a story
you can add to it."**

"I started off just going thrifting and flipping them into my everyday style," said Rodriguez. "And then people started reaching out to me asking if they could get some pieces of mine..."

Kunty Klawset, Rodriguez's online platform is used to highlight how repurposing an old piece of clothing gives it "sentimental value".

Another reason these businesses prefer thrifting is because of vintage finds that you can recall.

Munoz said people like thrifting because it's like going down memory lane.

These local businesses that resale and redesign thrift finds help give "inspiration" to their community.

"A lot of people have said that they've been inspired to go outside their comfort zone and just experiment with their clothing," Rodriguez said. Even my own girlfriend... she just said that I inspired her to do so because I'm not scared of what people think."

Munoz said his motivation to keep his store open is for the community experience of having people to push and inspire.

"If [a customer] gets all happy when they find something and they show me..." he said. "It's more about the community and seeing it grow and seeing other people look up to me and they open up a store."

With thrift stores being full of second hand clothing, many are filled with styles from previous years.

Therefore, Munoz concludes that people like it because "You can find one-of-a-kind pieces..." Munoz said.

Another aspect that causes Munoz to suggest people like thrifting isn't because it is "a trend that just got really hype" but because of how "sustainable" those thrifted clothes are.

“It’s sustainable because you’re saving money, you’re not buying fast fashion... [thrifed clothes] are made with a lot more craftsmanship, quality and better materials,” said Munoz.

The effects of thrifting because of these local businesses goes into our community. The same applies to fast fashion in our environment.

“Fast fashion refers to clothing that takes very little time to go through the process of developing to the sales,” said Marla Perez Lugo, program coordinator of Environmental Studies in the department of Sociology.

Perez Lugo explained environmental studies is the combination of studying natural social sciences to discover the root of environmental issues, not the chemistry or biology of environmental problems.

Therefore, one of the environmental issues that Perez Lugo has been able to study is how fast fashion affects the environment.

“There are major problems with fast fashion,” said Perez Lugo. “For example, the amount of water that is required and the amount of space [the pieces of clothing] take in the landfills, because you are not supposed to wear [those garments] for long periods of time.”

Perez Lugo expressed that companies like “Zara and Forever 21 take only eight weeks from their conceptualization of a piece of a garment to the selling of that garment.”

According to her, companies do this practice on purpose so that their clothes are worn quickly and tossed out when a new piece of garment comes to the market forcing customers to buy more.

“It is designed for you to look fabulous for just a couple of wears and then you throw it away,” she said.

Due to this process, Perez Lugo also said that the clothes quality tends to be very low and not last long.

Some effects Perez Lugo found when it comes to the mass production of fast fashion in the environment end up contaminating the sea, air and even the next generation.

The ocean gets contaminated, “everytime we wash clothing that is made out of polyester, and that has small fibers of plastic,” Perez Lugo said.

According to her, this is all part of a cycle as all of the fibers get back into the ocean which will then get into the food chain when we eat the fish that eat polyester.

“There is research about how even in our reproductive organs, a few humans are saturated with microplastics, so we are sending microplastics to the next generation,” she added.

When asked what a solution can be to this issue, Perez Lugo said, thrifting is better for the environment than shopping fast fashion.

“There are websites that specialize in upcycling clothing and designers that are thinking about the environmental problems that are promising to use recycled materials in their new productions,” she said.

Entrepreneurs in the RGV, such as Munoz and Rodriguez have created their business internationally giving back to the community and



Hallway walls and floors with vintage clothing at Remenace Vintage.

consequently, Perez Lugo explains how that is being environmentally conscious.

“Having environmental conscience standards within these global fashion industries that mass produces... you are basically swimming against the current.”

She explains when something is trending and looks good the effects of shopping fast fashion to the economy have to be greater than purchasing. Which is being “individual defined” rather than “socially defined.”

The lobby of Remenace Vintage



A WALKABLE CITY

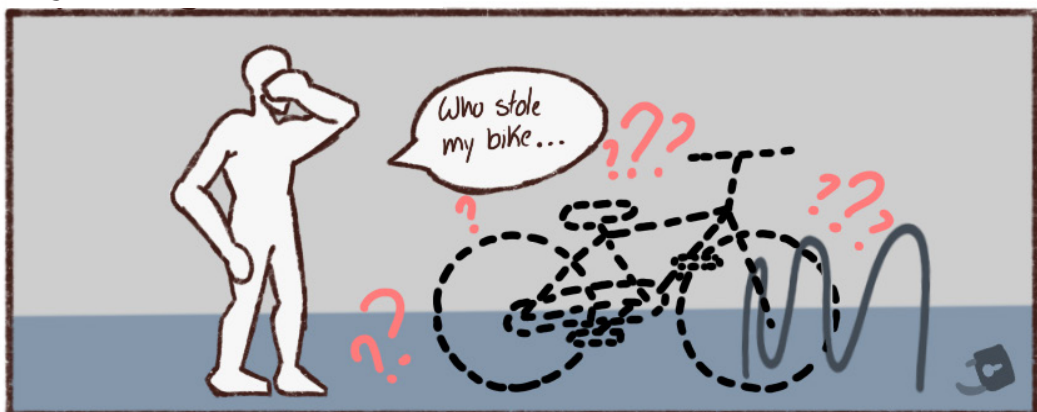
I'll just walk to class.



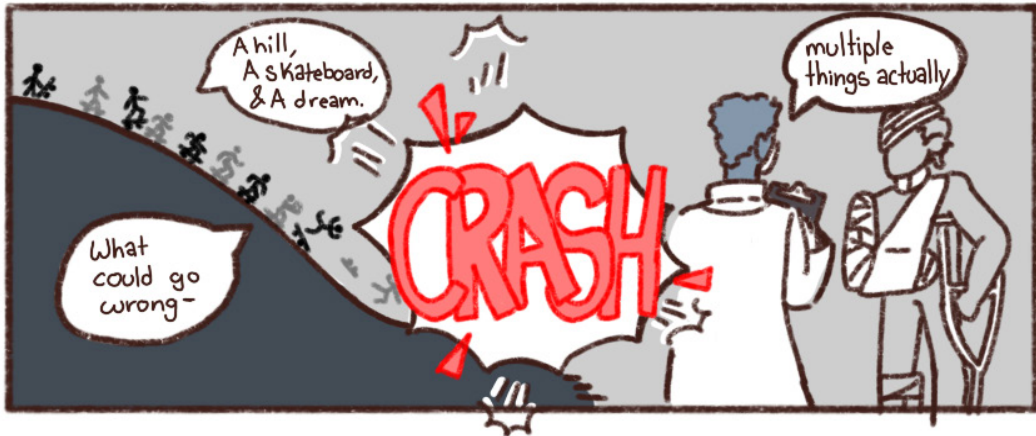
Nevermind, I'll wait for the VOLT.



Maybe biking is worth a shot.



Skateboarding seems fun?



Scooters seem safer, actually.



How about driving?



S P R I N G



Dancing to History



Story by America Salazar
Photos by Derick Lara

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On Oct. 4, 2023, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley announced a new Drill Team. Since then, history has been built by hosting tryouts, forming leadership and making appearances before its football halftime debut in Fall 2025.

UTRGV's Drill Team

history started with a proposal by Sel Gomez, director of UTRGV Spirit Program and drill team head coach, alongside her team of administrators.

"We wanted to come up with another dance team like a pom squad, kind of what we already have based in Edinburg or we wanted something completely

different that was more traditional when it came to Texas football, and that was the drill team," Gomez said.

UTRGV's Spirit Program consists of the Coed Cheer Team, Dance Team and Mascot Team. The Drill Team's addition will bring a new style to UTRGV.



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"The drill team is going to be a precision dance team, there's going to be more elaborate formations on the field," Gomez said.

According to the head coach, UTRGV's Drill Team will be the fourth collegiate team in Texas and of course the first in the Rio Grande Valley.

Since the team's reveal, various tryouts have been hosted and have formed a team of 25 dancers, but according to Gomez she hopes that during Spring tryouts she can build a team of 50.

To build the RGV's first university drill team, Gomez looks for more than just technique and dance skills during tryouts.

"I really look for poise, manners and showmanship," she said. "I look for leadership, someone who is able to have a conversation and be respectful when they communicate."

The team's leadership is guided by captain Marc Anthony Creado, a UTRGV dance education junior.

Creado's dancing career started with his desire to be a cheerleader when he was in sixth grade, he said one of the requirements was to be on the dance team for at least one

year. To his surprise, his mom saw the talent and passion he had for dance and encouraged him to not leave dance for cheer.

"Me staying in dance grew my love for the sport," he said. "I mean, that's just all I knew, it was just dance."

After a year in his middle school dance team, Creado took on the captain role which made him realize he wanted to

UTRGV was making a drill team, he was impressed. He explained there are other drill teams in Texas such as the Kilgore College Rangerettes and Tyler Junior College Apache Belles, but they are solely females only.

"Even if I wanted to [try out] I would not get the opportunity to do it," he said. "What made me want to [try out for UTRGV's Drill Team] was the fact that I have



be a dancer for the rest of his life.

"I was now captain of the team, that's what made my drive for being a dancer really go through," he said. "Now, I'm taking care of the team, I'm the leader and I have to set standards, from there it was just like 'this is what I want to do forever.'"

When Creado heard

the opportunity to still be a collegiate level dancer combined with what I love doing."

One of the challenges Creado has encountered as captain is keeping his team motivated before their first halftime performance.

"The way I keep them motivated is by just pushing each other and holding each

other into a high expectation whether we are performing or not,” he said.

Helping Creado build this year’s leadership are co-captains Alejandra Agado and Shelby Garza, whose love for dance started when they were part of their high school and middle school’s drill team, respectively.

“Junior year was probably one of my favorite years that I did [dance],” Agado said. “The drill team that I was part of in high school was strictly drill, so kick line, precision, a hat and boots.”

Garza sees dance as an escape from the real world and enjoys being able to tell a story on stage no matter the song or genre.

“I kind of use that escape to bring out a deeper part of my personality, and I wanted to continue that here at UTRGV,” she said.

Agado said during her senior year of high school she started losing the love of dance due to social issues within the team, but started looking into UTRGV’s Dance Team. With her background in drill, she felt discouraged as according to her, she does not have the skill levels as members of the dance team do.

“However, when UTRGV came out with the drill team, I was like ‘Can I still do it,’” she said. Making the team has

helped her fall in love with the sport, she added.

She believes the drill team is going to give an ode to the Vaquero with the cowboy hat, boots and skirts that make up the uniform.

“I think [the uniform] represents UTRGV in a different light,” Agado said. “We do have that clean look, and I do appreciate it, with the gauntlets and the little hat.”

Garza said she felt it was Christmas when she unboxed her uniform and was in shock.

“It was awesome being able to look at all the pieces of the uniform,” she added. “The hat is my main treasure, it’s just white, but it’s still beautiful.”

As UTRGV’s first football season approaches, she is excited to see the new traditions that are going to be created not only within the team, but with every organization at the university.

While the team hasn’t had their first official halftime performance, they’ve had appearances throughout the year such as UTRGV’s first official football practice, Madness and the Charro Days International Parade that has helped them introduce themselves to the university’s community.

“I think one of the most important parts of being part of the drill team would be the

role that we take on within the UTRGV,” Garza said. “That would be to bring energy and spirit to any event we go, just bringing spirit to the crowd.”

Due to the drill team being based on the Brownsville campus, practices were first held there twice a week, but according to Garza the team has now decided to meet halfway and Wednesday practices are now on the Edinburg campus.

“Unity is one of the most important things while being on the team because if you have unity off the field, then you are going to have unity on the field,” Garza said.

With a tight schedule, team bonding has helped the dancers grow closer.

If you’re a dancer who wants to make history with the UTRGV Drill Team, tryouts are being held April 26 on the Edinburg campus and May 3 in Brownsville.



SPANISH

BALLET
ESPAÑOL
PRESENTS

NIGHTS





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Meet UTRGV's New Women's Swim and Dive Team

Story by Anthony Tinay
Photos by Mikaela Lagunes

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley debuted its new women's swimming and diving team as part of its increased efforts to invest in student athletics programs during the 2024-25 season.

Betsy Graham, the team's head coach, was the first person the university hired for the Swimming and Diving program.

Graham, who described UTRGV as a "close to home" opportunity, grew up in Kingsville, Texas. She has 37 years of experience as a coach, with 26 of those years being at the college level.

"Having a divisional and swimming team in my back door would be awesome for me," Graham said.

Jennifer Mangum, UTRGV's women's diving coach, was also hired in April 2024 to train and scout for new student athletes. Before moving to the Rio Grande Valley, she helped spearhead clubs for Lubbock and Midland high schools and The University of Texas Permian Basin Division II diving team from 2017

to 2024. In her 37-year-long career, Mangum said she has gained extensive experience in establishing new teams.

"I've pretty much done that everywhere I've been," she said.

Before starting the season, Mangum said it was important to get familiar with not only her new stomping grounds for the team but the university as a whole.

She said living in Texas for most of her life meant she was used to warmer weather, but the Valley's friendliness and community was unique.

"The main thing I told the athletic director and the coaches was that I wanted to walk the campus from a student viewpoint," Mangum said.

According to Mangum, the more she gets to know the UTRGV community, the more excited she is to start something new in the university.

UTRGV's new team consists of 18 members who were recruited mostly from the Valley. A few members were recruited from other parts of Texas,

Florida, Virginia, California, Sweden and The Netherlands.

Mangum explained that recruiting for the team is a continuous process.

"My recruiting focus is going to be, for the next couple of years, trying to reach out and find divers from the Texas area as well as from wherever we can find them," she said.

Vaqueras who join the team have an opportunity to receive a full ride scholarship.

"It's exciting that we have resources, that we have scholarship money to give to kids. That we can try to draw kids to a great university where they can get a good degree," Mangum said.

Both coaches also shared that they are grateful for the support but also surprised by the amount of recognition the team has received from the community.

"There's been a lot of attention in the media, I have been stopped in several places. The grocery store, getting my car washed."

The team has also started competing. On Sep. 27, 2024, the swimmers and divers tested the waters for the first time as a team at the Orange and Gray Intrasquad Meet at the City of Pharr Natatorium. They competed in 12 events covering swimming techniques and challenges, such as the 200 metres freestyle and 200 metres butterfly.

The meet was also an opportunity for the coaches to see their athletes' progress since their four weeks of training before the season.

"We had some people that tried some turns that they didn't do coming out of



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high school, which was great,” Graham said. “Those are definitely where we see those improvements.”

Then on Oct. 12, 2024, the UTRGV team had its first season competition against the University of the Incarnate Word at the City of Pharr-PSJA Natatorium. UTRGV lost the meet, 193-94.

For Annaleagh Stahl, an electrical engineering freshman, the team had a good experience. She said, “We didn’t expect to go out there and win. We just wanted to have fun. How we came together as a team, it was a really good meet to start off with.” She won the 100 meters backstroke, 200 meters backstroke and the 200-meter individual medley.

Emphasizing the newfound camaraderie between the newfound team, she added that “making a team effort and encouraging one another is like the biggest goals for us, honestly.”

Stahl has been swimming for 14 years. She said swimming was a bonding activity in her family.

“I think I’ve been in the pool my whole life. It’s my home at this point,” she said.

She also described the first meet as “absolutely amazing. You could feel it in the crowd when I finished my first event in the 100 back. I had the first win of the day for the meet for our team.”

About 631 fans came to watch the meet. Dealing with the pressure of a crowded venue is relatively easy for Stahl, whose 14-year swimming

history has made her comfortable with pressure.

“I absolutely love competing in front of big crowds and getting to show my skills and being able to be in that atmosphere. So I enjoy it personally,” she said. “I feel it’s a skill that you develop over time, block everything else out and just focus.”

Ida Redulieus, another freshman swimmer, also saw the crowd as a positive thing.

“It feels like they’re going to know our names,” she said. “When they talk about the first wave, it’s going to be our names. So that feels really cool.”

Manou Meulebeek, a hospitality and tourism freshman and one of two divers on the team this season, joined the team with 10 years of competition experience.

At the meet, Meulebeek qualified for the National Collegiate Athletics Association’s Zone “D” Diving competition with her 1-meter and 3 meters springboard results. She also became the Western Athletic Conference’s Diver of the Week.

“It was kind of mindblowing that I qualified,” Meulebeek said. “I was really, really happy. I can’t wait to work harder and to perfection. I know it was a goal for me.”

Meulebeek transferred to UTRGV from The Netherlands. For her, it was a big leap traveling to the United States of America to do what she loves.

“My family is the only thing that I really miss,” she said. “And of course, some of my friends. But this has been a life opportunity for me coming here

and it has changed a lot in a very positive way.”

However, as she came from a less competitive background, Muelebeek said she must work on competition stress.

“I just want to work on being a little less stressed, a little bit less nervous and just try to enjoy more,” she said.

The athletes are excited to be a part of the first UTRGV Women’s Swimming and Diving team.

“We are setting the standards and the traditions for everybody,” said Olivia Votava, a mechanical engineering and mathematics sophomore. “It’s a little stressful at times, but honestly I love it. It’s great.”

For Stahl, “I’m really proud of what we accomplished as a team since we’re a brand new team.”

Over the course of the season, the team will travel to different places, including New Mexico, Colorado, Idaho and Washington. Muelebeek said she is excited about traveling with her teammates.

“It’s really exciting because I feel like on these trips, you get to know the people more,” she said.

“You become really close because y’all are doing something that you love.”

FOOTBALL

2025

HOME

Sul Ross State

Aug. 30

Texas Wesleyan

Sept. 20

Houston Christian

Oct. 4

Incarnate Word

Oct. 25

Nicholls

Nov. 8

East Texas A&M

Nov. 22

(TBD)

(looking for a game to replace North American)



SCHEDULE SEASON

AWAY

Prairie View A&M

Sept. 6

Southeastern

Sept. 27

Lamar

Oct. 18

Stephen F. Austin

Nov. 1

McNeese

Nov. 15



UTRGV'S

CLASICO MARIACHI

KEEPS TRADITION AND

Story by Gloria Aguilar

REPRESENTS CULTURE

Photos by Noah Hernandez





The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Mariachi Program directed by Francisco Loera received opportunities to represent the cultural traditions nationwide by guest speaking and performing in the 2024-2025 school year.

UTRGV's Aztlan started over 30 years ago with Dahlia Guerra but is now being directed by Francisco Loera.

As a generational musician, Loera said, "the [mariachi] music attracts [Hispanics] and you cannot avoid it," when asked about how Mariachi contributes to the Rio Grande valley culture.

In 1994, Loera helped build and develop the current UTRGV mariachi programs. His contributions helped initiate mariachi programs in different high schools around the RGV.

What originally started as one mariachi program only accessible as a concentration is now available for a bachelor's degree with multiple programs students can apply to. Such as, Mariachi Aztlan, Mariachi Juvenil Aztlan, Mariachi Azalea, Mariachi Vaquero, and Mariachi Espuelas.

"We represent our student body mariachi and this university is known for that, not only locally but all over the U.S and Mexico...[the students

in mariachi are] role models for Mexico," Loera said.

Loera said that Mariachi has played a significant role not just for the community but the culture with "its traditions." The elements and its individual role functions are what help "create a love for the music... you get stuck in a good way."

Anthony Flores, a senior in music with a concentration in composition and mariachi plays the violin in Mariachi. Flores said that mariachi's tradition has connected him with others in his culture.

"It helps me to connect with others because they also have that same passion and same love for mariachi music, which is I think the best music in the world," Flores said.

Due to Loera's work in helping build the mariachi program, it made Flores aspire to come to UTRGV and be a part of "what started almost everything in the valley" for mariachi.

"When I was in high school, my dream was to be here, now that I'm able to lead it, it's a pleasure for me," he said.

Members of the mariachi have gone across international borders like Mexico as guest speakers. Also, as

far as Washington D.C. invited by Congresswoman Monica de la Cruz, Texas District 15, to perform for those representing the Mexican Hispanic culture in office.

"We have received a lot of opportunities to travel the nation... [it's] a privilege," Jacob Contador, senior in music with a teacher certification in mariachi education, plays the harp. "We traveled to Washington D.C., we've traveled to Mexico [and] a few different parts of the U.S"

With Spanish being one of the main components in Mariachi and with it being the longest standing form of music to represent Mexico's heritage it links both the performer to the culture and the listener.

"The language is a key component of the style, but the music first and foremost is what should be listened to," said Contador.

For those who may not understand the language, the mariachi members hope readers and listeners "appreciate the music" because it represents them.

"To any of my colleagues and any of our non-Spanish speaking audience, enjoy our music," he added.

In the blink of an eye

A photo series by Derick Lara





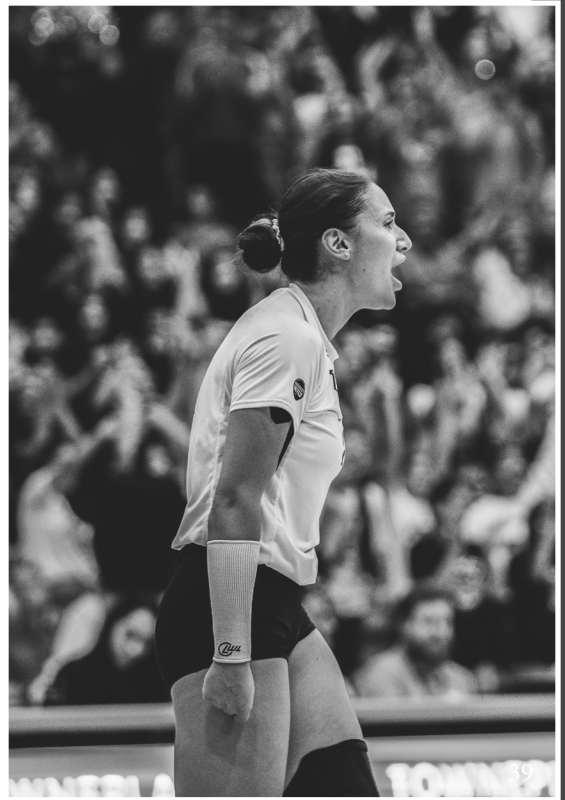
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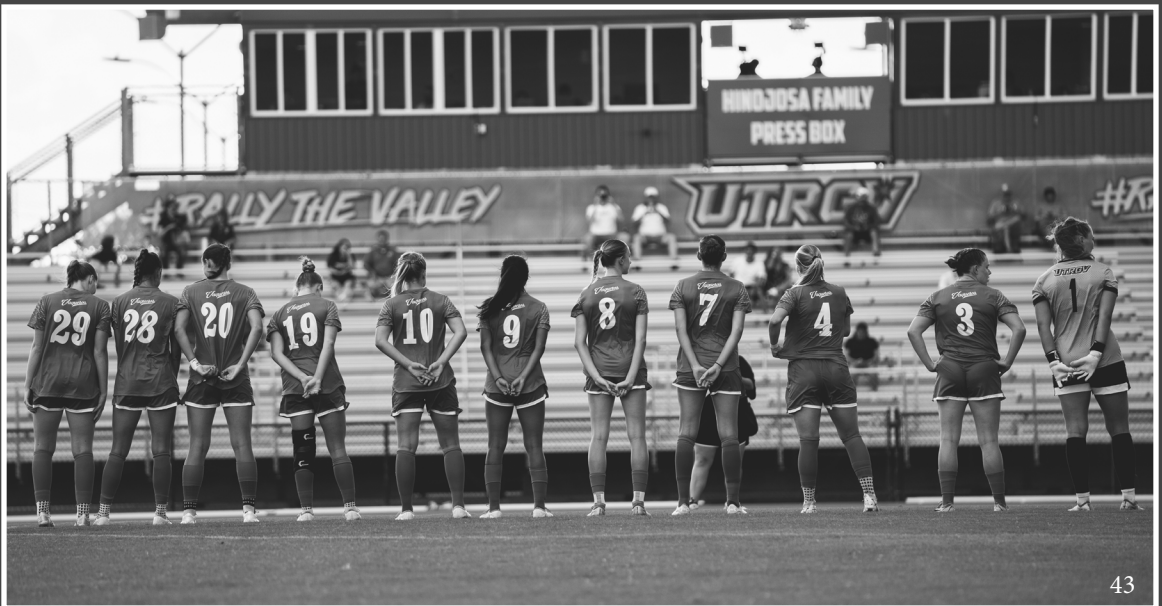








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MARCHING BAND'S LEGACY BEGINS

Story and Photos by
Gloria Aguilar



All new staff in Athletic Bands' at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley gets the Vaquero Marching Band ready for this year's football season with long training and community appearances.

Charles Greggerson joined UTRGV in 2024 after graduating from the University of Nevada Las Vegas with a doctorate in wind band conducting. He said he has plans for year-long events in preparation for the fall 2025 football season at UTRGV.

But Greggerson is not the only new faculty joining the Vaquero Marching Band, faculty members joining are Daniel Soto, assistant director of Athletic Bands, and Jerianne Larson, the director of Bands.

According to Greggerson, it's a completely brand new team for the band department. "My predecessor took care of initiating the marching band... So this is [our] opportunity to create our foundation and to begin our legacy," he said.

The first thing they did was hold a band camp, which consisted of 12 hours of training two weeks before the Fall 2024 semester at the UTRGV Soccer and Track & Field Complex

in Edinburg. At the camp, the students learned the fight song, how to march and drill formations.

"Professor Larsen and Professor Soto took them through band camp... in which they learn all of the basics of how to be in a marching band," said Greggerson.

The training continued throughout the fall semester. The students, whom Joshua DeLeon, section leader for flutes and piccolo, described as "band kids," spend two-and-a-half hours, three days a week, preparing for their performance. When asked why the band practiced for so long, DeLeon said, "It's just being a part of the territory... that you can brag about."

The Vaquero Marching Band currently has 9 section leaders and they all have the same responsibilities. DeLeon said the responsibilities include getting their section members comfortable in the new environment while having "fun".

When explaining her responsibilities Amanda Quintanilla, the section leader for the mellophones includes, "making sure they know their drill, which is what we do on the field," she said. "And if they have any

questions or any concerns, "they can talk to me."

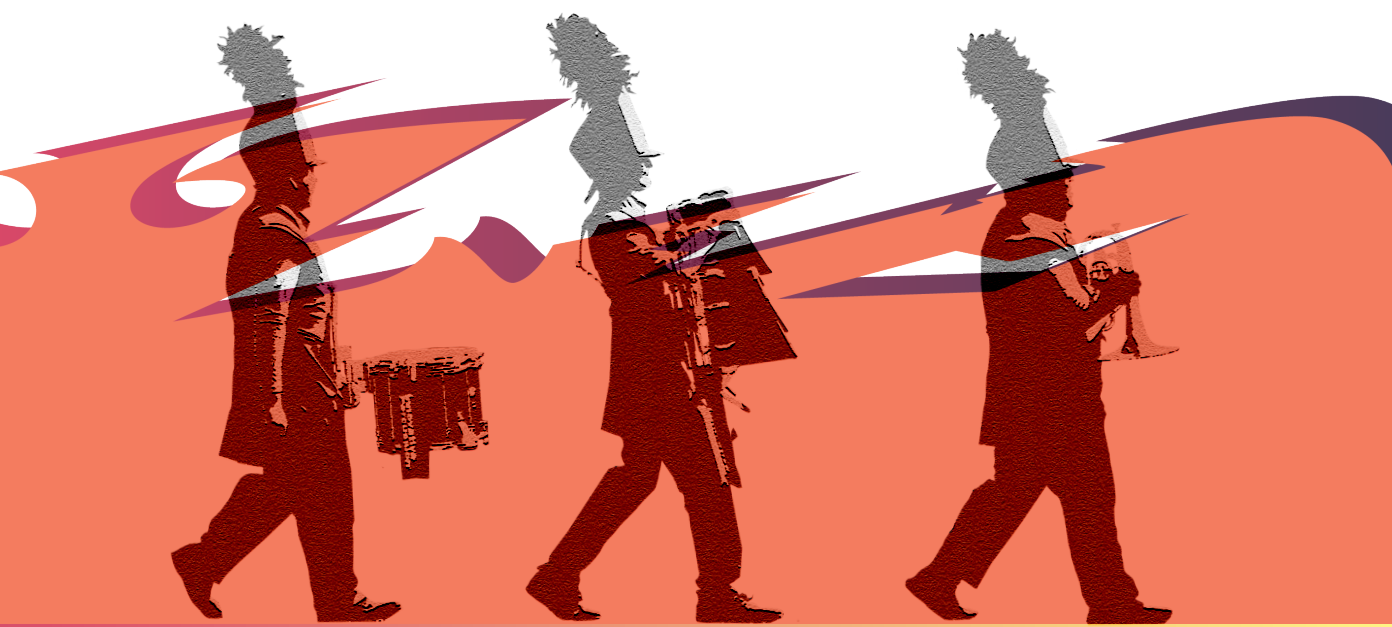
Drumline Section Leader, Aiden Blankenship explained, the leaders are planning to create a mark this year for future students to come in future semesters. For Blankenship, "It's a pleasant challenge because we know that what we're doing now will set the standards for years to come."

Even though it is the second official year of the Vaquero Marching band, Blankenship said that it felt more like the first year because, "it's the first time we have a real marching band on the field, brand new uniforms, brand new show written for us [and] brand new set of staff."

DeLeon said "The uniforms are important in a huge way to me because it shows how much effort and attention the university is showing to this program so we put those uniforms on and perform for the people here in the Valley and soon for our football players."

Therefore he tells his section to "play with pride".

Another important part of the marching band is the UTRGV Color Guard. The color guard performs



The Vaquero Marching Band during the UIL's 2024 intermission performance.

beside the marching band to help the audience visualize the music the band is performing.

The Color Guard captain, Madison Colunga said, "We are the color of the marching band. We're the story they are trying to tell."

Starting in 2023 with the marching band, the color guard captain has goals to "influence" people that watch them perform. Colunga added, "I want to put the Vaquero symbol on a flag and show that this is us," she said. "There is nothing that screams that more than a large marching band."

Greggerson, who was not raised in Texas, said the state is known for having the best bands, and he wants UTRGV to fall under that category.

"It's well known across the nation how strong Texas music programs are." He said, "we hope with the creation of [the UTRGV] marching band here, to bring it..."

UTRGV's Marching Band leader's have their own goal similar to Greggerson, to one day establish the same "recognition" that most college



school bands across Texas have.

"When people say marching bands in college, [they think] of A&M with 500 marchers while we're barely hitting 100," DeLeon said. "I'm just hoping, in later years, we are going to be the first name to come up when people think of college marching bands..."

As the Vaquero Marching Band prepares for UTRGV's future football season, Greggerson explains that participating in community events help them become "part of the community identity of the Rio Grande Valley".

The band director 's plans for this year include participating in the annual Pig Skin, the regional competition for high school bands. "It's a great opportunity to have the marching band perform basic skills, because we can bring more people to the marching band... to enrich our programs here at the university," said Greggerson.

Attending the UIL competition was the opportunity to initiate their identity by presenting to high schoolers that there is an option to go to the RGV that has a marching band program now.

"I get to see my old band again, it's fun to see high schoolers doing [Pigskin] so when we perform, I'm hoping we get their attention," DeLeon said. "Kind of like, hey, if you love what you do, you can do it in college here."

Many of the section leaders also got to reconnect with their prior highschools while representing UTRGV.

"It's really fun to see all the high schools and everybody we've known throughout our whole band career cheering for us," Quintanilla said. "A lot of people were like V's up and Go Vaqueros."

The collaborative work of each band member produces not just the showcase they have been preparing for since August but promotes their future performance for the football season in fall 2025.

"This helps us gently prepare for the next season," Gregerson said. "Having students know what to expect for football games... because it is only going to become busier as we learn more and more."

Alongside the anticipation for the

2025 football season and the Vaquero marching band's preparation for their year long events created an inner community amongst themselves.

Quintanilla said that preparing and performing provided a foundation with an already established "community" and "communication" amongst her section.

Blankenship shares that this inner community helps, "when it gets hard, everyone still has a good time."

DeLeon said that they are a big family at this point.

With each section leader looking forward to the 2025 football season, Quintanilla said it's because, "it's the best part about marching band, beside marching."

However, Blankenship said those who are not interested in football can still attend the future games, "if they necessarily don't want to watch football, they can go for us."

They also encourage all students and staff to attend the future football games, "we love to see everybody there" said Quintanilla and "come out and support us," said DeLeon.



Paul Farris, Vaquero Marching Band drum major, leading the band performance Saturday during UII's 2024 intermission.



EAT. PLAY.
STUDY. RELAX.



#RALLY THE VALLEY



Student Union

Welcome to the heart of campus life — the Student Union! Whether you're at the Edinburg or Brownsville campus, the Student Union is your campus living room, a place where ideas spark, memories are made, and campus life truly comes to life.

The Student Union is the hangout spot before, between, and after your classes. Grab a bite, study, relax, or take part in awesome, free activities and events that keep you engaged and connected.



Game Room Fun!



Burning of the Letters



Student Activities

Student Activities provides unique experiences that enrich UTRGV student's university/college experience. While proud to carry a legacy stemming back over 80 years across our region, as a new university, we are committed to the coordination of campus activities and lecture series, and the instilling of pride, tradition, and affiliation to the university.



The Stomp





HOT TOPICS



PULSE LEGACY

About Students. For Students. By Students

Compiled by America Salazar

Pulse, formerly known as Panorama at the University of Texas Pan-American celebrates its 10th anniversary by commemorating the waves of students whose paths have crossed the magazine's office walls.

The magazine's legacy began 10 years ago, when the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley opened its doors to Vaqueros in fall 2015.

With the goal to provide visual and literary elements to the Rio Grande Valley community and beyond, according to Pulse mission statement, the magazine staff is made up of writers, graphic designers and photographers.

Pulse logo designed by Adrian Castillo Lara is made up of incomplete circles which to the designers point of view represent there is room for improvement at the

magazine and although perfection is impossible, the staff will strive for it, according to Betzaida Rivera first Pulse editor-in-chief.

Throughout these years, talented students have dedicated time of their undergrad chapter to Pulse.

Every generation has entered Pulse with an empty recorder, sd card, or sketch book, and has left as a journalist, photographer or designer.



Erik Webster, who was a photo editor in 2018 said he first joined Pulse after switching majors to mass communications.

“I never would have thought of working at a magazine, but I’m really glad that I applied because it was truly an incredible opportunity,” Webster said. He described Pulse as a creative outlet that gave him the opportunity to write about topics that students do not normally get the opportunity to discuss.

“The UTRGV community needs to maintain that trust and know Pulse is that place to let unfiltered thoughts and emotions flourish,” said Steve Hughes, Pulse editor-in-chief for issue 006.

In 2016, Arael Meza joined the Pulse team as a photographer in which he had the opportunity to highlight UTRGV professors and work on a photo series called Borderland Activism.

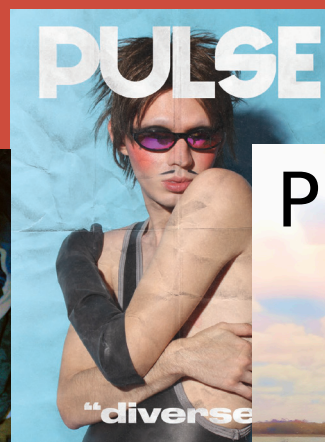
According to him, Pulse helped him grow his confidence and knew he was ready for a bigger role. Meza was the graphics editor for Pulse 003 and 004.

“We understood from the beginning that collaboration was key,” he said. “There was so much talent among the student body that needed a platform for creative expression and exposure.”

The graphics editor described Pulse as a dynamic fusion of a yearbook, cultural

publication, and living timeline that captures the heart and soul of UTRGV.

“[The magazine] reflects the diverse voices, stories, and global influences shaping the Rio Grande Valley,” he added.



2025 HOROSCOPES



Aries

March 21- April 20

You're probably justified to be angry and lash out a little this year. Just don't overdo it. Make sure to keep a tight hold of the whimsy in you.



Leo

July 23- Aug. 23

Take a step back in your brain and stop being on two extreme ends of the spectrum. Your work this year will pay off next year.



Sagittarius

Nov. 22- Dec. 21

Be cautious this year. There will be many opportunities for you to be challenged. You'll determine if you grow or not.



Capricorn

Dec. 22- Jan. 19

Let go of the past and evolve. The second half of the year will be yours for the taking. Will you?



Taurus

April 21- May 20

Go take someone out to lunch and try something new on the menu. You can grow out of your comfort zone this year.



Virgo

Aug. 23- Sep. 23

Don't over plan. This year won't go by perfectly and yet it'll still turn out OK. It'll all come back together so don't freak out.

In the Chinese zodiac, 2025 is the year of the Wood Snake, which means this is the year to shed bad habits and transform yourself! What does this year (maybe) have in store for you?

✧ Designed by Devin Garza



Cancer

June 22- July 22

Please pick up a healthy coping mechanism this year. Do breathwork, go on a walk, try yoga or meditation. You need it more than ever.



Scorpio

Oct. 23- Nov. 21

Have patience. This will be a long year, but you're strong. You can move past what's been weighing you down for a long time.



Pisces

Feb. 19- March 20

Cherish the good things flourishing this year and trust yourself. You deserve to enjoy the rewards of your hard work from the past two years.



Aquarius

Jan. 20- Feb. 18

Shake something up this year. Get a pet, try a new look, be wrong for once. There's no pressure, just have fun!



Gemini

May 21- June 21

The walls you put up will be tested. It's OK to relax and be yourself. Your friendships will strengthen this year because of it.



Libra

Sep. 23- Oct. 22

Do some self-reflection and figure out where you want to improve your life. You can get the things you want.

AI & Education: Revolution or Risk?

As AI technologies become increasingly integrated into academia, what impact is it having on professors and students?

Story by Sam Allen

Graphics by Quinn Garza

Artificial Intelligence—at one point an obscure, futuristic tech dream has now become a fixture of everyday life. At UTRGV, the spectre of AI looms large as the technology makes its way into classrooms and lecture halls. Some students and professors are embracing technological advancement while others remain steadfastly skeptical. Is AI in the classroom the next big step in a broader educational revolution or is it buying in on tech hype?

On-Campus Sentiment

For some professors, such as Michael Flores, a lecturer in the Department of Marketing and Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship (RVCOBE), AI is the next great

advancement in education.

“All of my courses now incorporate AI. I strongly recommend that [my students] use AI to help them create their weekly slide deck,” Flores said. “This is the new ride-share service. This is the new tool.”

Martha Lovett, a full-time lecturer in RVCOBE, sees AI similarly to Flores.

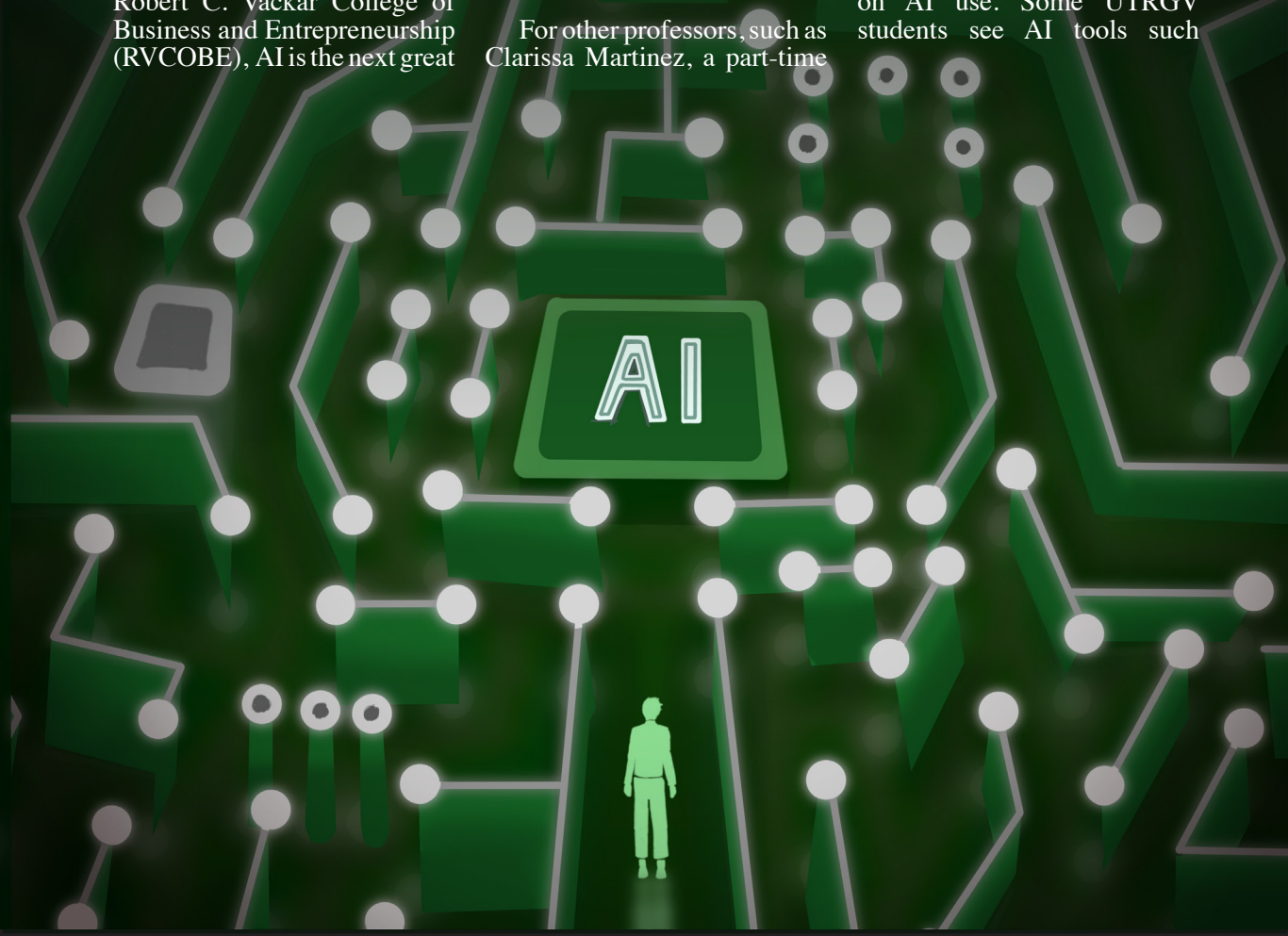
“[AI is] all good. I don’t believe that this has come to replace anything in the sense of people complaining, ‘Now kids don’t study, they just rely on AI.’ I don’t necessarily think so,” Lovett said.

For other professors, such as Clarissa Martinez, a part-time

lecturer in the School of Art and Design, AI tech feels more menacing. Martinez doesn’t see herself as fundamentally anti-AI, but she believes university implementation of AI should wait until the technologies mature.

“No, I don’t use AI in my classes and I don’t think I will be encouraging it. When it comes to what clients, agencies, or advertisers are looking for, if it is something you heavily rely on, [AI] can get in the way of doing successful work,” Martinez said.

Just like their professors, students have mixed opinions on AI use. Some UTRGV students see AI tools such



as ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot as an invaluable supplement to their education. AI tools help them create tailored-study schedules, practice exams, reviews and can act as a 24/7 personal tutor.

Brianna Del Angel, a UTRGV integrated health sciences junior, uses AI tools to study.

“I usually use [AI] for practice. So, I’m like, ‘Give me some practice questions, but don’t give me the answer yet.’ So, I do the practice questions, write them down. Then I [say], OK, give me answers. And then, I cross-reference,” Del Angel said.

Edgar Soto, a computer science freshman, sees AI as a tool whose use depends on the individual writing the prompts.

“AI is just another tool that helps us out, you know? And it’s pretty cool ... [but] there’s always that 1% that will use [AI] too much and just take advantage of it,” Soto said.

While other students such as Lilah Cravy, a visual communication design freshman, sees AI as a complex issue.

“[AI] should be used like a

basic tool, then I’m completely OK. But trying to use [AI] to make the product? I do have my worries,” Cravy said.

AI at UTRGV

AI use at UTRGV primarily takes the form of Microsoft Copilot, the AI tool integrated into Microsoft 365, which is provided to students and professors via their UTRGV accounts. In February, the university rolled out Copilot as a ‘safer alternative’ to other AI tools such as ChatGPT.

The Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology (COLTT) is the department responsible for providing guidance and support regarding teaching technology, including AI. On its website, it describes Microsoft Copilot as an “AI-powered assistant that can generate text and images, assist with research, and more.”

Jefferey Graham, chief information officer of IT at UTRGV—in a Feb.19 interview with Pulse for a story covering the Copilot launch—reasoned that since generative AI is already a part of students’ everyday lives, the university should leverage the technology.

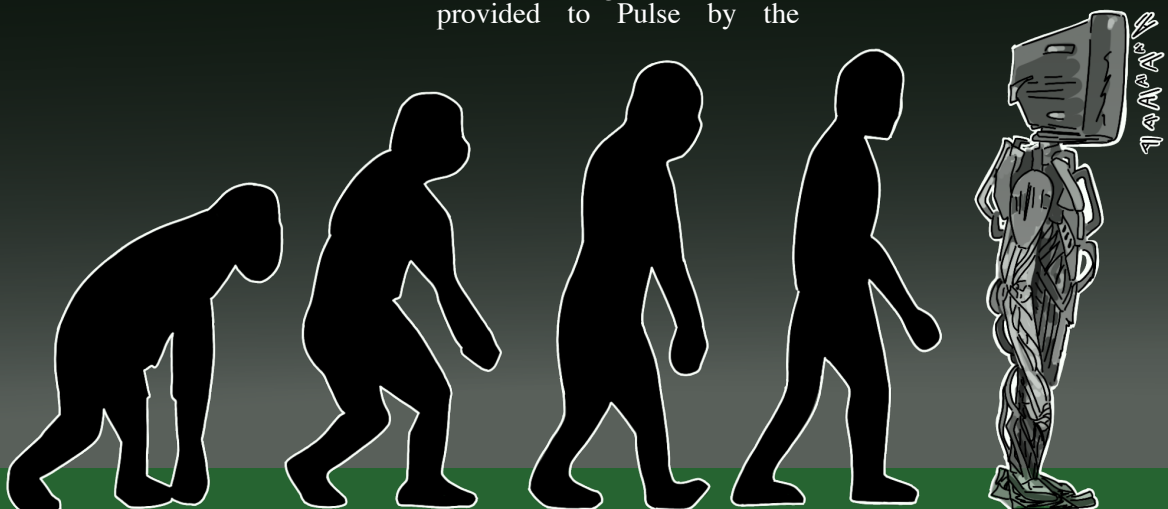
According to a statement provided to Pulse by the

UTRGV Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR), current university policy does not support the use of AI to complete and submit assignments or as a substitute for independent student work.

“Right now [AI use] is prohibited. Technically it doesn’t say ‘AI’ in the policy. It’s not specific, but it does mean that you cannot [submit] anything that is not your own work,” Gloria Garcia, assistant director of SRR said.

UTRGV currently implements content scanners that evaluate student work for AI use. The scanning software could not be disclosed to Pulse. However, there is no percent threshold at which a student submission would be automatically flagged for AI plagiarism and referred to SRR. The evaluation of AI use constituting plagiarism and referral to SRR is left to the discretion of the professor, according to Garcia.

“Right now, we are working on collaborating with faculty to see what [comes] next. Every other year, we look at and redo some areas of the policy. Maybe [AI is] something that we’re going to be looking into. But for now, it is prohibited,



but at the discretion of the professor,” Garcia said.

Professor discretion can vary widely across disciplines and within departments, so Garcia strongly recommends students review their course syllabus and any related guidelines before using any AI tools on class assignments. If students still have questions, she recommends reaching out to professors directly to clarify their stance on AI use.

Impacts on Learning

A big controversy surrounding AI use, especially in educational settings, is the ability of students to sidestep critical thought and outsource thinking to AI programs. Some educators at UTRGV fear that overreliance on AI tools will lead to students losing the ability to be confident and think for themselves.

“I am worried about people over relying on AI for their research, for their writing, for their reading. It could limit them in terms of intelligence, critical

thinking or comprehension. They may not realize it, but they’re limiting themselves.” Martinez said.

Martinez’s fears are not unreasonable according to the findings of a 2025 study conducted by Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University. The study shows overreliance on generative AI tools such as Copilot can negatively impact critical-thinking skills. However, professor experience implementing AI tools at UTRGV seems to contradict the study’s findings.

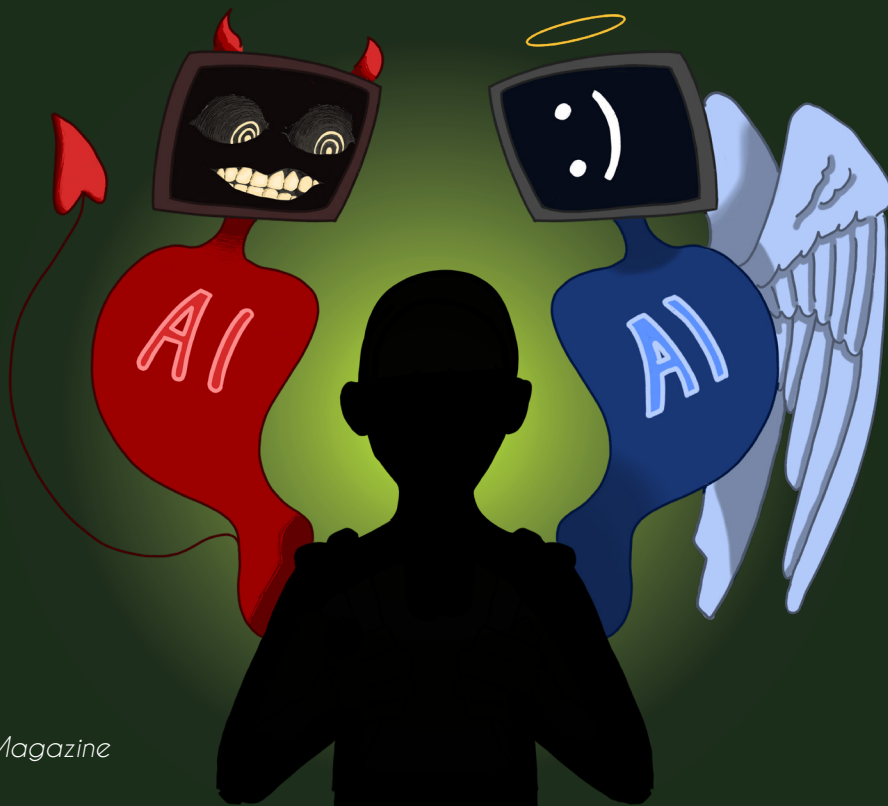
“In my personal opinion, as far as engagement in the classroom, it’s increased. I think [AI has] actually helped. We see students now with more ideas saying, ‘Hey, AI gave me this.’ They’ll present an opportunity and we’ll discuss it. [Students] say, ‘This [answer] was way off.’ So, they’re actually using critical analysis when it comes to the use of AI itself. They’re saying, ‘Hey, the machine is smart, but

I’m smarter,’” Flores said.

According to a separate 2024 study published in the Journal of Educational Computing Research, there are measurable positive impacts of AI use on college students’ academic performance. The study found that AI had a ‘moderately significant positive impact’ on improving academic achievement among college students.

Whether it is professor experience or scientific research, the true impacts of AI use on students’ learning abilities remain debatable—at least for now. What the research and anecdotal experiences seem to suggest is that the negatives or positives of AI use do not stem from the tech itself. Rather, the effects of AI on learning seem to come from how AI is implemented in educational settings and how students learn to interact with it.

So, is AI in education a revolution or risk?





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Downtown Urbanization

Story and Photos by Derick Lara

Illustration by Quinn Garza

The Musk Foundation and Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation have helped Downtown Brownsville experience a substantial amount of economic growth over the past five years by assisting small businesses expand and renovate.

In 2021, for example, Elon Musk announced March 30 via X he would donate \$10 million to the City of Brownsville for “downtown revitalization.”

Cori Peña, president and CEO of Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation (BCIC), said the donation has been a significant help to the community as well as the entrepreneurs looking to build their businesses.

To aid in its efforts, the BCIC applied for a grant from The Musk Foundation.

“We applied and received \$2 million for our Business Improvement and Growth grants, which we call our BIG grants.”

Peña explained the BCIC actually started its BIG grants in 2019 with

the purpose was to “assist with the activation of vacant buildings in downtown Brownsville.”

Before the grant existed, there was nothing available to help revitalize the old historic downtown buildings and not enough money to renovate the area.

“There’s always been talk about the rich cultural history of downtown, but there were no grants in place to help with the buildings,” Peña said. “Many of these buildings are very dated and not up to code. Their electrical, fire, plumbing, a lot of it’s not up to code and it’s a very costly expense.”

People who don’t have the funds to embark on restoration projects also own many of the buildings and properties in downtown Brownsville, according to Peña.

“A lot of these buildings are generational properties,” she said. “We came up with these grants to help

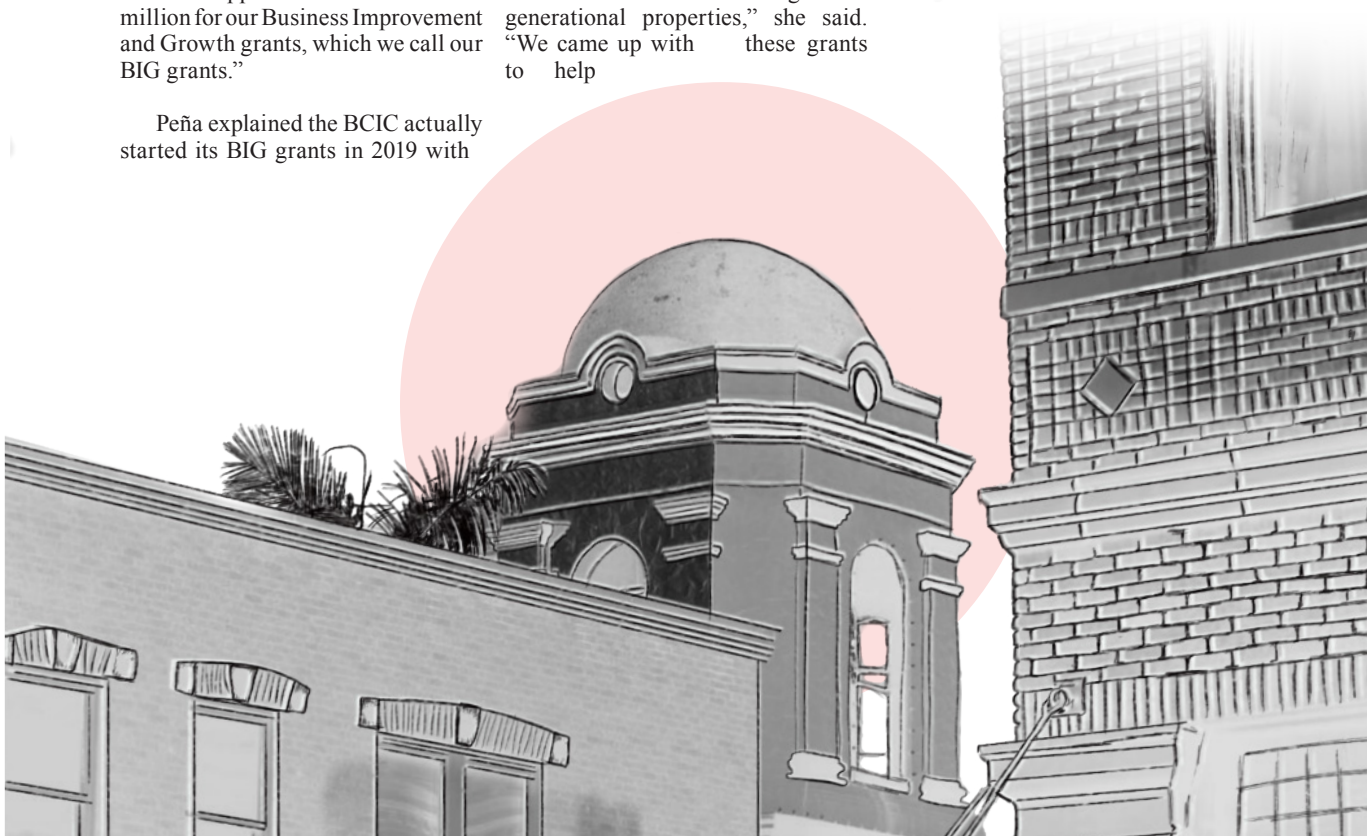
remove that barrier and our hope was to activate these buildings and to bring more businesses and tourists downtown.”

Peña explained The Musk Foundation has allowed BCIC to enhance its grants and increase financial help toward the rehabilitation of generational properties.

“Overall, we’ve done 57 projects and have close to \$30 million of private investments in BIG Grants,” she said.

Apart from renovating Downtown Brownsville, BCIC’s primary objective is to assist small business entrepreneurs.

Under its Business Improvement and Growth Program, the organization focuses on the smaller



businesses and “the entrepreneurship part, the people that want to grow their business,” Peña said.

One local entrepreneur who has benefitted from the resources provided by BCIC is Mary Soto, chef and owner of Jolie Petite, a French-inspired bakery and restaurant located at 1105 East Adams St. in Downtown Brownsville.

“We opened April 16 of [2024] and it’s been a great five-and-a-half months and we are looking forward to the rest of the year,” Soto said.

Before opening her restaurant, Soto was a banking center manager and bank officer at Lone Star National Bank.

“I was a bank manager for 16 years,” she said. “I started my bank career when I was in my early 20s. During the pandemic, I started thinking, ‘Is this what I want to do for the rest of my life?’ I was kind of burnt out.”

Soto’s love of cooking began when she was little. She started off by cooking with her mom and grandmothers.

“I would help my mom cook for my brother, my sister and my dad, so I always wanted to do that,” she said.

She also said she had always wanted to open a restaurant.

“Every time we would go to restaurants, I loved looking into the kitchen or asking for a tour when I was little,” Soto said.

“I went to culinary school during the pandemic and it was the hardest thing I’ve ever done.”



Front entrance of Jolie Petite in Brownsville

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Soto decided it was time. She pulled out her computer and searched for a culinary school online. Soon, she was accepted into the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts’ online program.

“[Culinary school] was either going to make me or break me,” she said. “I ended up graduating with honors and it was so much fun. The most fun I’ve ever had in school.”

When it came down to taking a leap of faith and opening her own restaurant, Soto said it was a “very scary” decision to make as she and her husband had used up all of their savings. Still, they took a chance because, according to her, they had their families’ support and faith in God.

But why French cuisine in the Rio Grande Valley? Soto said her honeymoon trip to London, Paris, Brussels and a lot of European cities was the inspiration.

While she said she loved everything they ate and the aesthetics, she fell in love with Paris’ cuisine and aesthetics and wanted to incorporate the little details that she saw into her restaurant.

However, opening the restaurant was not without challenges. One of the challenges

she faced was not having the experience of owning a restaurant. In her words, it was a “huge hurdle.”

“The other hurdle is, you know, I’ve never been a tenant. So I had to really do my research and development, and educate myself,” Soto said.

The BCIC and its resources helped Soto in overcoming these hurdles. She first heard about BCIC through an online advertisement that was promoting the Kaufman Program, an eight-week course that the BCIC offers.

She explained “The [Kaufman Program] helps you learn how to start up a business by creating a plan and really knowing the ins and outs of being a business owner. It’s like a crash course. I loved it and I learned so many things about running a small business and the resources that BCIC offers.”

One of the resources Soto learned about was the BIG Grant, which she later applied for.

“We applied for the maximum, which I think was about \$90,000 and they gave us \$30,000,” she said. “That really helped us when it came to expenses on mechanical, electrical, plumbing and anything that goes into the building.”

Soto added BCIC staff

members were supportive and still keep in touch with her and the restaurant.

So, what did her experience teach her?

"I think one of the big messages is, don't give up on your dreams," Soto said. "Really go for them, because you never know until you try. I think that's one of the things that my grandparents inspired in me, and I would like to keep moving forward for everybody. The sun comes up, and comes out for everybody, not just me. I'm looking forward to many, many years of serving my community."

On Nov. 15, 2023, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley bought the Majestic Theater, a historic building in Downtown Brownsville that was built in 1948. The university plans to use the building for its College of Fine Arts where students will have ample space to perform and practice their skills in theater, music and dance.

Jeffrey Ward, dean of the UTRGV College of Fine Arts, told Pulse how the building's renovation will impact the college, the city and the university.

Ward said, the Majestic is "going to have a profoundly positive effect on our college. The location could not be better. Right in the heart of downtown, a little over a mile from campus. It will serve as that university footprint into downtown where there's so many new restaurants opening up every day. What those restaurants really need are activities to bring people in. We see ourselves playing a really important role in the life of Downtown Brownsville."

He estimated the Majestic Theater doors would be open to the public sometime in 2027 or 2028.

"When you have a project like this, it's a series of stages," he said. "Right now we're in the second stage. The first stage was acquiring the property. The second stage is to do some analysis of what's possible from a feasibility standpoint and then the third stage will be to work with the design team who has theater and acoustic experience. They will help us do the architectural renderings and create a budget before we then go for final approval. The final stage is the



The Majestic Theater sign in Brownsville.

actual construction and renovation.”

He said it was too early to know exactly how much the entire project will cost.

“I’m always of the mind to say, ‘OK, let’s kind of shoot for the moon a little bit and dream about what we want it to be, then see what the costs are,”he said. “If you don’t shoot for the moon, you sometimes come up short.”

Ward also shared some of the possibilities that the college would like to pursue when it comes to renovations and improvements.

“We’ve had a lot of conversations about those possibilities, ranging from having a collaborative space for film, game design, animation and music technology,” Ward said. “We will definitely have a need for instrumental

and rehearsal space because our ensembles need a bigger place to rehearse. We currently don’t offer theater and dance classes in Brownsville, so I think this is an opportunity for us to do so.”

Ward also identified UTRGV’s support of the fine arts as a testament to its



Eleventh Street on Oct. 18, 2024, in Brownsville.

commitment to the region.

According to him, “This is my third university that I’ve worked at in my career. I have never seen a university that’s been more supportive of the fine arts. I think it’s not only a commitment of the university to our fine arts students, but it’s really a commitment to the region. [The Majestic Theater] is going to drive economic development in Brownsville.”

“I think about that first performance and walking through the doors and through the lobby,” Ward said. “The lobby has this beautiful mosaic floor and floral themed mural on the wall. Then walking up the stairs to my seat for the first performance. I’m very excited for that day.”

What is he most excited about?
The first performance at the new Majestic Theater.

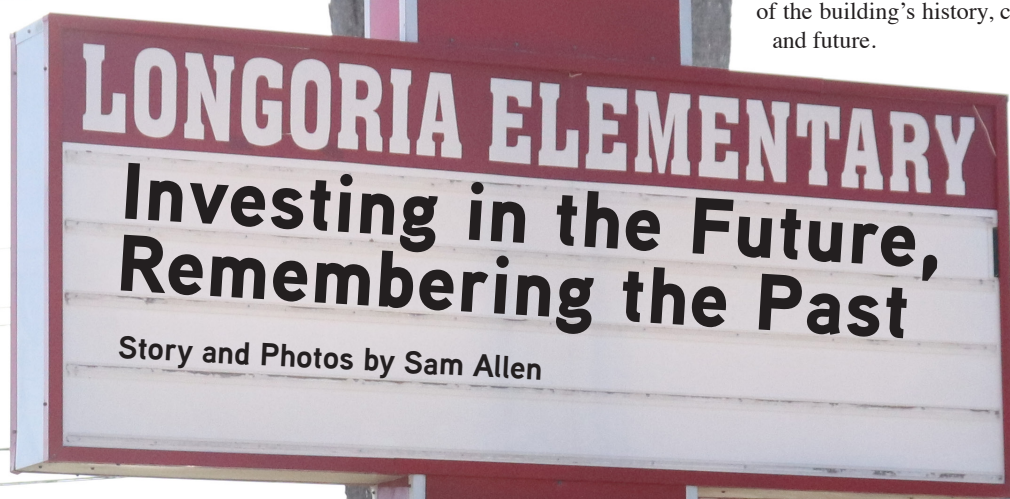


The Majestic Theater on Elizabeth Street in Brownsville.

On Feb. 20, the University of Texas System Board of Regents approved the \$39-million project to repair and renovate former Reynaldo Longoria Elementary School in Brownsville to create new facilities for the UTRGV School of Art and Design.

This new investment follows years of complaints from

As the university investment prepares to reinvigorate the 45,852-square-foot former school, Pulse magazine captured photos of the elementary to serve as a record of the building's history, current state and future.



art and design students, faculty and staff regarding their accommodation in Rusteberg Hall, leased from Texas Southmost College (TSC). As reported by The Rider newspaper in Spring 2023, students complained about issues at Rusteberg Hall, such as rats, water leaks and subpar bathrooms.

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The sign of former Longoria Elementary School in Brownsville is shown March 10, 2025. Casa Bella student housing is visible in the background. The former elementary school sits only two blocks from the UTRGV Brownsville campus.



A mural of the Longoria Elementary mascot, the tiger, is shown on the outer wall of the gymnasium in Brownsville. The painting fades in the hot morning sun March 10, 2025.

A large tree sits in front of the former classrooms on the Longoria Elementary campus in Brownsville and catches the morning sun March 10, 2025. The classrooms pictured have sat empty for over five years.





A visitors sign is shown March 10, 2025 at the former Longoria Elementary School in Brownsville. Longoria Elementary School was closed by Brownsville ISD in 2019 due to declining enrollment.

An electrical switch box turns bright orange from years of rust at the former Longoria Elementary School in Brownsville March 10, 2025.



A faded-and-torn sticker is shown March 10, 2025 on the door of classroom 34 of the former Longoria Elementary School in Brownsville. The building pictured was an addition to the campus made to accommodate more students.

Paint chips away from the canopy supports that cover the walkways across former Longoria Elementary School in Brownsville March 10, 2025, revealing the dark grey metal underneath. Longoria Elementary originally opened in 1929.



The chain link fence surrounding the campus of former Longoria Elementary school in Brownsville sags while weeds grow freely on the ground March 10, 2025. The original 1929 school building pictured will be renovated to provide new facilities for the UTRGV School of Art and Design.



The vending machines and microwave in the EVAB hallway.



Students in between classes at EVAB's student lounge room in Spring 2025.



LACK OF SOURCES FOR ART STUDENTS



Edinburg Visual Arts Building (EVAB) located at 2412 Closner Blvd.



Student lounge room and amenities located in the art building in Spring 2025.



The lounge room's heavily used microwave.

Story by Vanessa Vega
Photos by Mikaela Lagunes & Devin Garza



EVAB main hallway in Spring 2025.

Ever since the establishment of UTRGV in 2015, art students have had to commute to the Visual Arts Building, located at 2412 Closner Blvd. in Edinburg, which is about 15 minutes away from the main campus.

The Visual Arts Building does not offer many food options as the main campus, resulting in students going to nearby restaurants.

Troy Barocio is a visual communication design senior who spoke about his time at the Visual Art Building before he graduated in Fall 2024.

Barocio said there were days he waited until his last class of the day to get food.

“The times I’ve been hungry, I have trouble focusing on doing work,” he said.

He shared the Visual Arts Building only has vending machines and nearby restaurants that are within walking distance.

Barocio spoke of his deep sorrow for visual art students who have classes the whole day or are coming from Brownsville. He understands that everyone is responsible to take care of themselves, though he expressed UTRGV should be considerate toward its students.

“The students coming here from Brownsville and buses, sometimes they don’t always prepare for food or lunches. ... They just focus on getting here on time and getting things prepared for [their] classes,” he said.

Romelia Zavala, a graphic design senior said most of the time she brings her own lunch due to financial struggles.

Zavala mentioned the vending machines in the arts building are too steep for what they offer.

“I remember ordering a chocolate from the vending machine last semester, and it was like ... when chocolate gets old, it gets, like, whiteish. ... I still eat it like ... when you’re hungry, you have, like, almost no standards,” she said.

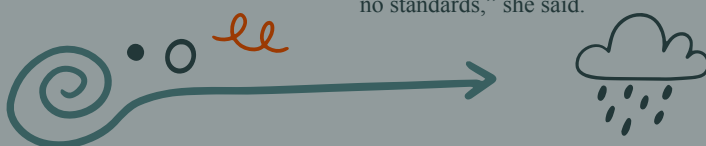
Zavala hopes UTRGV can provide another food source near the arts building. She mentioned that it does not have to be extravagant and it could be anywhere around the building.

“You can make the argument that, ‘Yeah, just drive off like outside of campus,’ but the main campus doesn’t have this issue. ... If they can’t fit it inside the building then at least somewhere like right next to it,” she said.

A local business has taken initiative in meeting students’ demand for food options. Match Made, a coffee truck within a walkable distance provides coffee and other beverages to students.

“There wasn’t a lot of food and beverages offered within walking distance and so that was definitely a huge draw for us,” said Stephanie Brantley, owner and lead barista of the coffee shop.

Match Made is run by Brantley, who started her business during the COVID-19 pandemic Nov. 7, 2020. Though Brantley knew nothing about running a business she took the challenge alongside her wife.





EVAB main hallway during passing period

Brantley said she originally hoped for Match Made to be a place the community could go to enjoy coffee and meet friends.

“We have a lot of students that come here and congregate, and they get you talking to each other, and they get to compare notes about what they’re each studying and where they’re from,” she said.

Ruining the customer model is why Brantley decided to not expand her business as she worries that people will gain negative experience due to poor customer service.

“Our customer service model is so strong and it’s so important to what we do because anybody can make a cup of coffee, and I can remake a cup of coffee 20 times to get it right if I have to,” she said.

Coraline Lazo, a visual communication design senior with a minor in film production, is a regular Match Made customer.

“The owner is very nice. It’s a very welcoming environment and along with that, ... It’s close by. ... It’s just kind of the atmosphere of the whole place is really lovely, especially when you go with a friend,” she said.

Lazo expressed how Match Made is helping the art students.

“I think there are a lot of students here who just desperately need energy and Match Made, being a coffee shop right nearby, is very convenient ... very affordable, very nice, and friendly towards everybody who goes there,” she explained.

UTRGV art students’ college experience has been affected by the Visual Art’s building location, according to Jacob Rodriguez, a visual communication design senior.

“I was ready, expecting to get the whole journey of walking around, seeing my cousin’s friend from back then and here I am, isolated,” he said.

When comparing UTRGV’s main campus and the Visual Arts Building, there seem to be a big difference for Rodriguez.

“We have no restaurants or anything of the sort...it breaks my heart a little, because I remember being here my first year really hungry,” he said.



Match Made employees working on a customer's order.



Match Made after hours at 2500 S Business Hwy-281 in Edinburg.

He felt that there is a clear disconnection from the main campus and the Visual Art Building.

Rodriguez shared art students have provided support to help other students. He said he feels that UTRGV should take responsibility, not the students.

"[It] feels like the students are doing more for individual students and providing food for each other because we all understand the lack that there is," he said.



"I think it's really important to take care of all students and their well-being. I think everybody deserves that."

Left Behind

"In my personal opinion, first off, I think that our campus is way prettier, and second of all, I feel that people shouldn't be traveling that much if we have the structure of setting up a place and having the opportunity to have all your family members here on campus ... I also [would] rather have more family invited here in Brownsville." - Mariana Gallardo, UTRGV sophomore based in Brownsville.

"I have a big family and I feel like Brownsville ceremonies are more family oriented because we were able to take all our family, versus Edinburg, we only get to take like 10. That's not even half my family that I wanted to go to, and that's why I'm pretty upset." - Julissa Rivas, UTRGV graduating senior based in Brownsville.

"I feel like everyone should be able to decide where they can walk because they have a nice view [in Brownsville], compared to [Edinburg] where it's super crowded, especially the parking." - Evelin Ulloa, UTRGV graduating senior based in Brownsville.

"I like the Brownsville campus more, so for me it would be better for them to be here, but I get it, maybe it's a lot of expenses if they have to do them on both campuses." - Benjamin Silva, UTRGV sophomore based in Brownsville.

"I'm still debating of whether I should go or not because being a Brownsville student, I would have to get up earlier, get dressed earlier, drive earlier because also the traffic that's gonna build up and on top of that I'm just waiting to see if there's gonna be parking lots available for my family and I, so its something I'm still debating." - Gabriela Alvarez, UTRGV graduating senior based in Brownsville.

at Graduation

Compiled by Adrian Gamboa

"I was kind of upset because I feel like sometimes the Brownsville campus gets put second for the Edinburg campus, and then also I kind of got a little bit worried about how my older family members, like my grandparents, would be able to make the trip to see me graduate all the way over at Bert Ogden." - **Julietta Torres, UTRGV graduating senior based in Brownsville.**

"I think it's unfair to students who completed a degree in Brownsville only to have to go all the way to Edinburg, just for their graduation ceremony."

- **Marcos Ontiucros, UTRGV junior based in Brownsville.**

"My initial reaction was kind of fair, I didn't see a problem with the transition of making the graduations only in Edinburg. However, as I started realizing maybe some of the families aren't able to access the graduation in Edinburg because they don't have the resources to witness the graduations, and some families don't even live in Brownsville, they live in Matamoros, so they don't have access to witness such a beautiful moment with their student, so that's kind of sad." - **Paulette Andaverde, UTRGV junior based in Brownsville.**

"I was fine having to go all the way to Edinburg ... I do think that we should still have a choice, some people might not be able to go all the way to Edinburg."

- **Jonathan Flores, UTRGV alumni based in Brownsville who graduated last fall semester.**

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Story by
Anthony Tinay

José Dávila-Montes, who has a Ph.D. in Translation and Cross-Cultural Studies, and is the new dean of the College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley, has served as interim Dean since June 2024 and was instated as permanent Dean on Jan. 1, 2025.

The road to his new position as Dean has been filled with extensive experience in the Rio Grande Valley, being based in the region for 20 years. He was originally hired as a Spanish translator for the campus formerly known as UT Brownsville.

"I want to say I know the region pretty well, that I know our institution very well through its several stages of development," Dávila-Montes said.

Dávila-Montes has studied in numerous countries, such as Japan, Spain, and Ireland, allowing him to get a broad range of internationally-minded experiences.

He has a history of establishing new programs, such as the first BA program in Spanish Translation and Interpreting in the State of Texas in 2009, and the first fully online MA Program in Spanish Translation and Interpreting in the U.S. in 2010.



The new permanent dean continues that momentum for the College of Liberal Arts by heading new initiatives currently in development.

"The CLA is currently working on several academic program development projects, including an undergraduate minor in Forensic Anthropology, and several Doctoral Programs in the Humanities, the Social Sciences and Applied Linguistics and Cross-Cultural Communication," he said.

The undertaking of being the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts is not lost on Dávila-Montes.

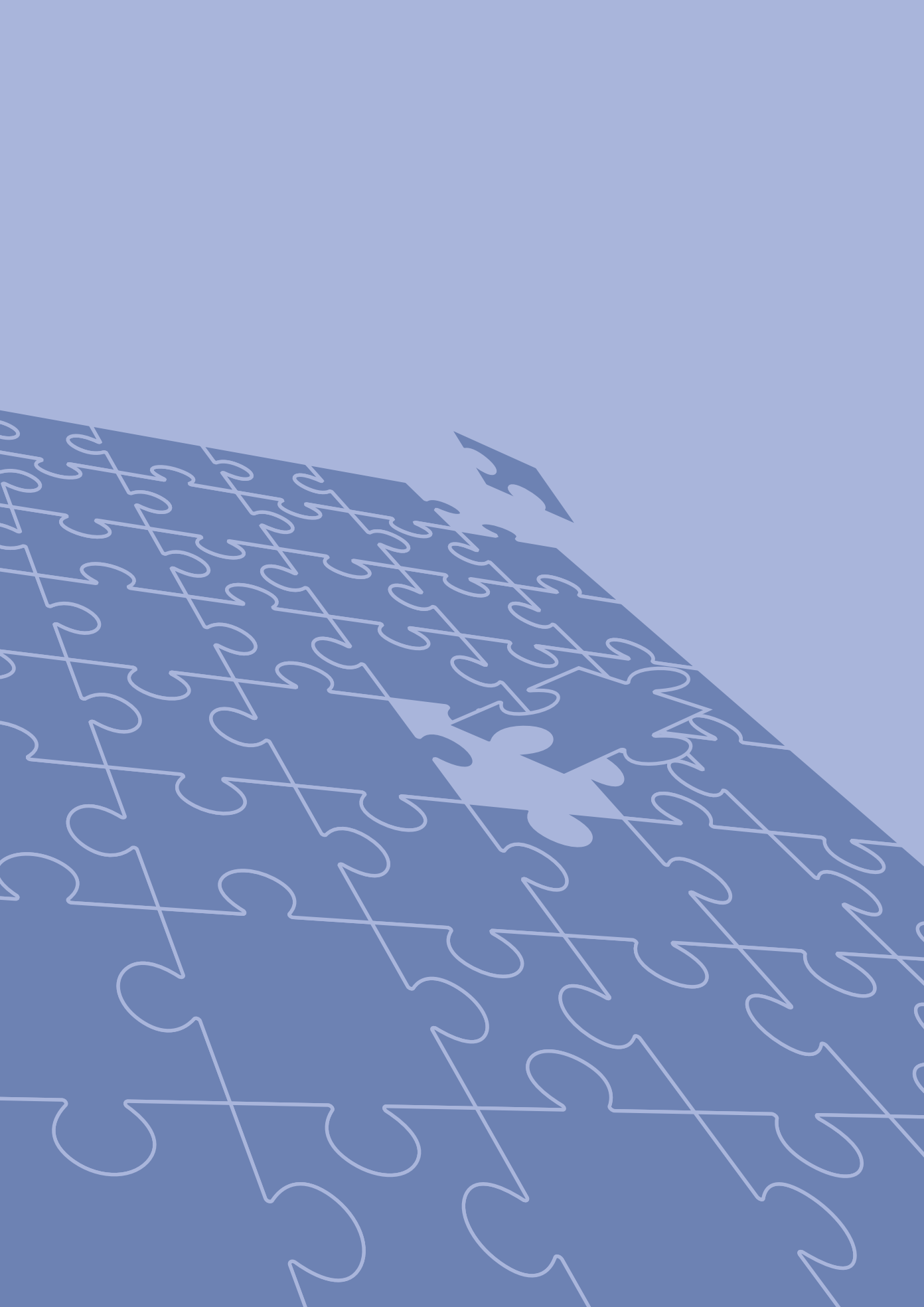
Ever since taking on the position, he has been in charge of keeping 400 staff members aligned under one common theme. The dean also finds it to be a "humbling honor" to be able to see the work his colleagues are doing.

"Leading our faculty and students in that journey, that's what it mainly means to me by using everything I have learned throughout 20 years and putting it into practice," he said.

Dean Dávila-Montes emphasizes the importance of human work done in his institution to students

"We are the core of what the university is. What we provide are things that machines do not provide. Humanity means that we need to work together with other disciplines so that our students are not just great humanists, but people who can help the system work through being able to understand the human being better than machines," he said.





GOINTRO- TIONS





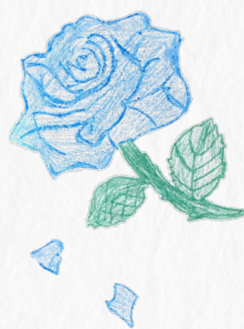
"VOLVERÍAS AL PASADO"

ABBY DAVILA

QUISIERA VOLVER EL TIEMPO
PERO NO PUEDO
VOLVER AL PASADO
PERO NO
VOLVER, VOLVER NO PUEDO

ME ESCAPARÍA PARA EL PASADO
PERO EL TIEMPO PASA
SERIA BUENO O NO
VOLVER VOLVER YO QUIERO

SOMOS FELICES HOY
POR QUE VOLVER
VOLVER AL PASADO
NO EXISTE REGRESAR
AL PASADO



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ABBY DAVILA



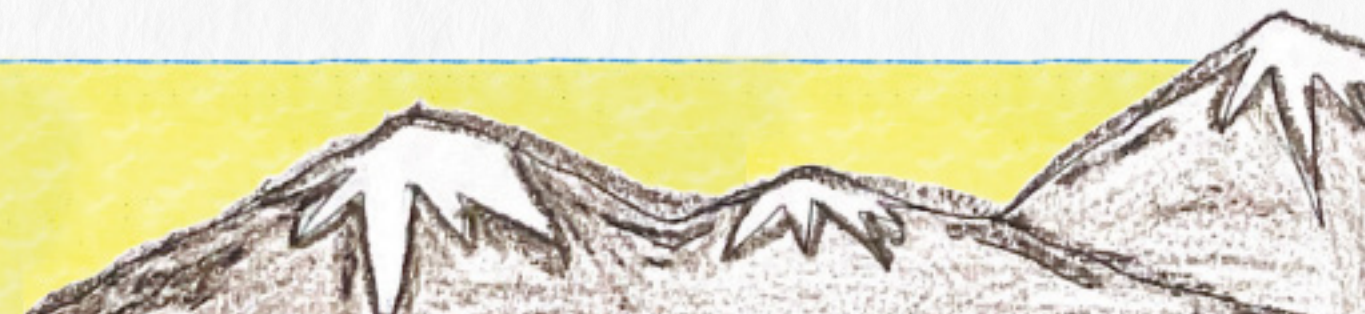
"SOLEDAD" ABBY DAVILA

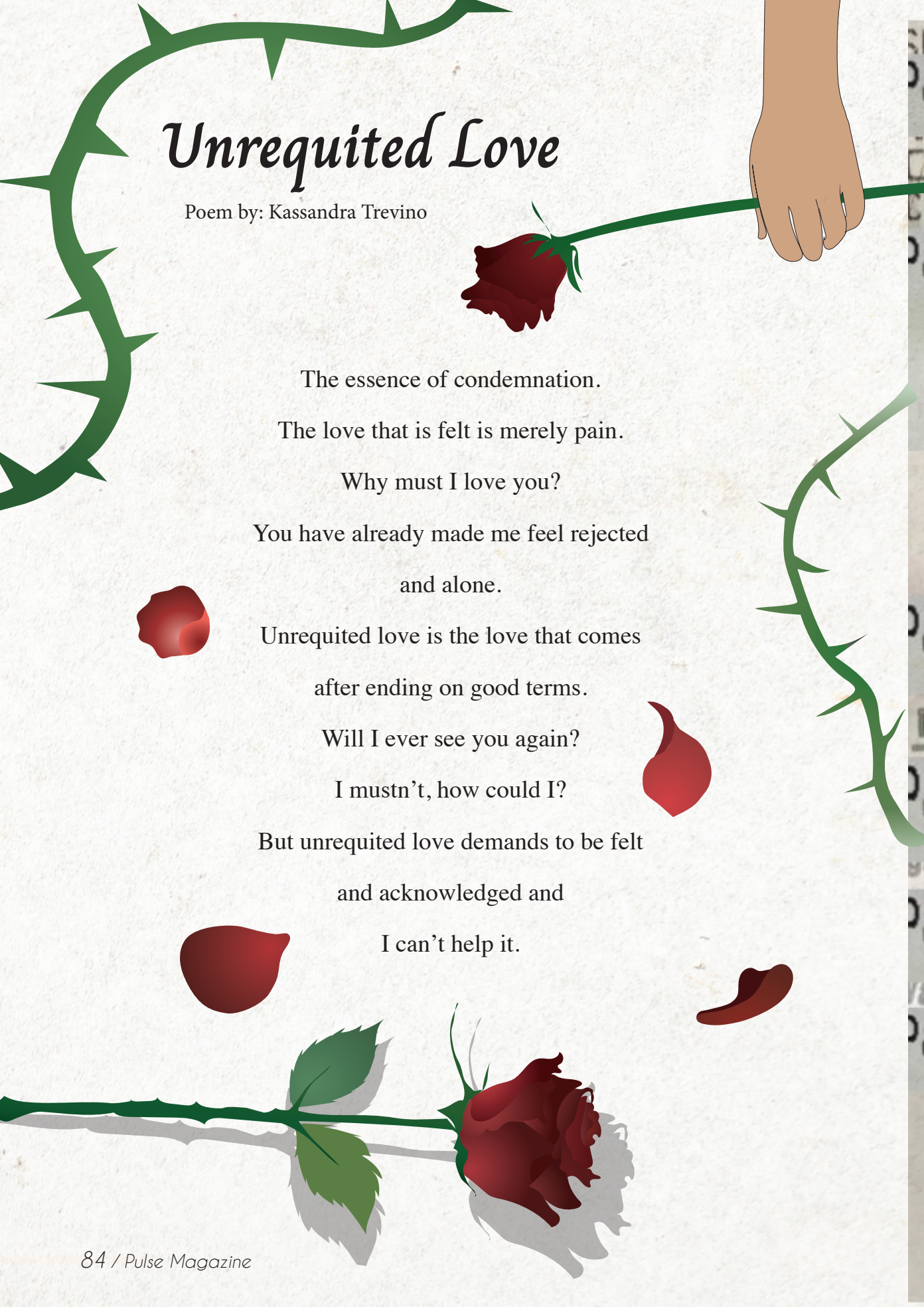
LA SOLEDAD SE SIENTE
UN DÍA ESTÁS CON ALGUIEN
OTRO DÍA TE ENCUENTRAS SOLA
LA SOLEDAD SE SIENTE

EN UN MOMENTO DEL DÍA
ME LEVANTO Y PIENSO
QUE LA SOLEDAD ES
PARA QUE PUEDES REFLEXIONAR

CUANDO EL DÍA SE PONE DE NOCHE
TODO CAMBIA. LA NOCHE
ESE TAN DIFERENTE QUE
SI SE SIENTE LA SOLEDAD

LA SOLEDAD SE SIENTE
PERO TAMBIÉN TE AYUDA PARA RECAPACITAR



The background of the page is a light cream color with a subtle, aged texture. A large, dark green thorny rose branch curves from the top left towards the center. A hand with a light skin tone is shown holding the stem of a single red rose bud that is positioned to the right of the title. Another thorny branch curves from the right side towards the center. At the bottom, a horizontal rose stem with two green leaves and a large, open red rose is shown, casting a soft shadow. Several red rose petals are scattered around the text: one to the left of the first stanza, one to the right of the second stanza, one to the left of the third stanza, and one to the right of the fourth stanza.

Unrequited Love

Poem by: Cassandra Trevino

The essence of condemnation.

The love that is felt is merely pain.

Why must I love you?

You have already made me feel rejected
and alone.

Unrequited love is the love that comes
after ending on good terms.

Will I ever see you again?

I mustn't, how could I?

But unrequited love demands to be felt
and acknowledged and
I can't help it.

SHIRT TOTAL \$1000 Walmart ol ROMELIA ZAVALA
Pay Now Gasoline 20.00
CASH CHANGE podría ganar una de las 5 tarjetas de regalo Walmart de \$1000 o una de las 750 tarjetas

Pay Now Gasoline 20.00

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It was a pleasure serving you!
Have a wonderful day.
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How was your experience? How was your experience?

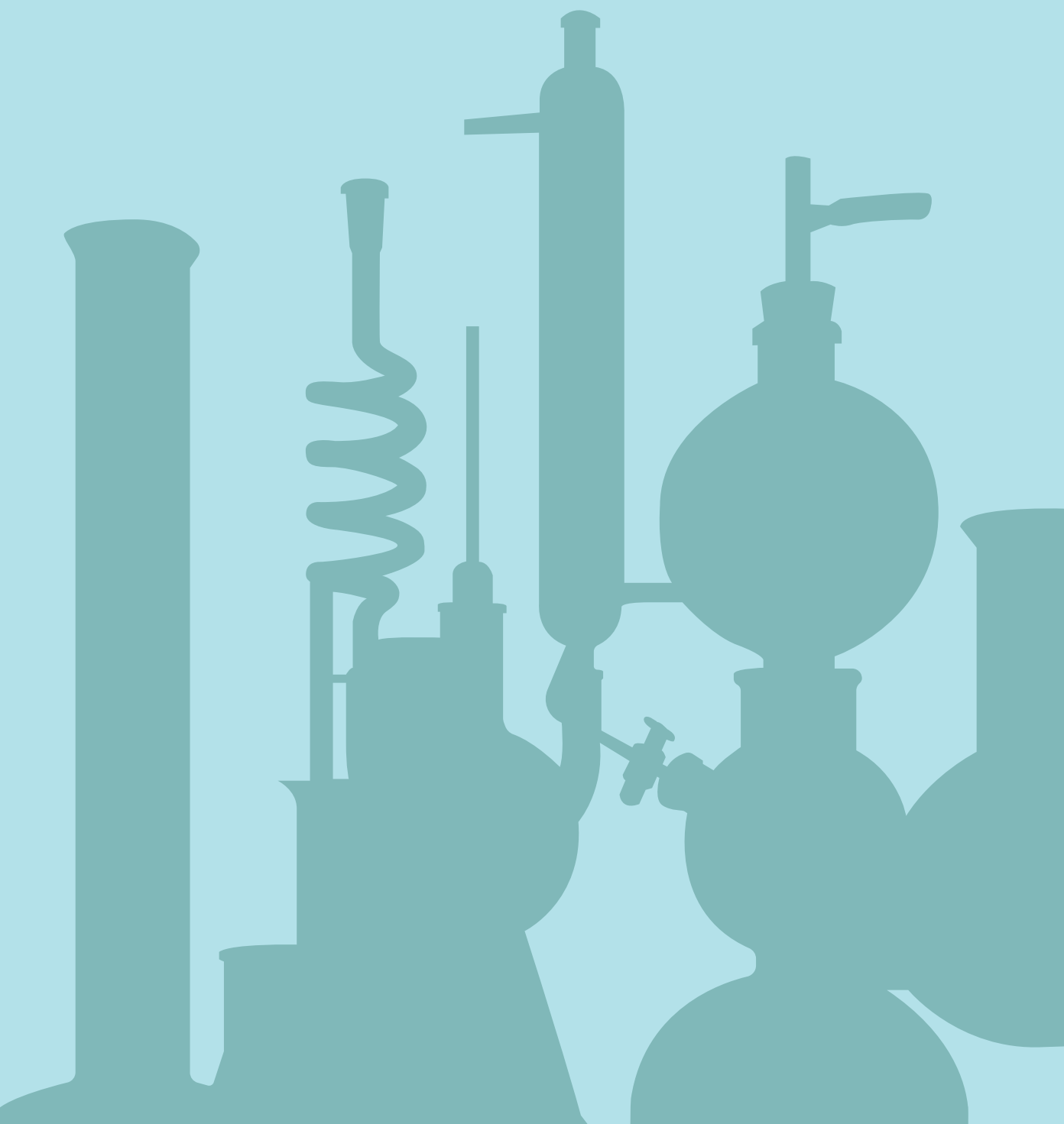
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SCIENCE
TECH
|||



Taking Vaquero Gamedevs to The Next Level

Story by Finch Cantu Photos by Mikaela Lagunes



Computer science senior Enrique Martinez plays a game during the showcase at the Valle Game Jam 2024.

For students looking to take a step deeper into the inner workings of video games, Valle Game Devs is a student organization offering just that opportunity.

The organization gives students access to game development guidance from both peers and professionals. Now, with The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's first game jam: Valle Game Jam 2024, students can also build their resumes.

Valle Game Devs was founded in May 2022 with the goal of fostering connections among students and game developers, as well as providing the resources to empower Vaqueros to pursue their goals of game development.

The organization is open to all majors and also serves as UTRGV's student chapter of the International Game Developers Association. From January 2024 onward, its president was Jorge Orta, a computer science senior who became a computer science master's student in spring 2025.

According to Orta, the intention behind the organization is to give members, especially those studying computer science, the push to start developing their own games.

"The introduction to the computer science classes is the programming language C++," Orta said. "It's heavily used in game development. Having students get excited for something like that, as they're coming into college solidifying their skills, getting that practice in, was kind of our big vision. To have them build projects, present them at the club."

To do this, VGD offers a number of opportunities for current and aspiring game developers at UTRGV to build and refine their skills.

One such opportunity is the organization's hands-on development workshops, which are announced on the Valle Game Devs Discord server. Each workshop teaches participants how to implement a specific mechanic or concept within a game engine such as Godot or Unity.

Computer science graduate student and VGD member Ramiro Santos has led several of these workshops, and explained their importance for students who are experienced or new to game development.

"Basically, members can come in and you know, I will be presenting some type of tutorial, such as how to do a 2D pixel art puzzle game," Santos said. "This encourages new students to also learn about game development and also, you know, have fun, see what people can create."

For more experienced developers, Santos said that sharing knowledge in this way can help to solidify their understanding of the concepts demonstrated.

The Discord server also offers a space for members to post their unfinished projects and final creations, promote themselves, help one another solve issues that may arise in their endeavors, trade advice and network with their peers.

To Santos, this opportunity to

build connections is one of the most impactful services that VGD provides.

He said, “You can’t do everything alone. You have to work as a team. You have to share ideas. You can work as a game developer alone, but it’s very difficult. You might not have the skills that you need. But the community has, you know, artists, musicians and programmers, so they all can team up to make a game.”

Another major part of VGD’s purpose is to get interested students into the industry after graduation.

Through its ties with the International Game Developers Association, VGD holds virtual speaker events with industry professionals, during which speakers discuss their journey and current place in the industry, as well as advise students looking to follow in their footsteps.

According to computer science graduate student and VGD Vice President Diana Castilleja, connections both inside and outside the industry are students’ foot in the door when it comes to getting hired for game development.

Yet, despite being the only game development organization at UTRGV,

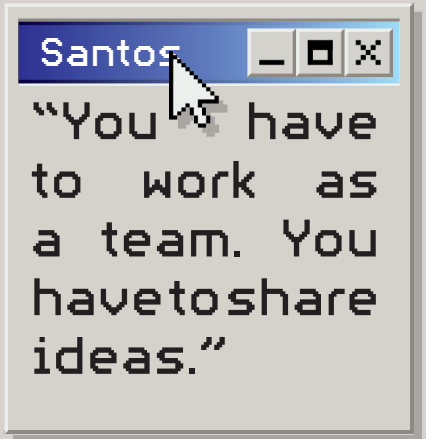
many of the opportunities VGD offers are not new to the university. VGD stands alongside game development courses ARTS 4309 and CSCI 3370, taught by assistant professor Aneta Urbanska and professor Emmett To-mai, of the College of Fine Arts and the College of Engineering and Computer Science respectively.

What is new, however, is the game jam.

“A game jam,” Orta explained, “is an event where students, in teams or individual entries, make a game. And usually, it revolves around a theme or restriction and it sparks that creativity in them.”

While game jams are common events online, Orta said Valle Game Jam is UTRGV’s first. The jam took place from Sept. 20 to Sept. 22, 2024, and was open to any college-level participants. The top three entries received prizes.

For Valle Game Jam 2024, the theme was “comically large” and the participants had to choose between incorporating Newton’s second law of motion or autumn colors. Participants had 48 hours to develop a game from start to finish, from 5:30 p.m. on Friday to 5:30 p.m. on Sunday. The event was held in the lobby of the Engineer-



ing Building on the Edinburg campus.

Participants had varying amounts of experience in game development and various future goals.

For Santos, this was the fourth game jam he has participated in. He started with game development in high school and began making games more seriously once in university. He said these were mostly “storyline, FPS [first person shooters] ... puzzle games as well.”

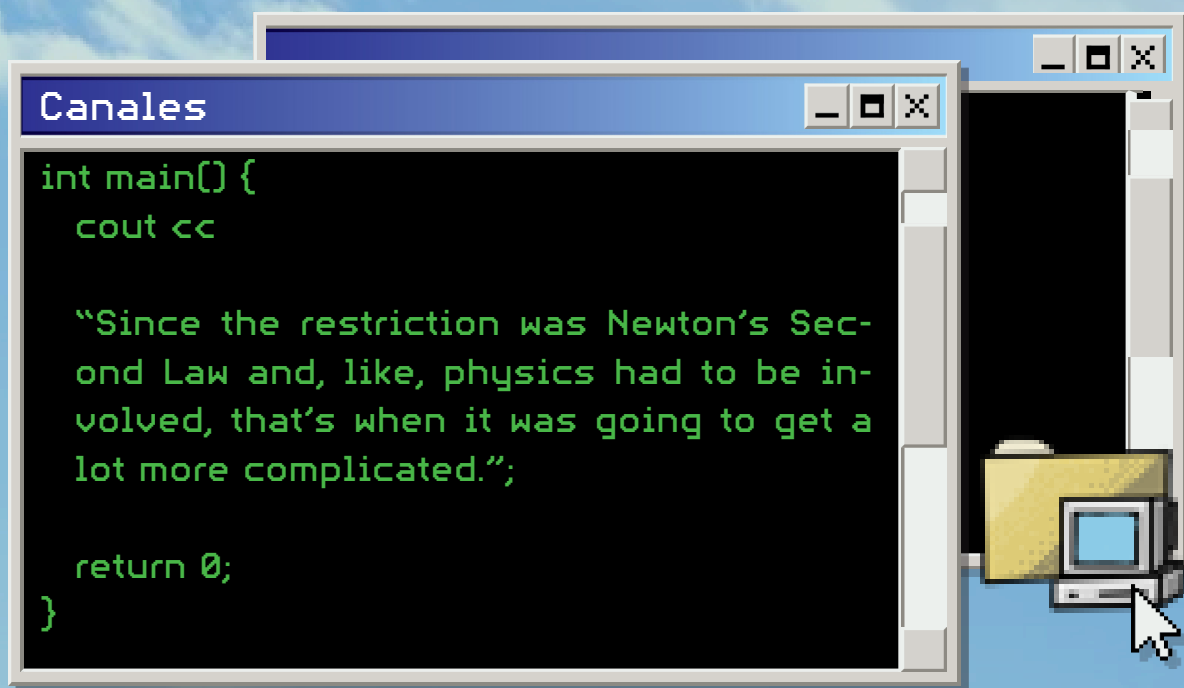
On his own he has worked on more than six games at varying degrees of completion, two of which have been published on the website itch.io. After graduation, he intends to continue developing games as a hobby. Professionally, he aims to continue being involved in computer science research as a Ph.D. student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or The University of Texas at Austin.

For teammates and computer science seniors Arturo Meza Canales and Ariel Trejo, Valle Game Jam 2024 was their second and first game jam experiences respectively. Both have developed games before outside of jams.

“I took a game design class a year



Cassandra Garza (front), senior double majoring in computer science and math, works on her team’s game alongside teammate Belinda Alvarado (back), graduate student, during the Valle Game Jam 2024.



ago," Canales said. "That was the first, sort of, real formal experience where I actually tried and spent a lot of time on game development and I really enjoyed it."

Canales added that "the real dream" for him is to start a game company and develop puzzle games or roleplay games.

Trejo said his interest in video game development largely started when he "proposed to [his] fiancée by making a video game."

His area of interest is 2D story-driven open-world games, and his dream would be to work for Rockstar Games.

Another participant, Tim Trasmonte, is a junior who left biomedical engineering for mechanical engineering and finally switched into computer science in the fall 2024. He has also had experience in developing video games, but this was his first game jam.

"As a matter of fact," Trasmonte said, "That was the first time I've ever worked with a team, in terms of game development."

He has created several complete games, mostly first-person shooters. Trasmonte said his goal is to work

as a gameplay programmer on games within the shooter genre for companies such as Valve or Respawn Entertainment.

However, not all who took part in the game jam had experience with game development. The event also served as an opportunity for beginners to give game development a go.

Canales recalled that his friends attending the event had no experience with making games, but came out of the event having successfully made one.

"It was really surprising seeing how much they were able to do," Canales said. "From not knowing anything to having a finished product in 48 hours ... It took me years to be able to do something very basic. So that was really cool, really fun to see people just progress so fast."

After development concluded on the evening of Sept. 22, the game showcase and judging began. Participants voted on the games immediately after the showcase. The developers of the three entries that garnered the most votes received a



\$20 Steam gift card.

The first place winner was team //NoComment's Barrel Chuck. Their game was a 3D first-person puzzle, with a toy-sized player attempting to escape a warehouse. To do so, a player must press buttons on a large remote control to maneuver an RC tank that can lift and chuck barrels in order to gather levers, which can be used to remotely activate buttons. These levers eventually allow the player to climb inside the throwing arm of the tank and be launched outside of the warehouse through the window.

The second place winner was Santos's team Butter's The Small Autumn. His was also a 3D first-person puzzle game and had three autumn-themed maps. The goal of each is to reach the portal atop a high place. This requires the player to lift and move items of a reasonable size. To help this cause, the player wields a ray gun, which can shrink or grow almost any item on the map.

The third place winner was team Me and Gang's Haunted Harvest. It was a Roblox horror game in which a player must maneuver through a corn

maze to collect five pumpkins while avoiding hostile shadowy figures with glowing eyes. At the end of the maze stood a giant that the player must fight using a nearby sword.

Brainstorming, designing and developing a game in just 48 hours was no small feat.

Team //NoComment, consisting of Canales and Trejo, said they spent much of the 48 hours developing the mechanics and physics of Barrel Chuck.

"Since the restriction was Newton's second law and, like, physics had to be involved, that's when it was going to get a lot more complicated," Canales said.

"Most of the problems were around that. Like, sometimes the tank would just start bouncing up and down or you would get thrown way outside of the map. So there's a lot of little bug fixes that had to be done. The last 12, 15 hours were just like, 'We've got to fix these bugs because it's near unplayable.'"

Additionally, Trejo had to remake

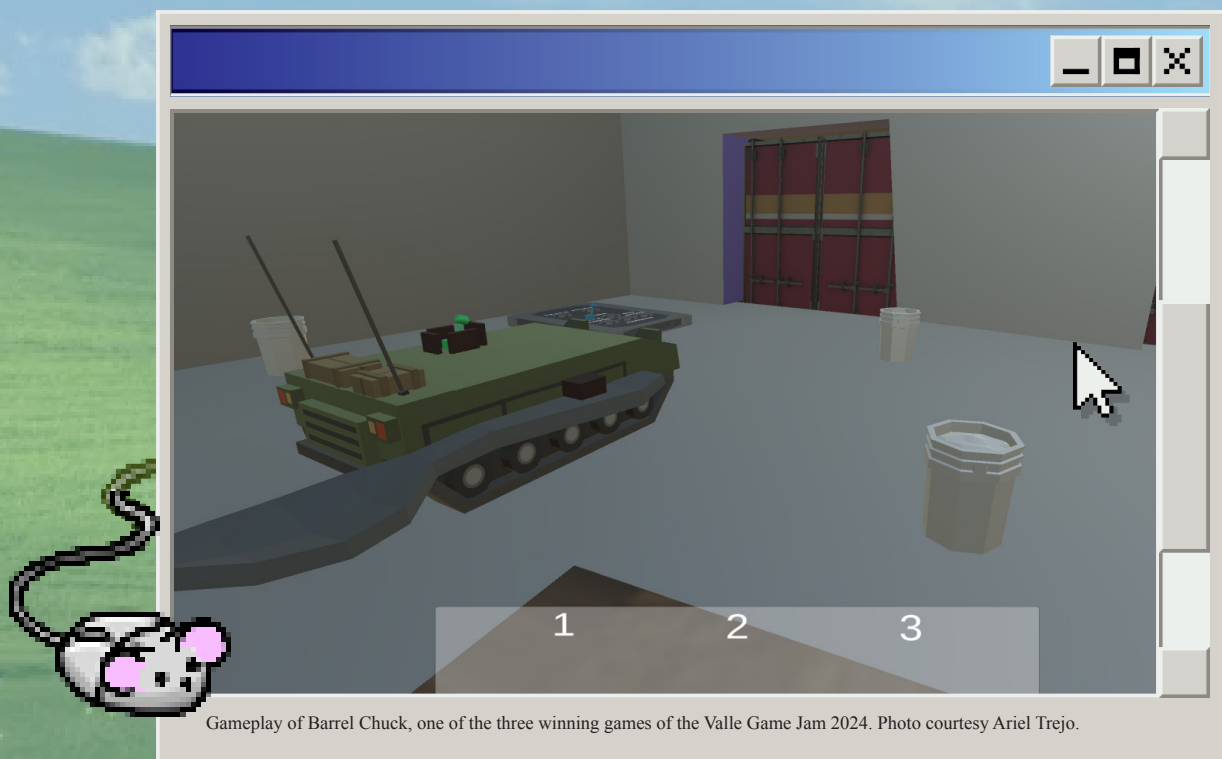
the entire map, the environment in which the player plays, after it was lost during the jam.

Trejo, who was in charge of designing the map, explained that "sometimes when you import assets, it overrides your map ... So, like, my whole map got erased, essentially. So I started panicking and I called [Canales] ... and I was like, 'Bro, the map's gone.' But ... he gave me some encouragement and he was like, 'No, you can do it again, right? You kind of know how to do it now.' So then I just put my headphones on and then for the next 2 to 3 hours, I did the whole map again."

Moreover, the team's focus on game mechanics led to nearly overlooking the gameplay.

"The other problem we had was just, like, we didn't have a puzzle," Canales said. "We had the mechanics. And they worked. But we didn't have, like, anything to actually do. Second night I didn't sleep at all. And I think, just at 3 a.m., it kind of just came to me."

Meanwhile, according to Tras-



Gameplay of Barrel Chuck, one of the three winning games of the Valle Game Jam 2024. Photo courtesy Ariel Trejo.

monte, his team, Alpha, had a relatively smooth process of development, aside from one factor.

“One of the major problems was working together, collaborating as a team,” Trasmonte said. According to him, the biggest problem the team encountered was the technical side because in order for the programmers to work together they needed version control.

“We decided not to go with GitHub [a cloud storage for files] at the time and wanted to use Unity’s [the game development engine that team Alpha built its game in] built-in version control, but I did not know how to set it up,” he said. “There was no documentation—that’s—how to set it up. So I spent like half a day just trying to figure that out.”

Aside from handling the team’s version control, Trasmonte was the 3D modeler and also helped with much of the game’s programming.

Team Alpha’s submission, Autumn Giant, was a first-person low-poly VR game in which a player takes the role of a giant tasked with helping a village collect food, water and firewood for the winter. The player is able to pick up, move and throw pigs, passing clouds and trees. To win, the player must gather enough of each unit before time runs out. It was the only VR game submitted to the jam.

In the end, although Valle Game Jam 2024 was relatively small, with seven game entries and 10 participants in the showcase (22 at the start), the impact on its participants was anything but.

“I don’t know,” Trasmonte remarked. “I think being locked in a room for 48 hours developing a game sounds pretty cool.”

With the novelty of such a challenge, the promise of gaining experience and building connections was a big motivator for participants.

For Trejo, it was a step outside his comfort zone that allowed him to forge new connections with his peers.

“I was nervous because I never really do stuff like this,” he said. “Like, events or anything outside of class or research. ... Even though I’m in computer science, I don’t really talk to anyone in computer science. I usually just talk to people in other fields, like mechanical and manufacturing. And it was good, it was fun, because I got to meet a lot of new computer scientists.”

To Trasmonte, game jam experience will make a strong point on his resume.

“Telling an employer that you were able to successfully collaborate with other members, not just other programmers, but also artists and sound designers. ... Putting that on a resume seems very appealing, especially to employers, because you’re going to be working with a team in game development,” he explained.

As the main organizer of the event, Orta shared the participants’ appreciation for game jams.

“They’re challenging. They’re fun. They’re a great way to network,”

Orta said. “And that’s honestly part of the college experience: to be able to network within your interest or field of study.”

It is unknown yet whether Valle Game Jam will be an annual event. Orta said that depends on “if the next president that takes over keeps that vision alive.”

Regardless, Valle Game Devs will continue to provide support and resources for game developers at UTRGV.

“If you want to go into game development, it’s up to you,” Orta said. “And if you want to garner those skills, a great way to do so is to join a club like us, Valle Game Devs.”

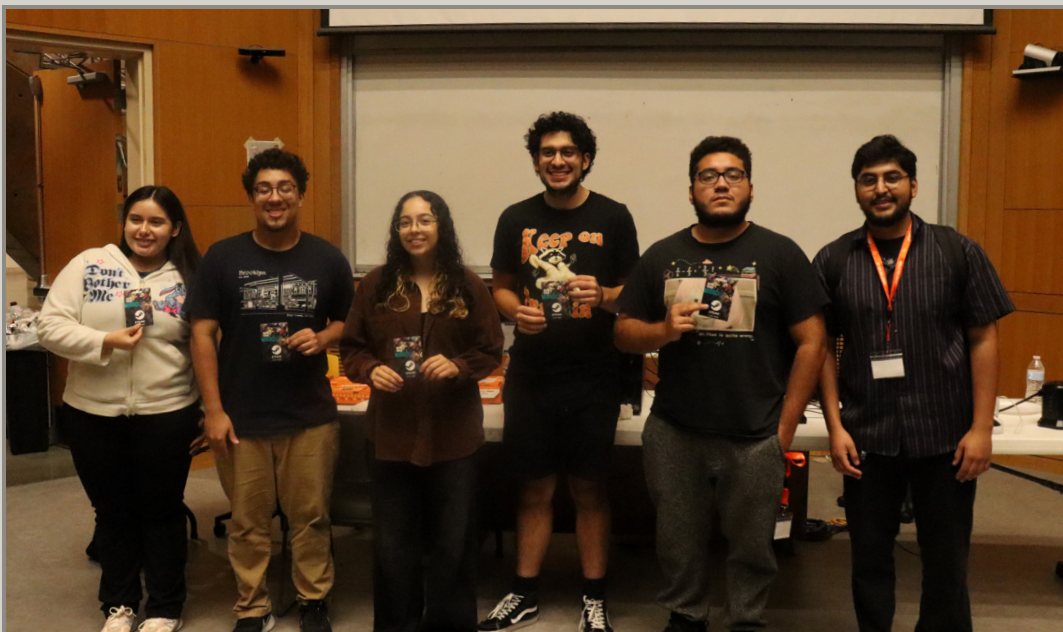
Orta

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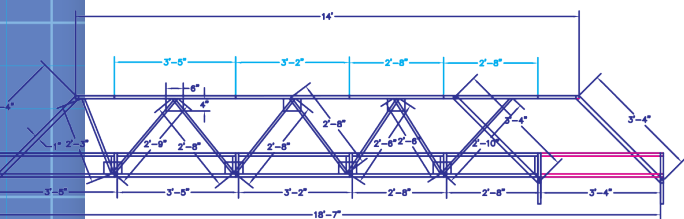


Computer science graduate student Ramiro Santos tests his game at the Valle Game Jam 2024.

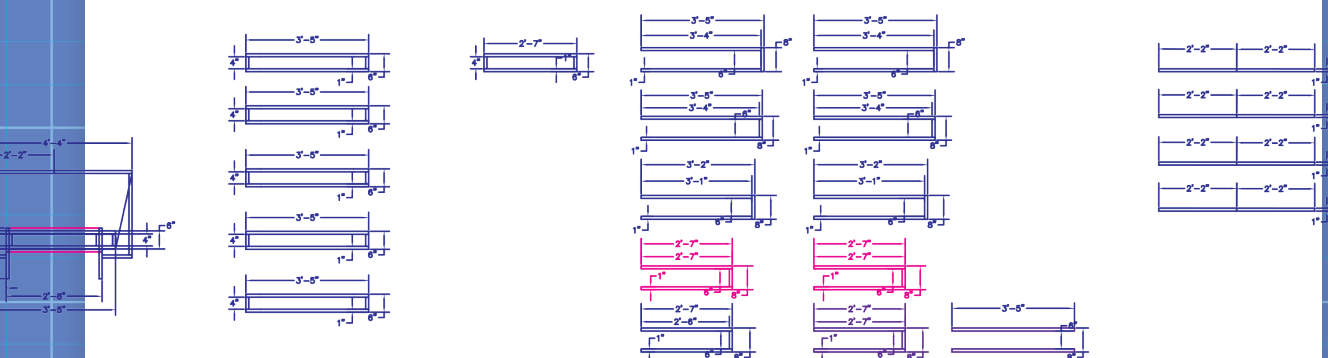


Members of the three winning teams line up for a photo at the end of the Valle Game Jam 2024.

Building a Strong



Foundation for Future Engineers



Story by Finch Cantu

A design created by civil engineering senior Valik Villareal for an ASCE steel bridge competition.

For 10 years, the department of civil engineering at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley has supported and propelled students toward professional success through competitions, student organizations and career development.

Jungseok Ho, a civil engineering professor and chair of the department of civil engineering, was one of the first three faculty members to teach civil engineering at UTRGV. Although the program started in 2010, Ho said it was originally part of the mechanical engineering department, with only 18 students. It became an independent department in 2015. As of fall 2024, Ho said the program had about 800 students, a master's degree program and 19 faculty members.

According to the department's website, civil engineers are responsible for planning, designing and implementing safe and reliable solutions for infrastructure issues. This may include designing foundations for buildings, improving transportation structures such as roads and bridges, or even developing systems and equipment that manage water resources and energy.

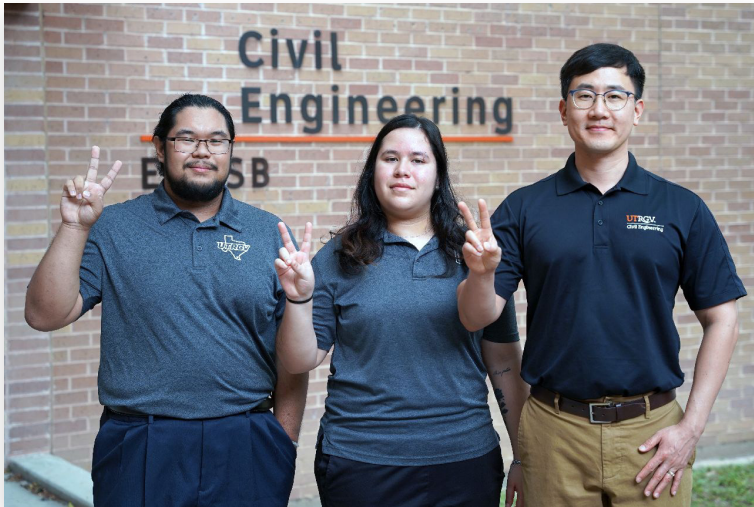
As so much of public safety is in the hands of professional civil engineers, Ho said UTRGV students have no shortage of extracurriculars that can hone their skills and solidify their knowledge.

One such extracurricular is participating in competitions.

In 2024, a civil engineering assistant professor, Jinwoo An, led a group of undergraduate students to the NASA Minority University Research and Education Project (MUREP) Innovative New Designs for Space (MINDS) national competition. NASA MINDS winners' research and prototypes contribute to NASA's Artemis missions to the moon.

In 2024, the Vaqueros won first place for their technical posters and third place for their technical report regarding the potential for creating concrete from algae farmed on the moon.

Another competition that UTRGV students participate in is GeoWall, which is one of several national



Civil engineering assistant professor Jinwoo An (right) poses with his team of undergraduates who won first place for technical posters and third place for technical report in the 2024 NASA MINDS competition. The students are Arthur Cabo (left) and Leslie Nava (center), both civil engineering juniors. Photo courtesy Jorge Vidal, faculty member of the College of Engineering and Computer Science.

competitions held by the Geo-Institute of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). The Geo-Institute's website states that in the competition, students must build a successful retaining wall with only poster boards and packing tape.

Thang Pham, a civil engineering associate professor, and Thuy Vu, an assistant professor and assistant chair of the department of civil engineering, have guided groups of Vaqueros to GeoWall twice.

According to a UTRGV Newsroom report, UTRGV participated in GeoWall for the first time in 2020. The team came second place out of the 19 universities that competed from across the nation.

In its second attempt in 2022, UTRGV won first place. Vu said that UTRGV participates in GeoWall every two years, and it skipped 2024 because the competition took place in Canada.

There is also a student chapter of the ASCE at UTRGV. UTRGV is part of ASCE Region 6, which, according to the ASCE website, encompasses student chapters in Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico.

According to Karina Esquivel, a senior, civil engineering major and president of UTRGV's student chapter of the ASCE, the organization's most important event is its participation in the ASCE Frontier Student Symposium. There, ASCE members participate in events such as concrete

bowling, sustainable solutions and surveying.

Esquivel added that UTRGV's ASCE chapter has won one of the top three positions in at least two competitions each time it participates.

For example, the members who competed in concrete bowling in 2023 and 2024 made it to the national competitions in the same years. At the national competition, participants had to create a bowling ball out of concrete in one semester and successfully roll it. The goal of the Concrete Bowling Competition, according to the University of Houston ASCE's website, is to show students'

creative, engineering and problem-solving skills. UTRGV won the competition in 2024. Esquivel said it was because the 2024 team "did not lose a single bit of weight of what they originally had. So that's how sound the structure of the bowling ball was."

Nicholas Mendoza, head recruiter of the UTRGV ASCE chapter and a civil engineering sophomore, said the competition helped him apply topics he learned in class.

"When I was a part of that bowling team, I was taking a materials class. ... One portion of that class is mixed designs for concrete. You know, analyzing different points about concrete. So I was able to directly apply those topics ... as I was creating this bowling ball. So it was a ton of fun," Mendoza said.

He added that, "Our team, we kind of became, really good friends. So that was another thing. ASCE has been, for me, a great way to network and make very, very

"I feel like our students, specifically here in the RGV, [are] like raw diamonds. They're mostly first-generation students going to college. So they really don't know, like, what to do and how much time is needed in that direction." - Vu



Members of the UTRGV ASCE chapter gather for the ASCE's surveying nationals during the Civil Engineering Student Championships, which took place at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, in June 2024. From left to right: civil engineering senior Daniela Alanis de Leon, civil engineering senior Ivan Vasquez, civil engineering junior Stephanie Moreno and civil engineering senior Arianna Tagle. Photo courtesy UTRGV ASCE.

good friends. And ... having these friends, you know, in the competition, just made it even better."

Sustainable solutions is also a strong area for the organization, as UTRGV earned second place in 2023. According to Esquivel, the team "always does well, within first and second place." In the competition, participants receive a prompt on an environmental problem and must devise solutions to them.

As for surveying competitions, UTRGV ASCE secretary and civil engineering junior, Stephanie Moreno, described them as "taking measurements of the land that's around us before a construction project." The participating teams are judged in five aspects: topographic mapmaking, taking elevations, pacing, measuring the depth of a proposed structure and measuring a level loop.

Moreno said the UTRGV ASCE team for surveying has made it to

national competitions as well.

"We're exposed to so much more that we're not used to here in Texas. So it's just another layer of preparing you for the real world. ... It exposes you to a lot of things that you don't see here in the Valley," Moreno said.

UTRGV's ASCE has even made waves in a competition not available in Region 6. Only a few regions host the 3D printing competition, in which students must design and build a specific 3D printed structure. According to Esquivel, in 2024 a group of members from UTRGV competed as an unofficial guest team in Region 7's 3D printing competition and won.

Moreno added that the competition at the national level is nothing to sneeze at either.

"When we go to nationals, we're talking about schools like Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech, NYU, schools

from all across the U.S. And for us to be there with those schools competing says a lot about what we're doing here at UTRGV. So I'm really proud of us for that too."

Vu said that the guidance she gives her competition teams is especially helpful for students.

"I feel like our students, specifically here in the RGV, [are] like raw diamonds. They're mostly first-generation students going to college. So they really don't know, like, what to do and how much time is needed in that direction."

Vu also noted that attending competitions outside Texas tends to motivate students to pursue their future careers with more fervor. The competitions have bolstered their confidence and revealed the opportunities available to them.

"Most of them, after they come back, they have [a] different attitude

about engineering,” Vu said. She said the students are also excited, especially as the national competitions are the first time they have left Texas. She said that meeting professionals also “changed their perspectives.”

Moreover, this competitive success has put UTRGV on the map for large engineering companies and is opening doors for Vaqueros pursuing civil engineering.

Vu said several companies have contacted her after teams have won competitions because they are looking for students who will make good employees.

Esquivel added that in the spring of 2025, “two very distinguished

companies came and presented to our school.”

One was Jacobs Engineering, which is one of the top civil engineering design firms in the United States. “And then we also had Fugro. Fugro does offshore drilling with windmills and other sorts of designs. And these are international companies and they’re slowly but surely coming down to the Valley,” she explained.

Apart from competitions, aspiring civil engineers at UTRGV have other options for preparing for their futures.

The ASCE chapter regularly hosts networking lunches called Lunch with a Civil.

During these events, lunch is provided and professionals in the civil engineering industry give a presentation on either their technical

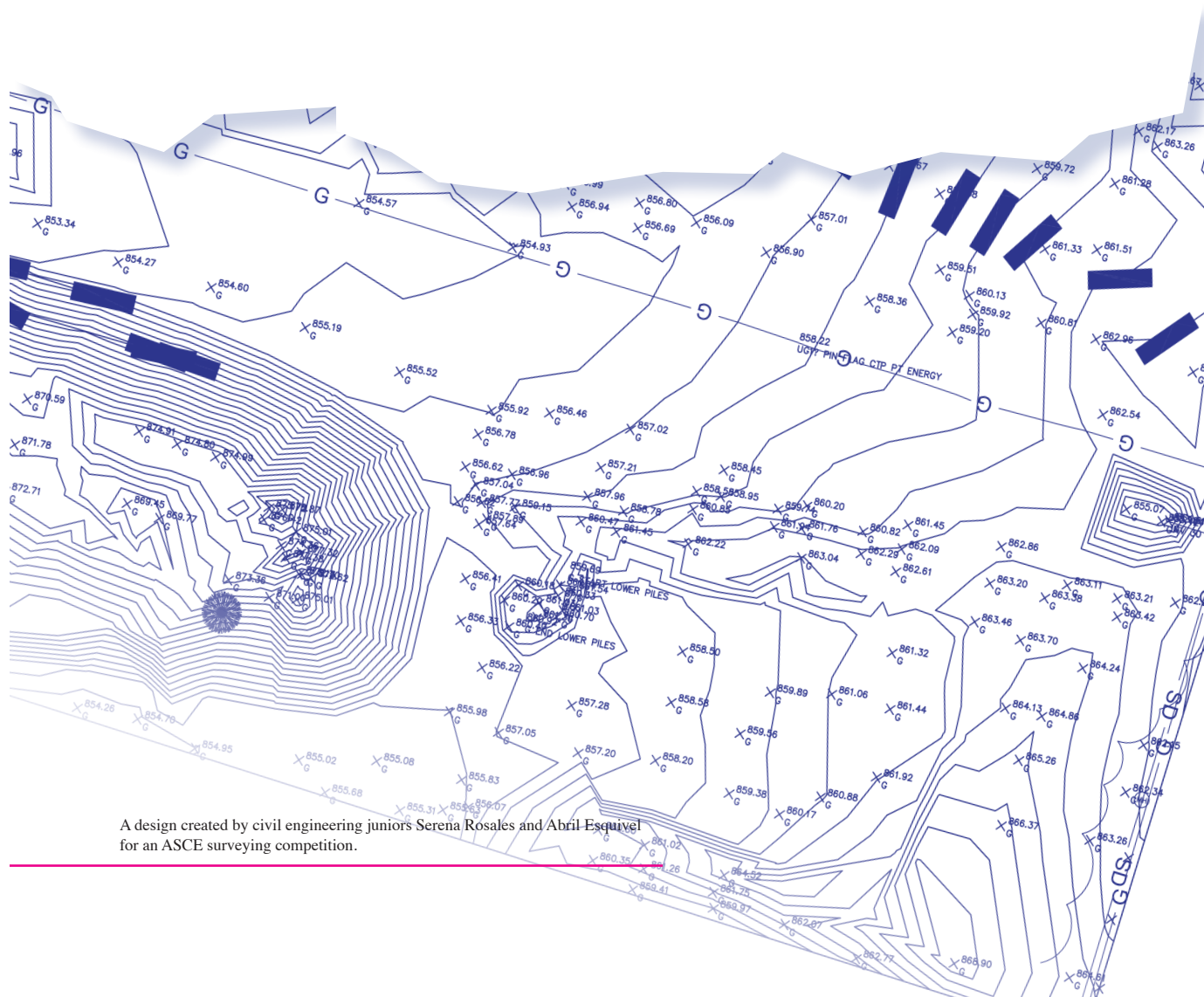
projects or their personal journeys from student to professional engineer.

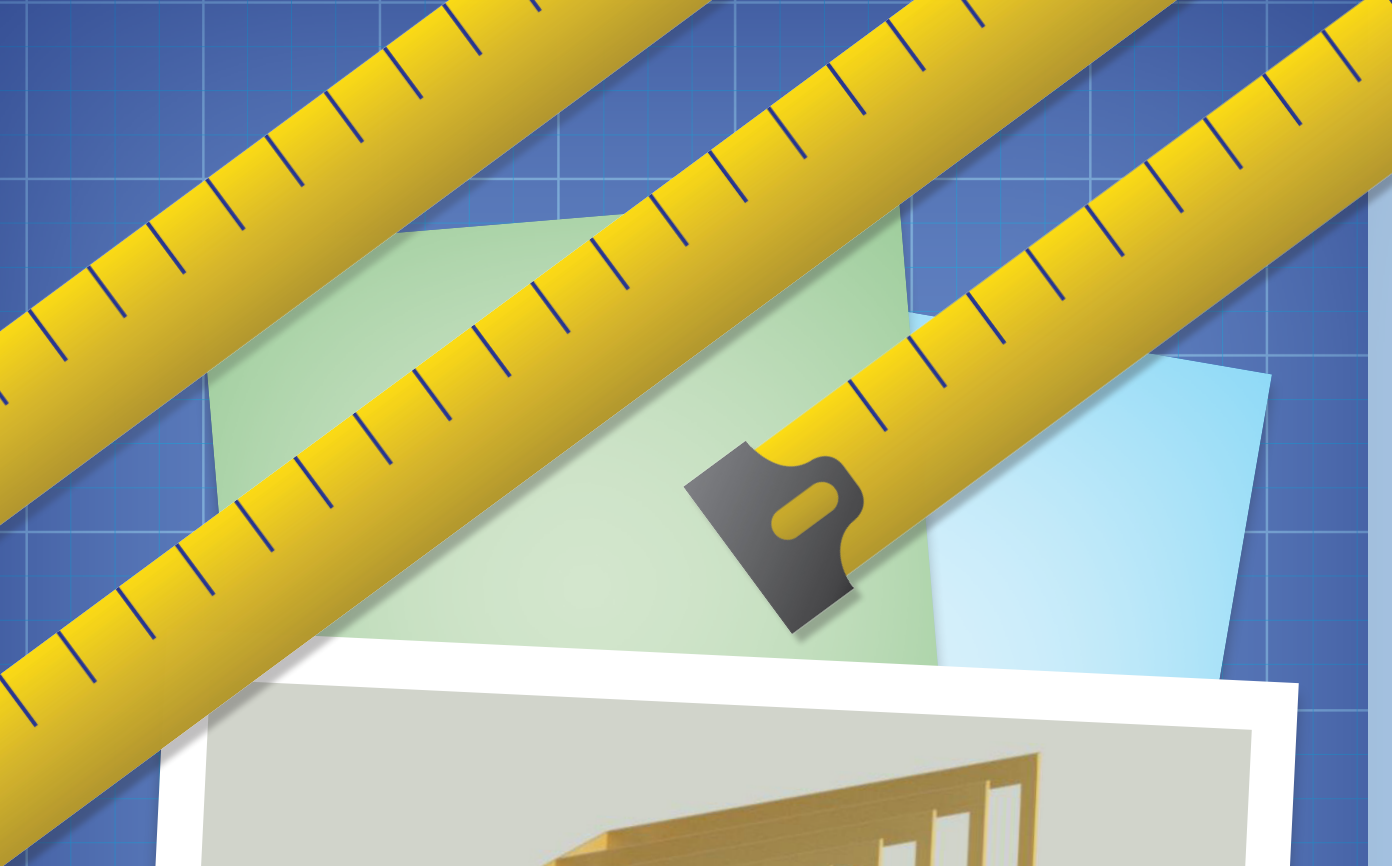
“A lot of students truly enjoy that series because they get to see what a real world experience is like,” said Amaya Saucedo, a civil engineering senior and vice president of events for UTRGV’s ASCE.

Esquivel said that despite being a relatively newer civil engineering department, its numerous success stories of students jumping into the industry with internships and careers, as well as competitive victories against more established schools like the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University and Texas Tech University, have quickly built UTRGV a reputation of legitimacy and skill.

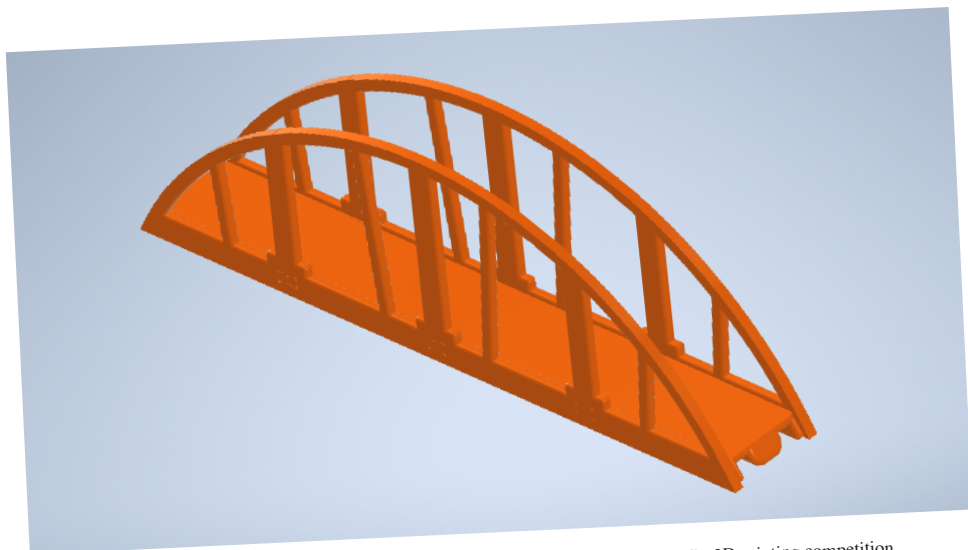
“A lot of individuals now know who UTRGV [is] and we are competitive,” Esquivel said.

A design created by civil engineering juniors Serena Rosales and Abril Esquivel for an ASCE surveying competition.





A render of a design created by civil engineering senior Zachary Gibson for an ASCE Timber-Strong Design Build competition.



A design created by mechanical engineering junior Helios Tarello for an ASCE 3D printing competition.



Members of the UTRGV ASCE pose in front of SpaceX rockets during a November 2024 visit to Starbase at Boca Chica. Photo courtesy SpaceX team.

PESTICIDES AND YOU:

Environmental Impact and The Push For Change

Story by | Anthony Tinay

Re:Wild Your Campus is a national non-profit organization helping improve environmental surroundings in universities, with their goal being to remove toxic pesticides that campuses use on school grounds.

According to the Environmental Awareness Club member Andrew Nieto, pesticides are chemicals that are designed to deter pests or insects. The issue with the widespread usage of these chemicals is they can cause diseases such as cancer, in humans. Another potential side effect is its damaging effects to biodiversity, including the endangerment of environmental species.

Mackenzie Feldman, the founder and co-director of Re:Wild Your Campus, explained the organization's purpose, "Our organization works with schools, students, groundskeepers and sustainability directors to eliminate synthetic pesticides from campus and also increase biodiversity," she said.

It's an important issue for Feldman, who believes the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley is not actively informing students of using pesticides.

"I think when other students hear about it, it's an issue that surprises people and gets them involved,"

Sheina Crystal, co-director of Re:Wild Your Campus states one of the ways their organization has been working to accomplish their mission is to survey areas for their level of ecological benefit. These can include, providing pollinator habitats, home for wildlife, or more biodiversity through native plants into the ecosystem.

"We have an Organic Pilot Program. We train groundskeepers in how to manage their grass as ecologically friendly as possible," she said.

According to Crystal, the program "chooses 2-4 sites on campus to test and analyze the soil with an expert's help, whose results provide site specific plans that are rooted in building soil health and healthy grass."

Students interested in working with Re:Wild Your Campus are required to attend a two day virtual training named the Ground up Advocacy Bootcamp, occurring every January and August.

The first day is dedicated to the history of the agro-chemical industry, how it translated to chemical use, and what conventional and organic land care mean. The second day teaches community organizing basics, such as building a campaign strategy pushing for change on campus.

"The idea is that by the end of the bootcamp, students will have started their campaign by sending an introductory email to the grounds team asking for a meeting," Crystal said.



Nick Kennedy, UTRGV Grounds Maintenance Manager, Andrew Nieto, member of Environmental Awareness Club, Mackenzie Feldman, founder and co-director of Re:Wild Your Campus, and several UTRGV maintenance crew after a recent conservation effort. Photo courtesy of Re:Wild Your Campus.



The hearing of a 2016 legal battle between Lee Johnson, a groundskeeper, and Monsanto, a former agrochemical corporation, was the inspiration behind the organization. Johnson got non-Hodgkin's lymphoma from spraying their required chemical, Ranger Pro.

"He sued Monsanto, and he won," she said. "That was a huge case. He won \$78 million. I went to many days of that trial, and became close friends with the plaintiff. I was then really inspired to expand to other schools."

Keeping a healthy talking relationship between the organization and groundskeepers has been a key aspect of the group's mission. Crystal said she has seen a shift over the past couple of years due to the lawsuits resulting from the chemicals along with the science, groundskeepers have generally been more receptive to change.

"When the groundskeepers feel like their job is on the line, their job is to make the campus look good to them," she said. "I think in many ways that sets us apart from other movements, where there's important work that's done in advocacy space, but doesn't involve holding people's hands and walking them towards the solution."

Ultimately, she feels that it is a hard job for groundskeepers to be in the field daily, along with the responsibility that it brings.

"It's a much more fruitful conversation when we're able to approach them to say you worked so hard on this,"

On campus, the Environmental Awareness Club has been working with Re:Wild Your Campus to make the university think more about the way it treats nature.

EAC member Apolonio Flores, an environmental science junior, said the two organizations have been "furthering the landscaping to be more suitable for pollinators and wildlife friendly, landscaping with native plants established within the Valley."

Another member, Andrew Nieto, a marketing junior and EAC event

coordinator, further elaborated on the group's intentions.

"We're to promote, native plants, biodiversity, trying to educate students and faculty on sustainable agriculture," Nieto said.

One notable occurrence was an interaction between a non-university groundskeeper and the club during one of their farmer's markets.

"We saw him spraying some chemical on the grass, so we asked him what it was," Nieto said. "He showed us the bottle and it contained dicamba and these other chemicals that are known carcinogens."

It was especially alarming to the members, since the groundskeeper was not wearing any protective equipment while spraying it, telling them that he was so used to the chemical burn that it would save time to just avoid it. Nieto states that risking their personal safety shows the dangers the job presents.

"We just want them to be protected," Nieto said.

When asked about the campus renovating university lawns into a more presentable presentation of plants rather than just grass fields, EAC member Sofia Martinez, an environmental science junior, said that it wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

"It's not a perfect path to be perfect," she said. "You can tell that they want to make a difference, but maybe they just don't have the information to know how serious it is to use pesticides."

The working relationship between Re:Wild Your Camus and the EAC produces talks with universities to establish an understanding of certain boundaries when it comes to maintaining campus grounds.

"Our priority is, meeting halfway and finding ways to incorporate our practices and our ideas for this without

inhibiting the way that they work and the way that campus operates,"

There are multiple ways that students get involved with nature in the EAC, primarily through volunteer work in the field.

"They can get involved by joining our WhatsApp group chat, by attending or helping volunteer at the farmer's markets, volunteering at the sustainable garden on campus, or by helping pull out invasive grasses from the native plants." Nieto said.

The EAC has collaborated with a number of organizations, such as the South Texas Environmental Justice Network. STXEJN has protested for causes such as stopping liquid natural gas usage in the RGV, and protesting SpaceX operations' proximity to endangered species, which is right in line with the club's beliefs.

Flores's main hope is students being able to realize that they can speak up about these issues and growing the movement and awareness about this subject matter.



Mackenzie Feldman and Apolonio Flores presenting a screening of the film *Into the Weeds in the Spring of 2024* to the UTRGV community

Students interested in joining EAC can follow their Instagram: [@eac_rgv](https://www.instagram.com/eac_rgv)



Extra cutlines

1 - Yaw Sam, CEO of Brand Geniuz talks to UTRGV students about social media marketing and building a personal brand Feb.13 at the Mathematics and General Classroom building in Edinburg. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

2 - CEO of Brand Geniuz, Yaw Sam (fourth from left) poses with a group of UTRGV students after giving a lecture on “Building Your Winning Brand” Feb.13 at the Mathematics and General Classroom building on the Edinburg campus. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

3 - Gonzalo Salazar, superintendent of Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District Feb. 21 at the District Service Center in Los Fresnos. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

4 - Gonzalo Salazar, superintendent of the Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District sits at his desk Feb. 21 at the District Service Center in Los Fresnos. ***Derick Lara Pulse***

5 - Materials science and engineering doctoral student Alejandra Guerrero poses for a picture Feb. 25 at the UTRGV Engineering Building on the Edinburg campus. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

6 - Materials science and engineering doctoral student Alejandra Guerrero prepares to assemble lithium-ion coin cells Feb. 25 at the UTRGV Engineering Building in Edinburg. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

7- Materials science and engineering doctoral student Alejandra Guerrero assembles lithium-ion coin cells using rubber gloves Feb. 25 at the UTRGV Engineering Building in Edinburg. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

8 - Attendees mingle and enjoy free food as part of Entre’s end of year showcase event. ***Nikole Salinas/Pulse***

9 - A display of family photos and home videos as part of artist Andrea Flores’ short film ‘Vuelve a Mi.’ ***Nikole Salinas/Pulse***

10 - UTRGV Drill Team members pose for a picture March 1 at Sams Memorial Stadium football field in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

11 -UTRGV Drill Team captain Marc Creado holds his pompoms in the air March 1 during the Charro Days parade in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

12 - UTRGV Drill Team Co-Captain Shelby Garza smiles at the camera March 1 during the Charro Days parade in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

13 - UTRGV line member Ella Davila holds her pom-

poms in the air March 1 during the Charro Days parade in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

14 - The UTRGV Drill Team stand together on March 1 at the Sams Memorial Stadium football field in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

15 - UTRGV Drill Team line members raise their V’s in the air on March 1 during the Charro Days parade in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

16 - UTRGV line member Ella Davila marches down Elizabeth St. on March 1 during the Charro Days parade in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

17 - UTRGV Drill Team line members pose for a picture on March 1 in the Sams Memorial Stadium parking lot in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

18 - UTRGV Drill Team line member Santiago Hernandez marches down Elizabeth St. on March 1 during the Charro Days parade in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

19 - UTRGV Drill Team members pose for a picture on March 1 at the Sams Memorial Stadium football field in Brownsville. ***Derick Lara/Pulse***

20 - Ballet Español dancer Odalys Villagran performs a portion of “Manton de Manila” as part of “Spanish Nights” Feb. 1 at the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex in Edinburg. ***Nikole Salinas/Pulse***

21 - Ballet Espanol’s dancers Matthew Guerra, Daniel Valles, and Odalys Villagran perform “Trilogia” Feb. 1 at the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex in Edinburg. ***Nikole Salinas/Pulse***

22 - Ballet Español dancer Odalys Villagran, performs a portion of “Manton de Manila” as part of “Spanish Nights” Feb. 1 at the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex in Edinburg. ***Nikole Salinas/Pulse***

23 - Dancers from Ballet Español at UTRGV captivate the audience as they perform “Manton de Manila” choreographed by Sonia Chapa Feb. 1 at the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex in Edinburg. ***Nikole Salinas/Pulse***

24 - Viviana Franco captivates the audience with a solo performance of “Caracoles,” choreographed by Fred Darsow, as part of Ballet Español’s “Spanish Nights” Feb. 1 at the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex in Edinburg. ***Nikole Salinas/Pulse***

25 - Ballet Español dancers perform “Rumba” choreo-

graphed by Sonya Casillas at “Spanish Nights” Feb. 1 at the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex in Edinburg. **Nikole Salinas/Pulse**

26 - Ballet Español dancers Odalys Villagran and Matthew Guerra perform “Bamberas”, choreographed by Concha Jareno, during “Spanish Nights” Feb. 1 at the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex in Edinburg. **Nikole Salinas/Pulse**

27 - Ida Rudelius, mechanical engineering freshman, competes in butterfly stroke at the first official meet of the Women’s Swim and Dive team against University of the Incarnate Word Cardinals Oct. 12, 2024 at the City of Pharr-PSJA Natatorium. **Mikaela Lagunes/Pulse**

28 - Electrical engineering freshman Annaleagh Stahl swims backstroke at the first official meet of the Women’s Swim and Dive team against the University of the Incarnate Word Cardinals Oct. 12, 2024 at the City of Pharr-PSJA Natatorium. **Mikaela Lagunes/Pulse**

29 - Members of UTRGV’s Mariachi Aztlán walk and introduce themselves on stage at the 2025 Spring FESTIBA mariachi event. **Noah Hernandez/Pulse**

30 - Mariachi Aztlán violinists and singer lead the mariachi as they perform at the Performing Arts Center for 2025’s Spring FESTIBA event. **Noah Hernandez/Pulse**

31 - Graduate student pitcher Angelo Cabral winds up to throw a pitch during the Vaqueros match against Southeastern Illinois Feb. 14 at the UTRGV Baseball Stadium in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

32 - Sophomore defender Rosie Train gets ready to kick the soccer ball during the Vaqueras match against the Southern Jaguars Aug. 29, 2024 at the UTRGV Soccer Track and Field Complex in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

33 - Sophomore guard Kam Burton (left) and senior guard Sam Hines Jr. (far right) jump to defend senior guard Cliff Davis during the Vaqueros match against Southeastern March 3 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

34 - Freshman forward Jordan Matthews dribbles the ball downfield during the Vaqueras match against the Southern Jaguars Aug. 29, 2024 at the UTRGV Soccer Track and Field Complex in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

35 - Junior guard Trey Miller dribbles the ball down the court during the Vaqueros match against Southeastern March 3 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

36 - Senior outside hitter Claudia Lupescu spikes the ball Sept. 12, 2024 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

37 - Junior forward Charlotte O’Keefe walks down the court during the Vaqueras match against Incarnate Word Feb. 13 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

38 - Sophomore infielder Easton Moomau sprints toward first base during the Vaqueros match against Southeastern Illinois Feb. 14 at the UTRGV Baseball Stadium in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

39 - Senior guard Sam Hines Jr. (left) leaps in the air to block redshirt junior guard Howie Fleming Jr.’s shot during the Vaqueros match against Southeastern March 3 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

40 - Senior outside hitter Claudia Lupescu celebrates after scoring a point against Texas Tech Sept. 12, 2024 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

41 - Sophomore guard Madison Huhn shoots a free throw during the Vaqueras match against Incarnate Word Feb. 13 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

42 - Redshirt junior outfielder Damien Whitfield takes a swing during the Vaqueros match against Southeastern Illinois Feb. 14 at the UTRGV Baseball Stadium in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

42 - The Vaqueras sit and wait for their name to be called before the start of their game against Incarnate Word Feb. 13 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

43 - The UTRGV Women’s Soccer Team stand together before the start of their match against the Southern Jaguars on Aug. 29, 2024 at the UTRGV Soccer Track and Field Complex in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

44 - UTRGV Men’s basketball team sing the university alma mater after their game against McNeese Jan. 25 at the UTRGV Fieldhouse in Edinburg. **Derick Lara/Pulse**

45 - The Vaquero Marching Band brass instruments and Color Guard perform Saturday during UIL’s 2024 intermission. **Gloria Aguilar/Pulse**

46 - Color guard team after UIL 2024 intermission performance: Jennifer Martínez, Sophomore, Crystallyn Ross, Sophomore, Catherine Ramirez, Senior Marilissa Garcia, Sophomore Ana De La Rosa, Junior Mavelly Guzmán, Freshmen. **Gloria Aguilar/Pulse**





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