

The University of Texas-Pan American

LOS ARCOS

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A RANCHING
FAMILY
LEGACY:

ADVANCING EDUCATION



LOS ARCOS

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MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM PRESIDENT



Dear Alumni and Friends:

Thank you for your warm South Texas welcome and support as I embark on a new phase of my career as Interim President for The University of Texas-Pan American, the 10th largest university in the state and the fifth largest in The University of Texas System.

UTPA is a beautiful campus here in South Texas, one of which we all can be proud. I have been impressed with the growth and the role that this institution has played and will continue to play in the development of the region, in addition to bringing the highest quality of higher education to the Rio Grande Valley.

My role as Interim President is one of working with the faculty, staff, students, and community to maintain the momentum of my predecessors as we continue to move along the path that the University has set for itself, that of becoming the premier learner-centered research institution in the state.

During my time here I plan to stay focused on preserving the University's mission of providing an excellent academic environment for our students while a national presidential search is conducted for a permanent president.

As some of you may be aware, the UT System has already appointed a presidential search advisory committee to advise UT System Board of Regents on the selection of the next leader for UT Pan American. The search process is estimated to take approximately nine months to complete and anyone can nominate an individual for consideration. Nominations can be submitted to apsearch@storbeckpimentel.com or in writing to the chair of the UT Pan American Presidential Search Committee, Dr. David Prior, 601 Colorado Street, Suite 305, Austin, Texas 78701-2982.

We are all aware that the economic situation in the country is having a major impact on the way in which business is being conducted. We find ourselves in difficult fiscal times and we do not expect that the legislative session will be able to assist us with much, if any, additional funding. Therefore, as stewards of taxpayer dollars, UT Pan American must examine our processes to identify ways in which the institution can reduce expenditures without impacting the teaching, research and service functions.

In order to obtain as much input as possible in this effort, we have created five Cost Avoidance Task Forces, made up of faculty, staff and students, and facilitated by a vice president. These task forces will develop cost-avoidance strategies and make recommendations for consideration by the University.

Together, we hope to be able to make a difference in the expenditures and, ultimately, in the costs for our students.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation in these difficult times and I look forward to working with you as my wife, Linda, and I make South Texas our home.

Sincerely,

Charles A. Sorber
Interim President
The University of Texas-Pan American

THE SEARCH IS ON *UT System selects presidential search advisory committee to find next campus leader*

The appointment of members of a presidential search advisory committee to advise The University of Texas System Board of Regents on the selection of a president for UT Pan American was announced in February by Regents' Chairman H. Scott Caven, Jr.

The committee will make recommendations on possible successors to former UTPA President Blandina Cárdenas, who retired Jan. 30. (See related story, pgs. 4-5.)

The advisory committee will be asked to present the names of no more than 10 candidates – unranked – to the board, which will make the final decision.

“UT Pan American is a beacon for higher education opportunity in the Rio Grande Valley and plays a crucial role in the economic development of that region and in the lives of so many South Texans, which makes the selection of a new leader for that institution a top priority for the Board of Regents,” Caven said. “The people who have agreed to serve on this search committee are well qualified for the task – bringing a broad perspective, experience and sound judgment to this important selection process. The Board is grateful for their service and looks forward to receiving their recommendations.”

Committee members were selected in accordance with the Board of Regents' Rules and Regulations, which includes a provision for representation on such committees by various constituencies of the institution.

David B. Prior, executive vice chancellor for academic affairs at the UT System, will chair the search committee. Representing the Board of Regents on the committee will be Regent Paul Foster of El Paso and Regent Janiece Longoria of Houston.

Representing presidents of other UT System institutions are Juliet Garcia, Ph.D., president of UT Brownsville, and Rodney H. Mabry, Ph.D., president of UT Tyler. Representing the campus deans' council will be Bruce Reed, Ph.D., dean of the College of Health Sciences and Human Services.

Danika M. Brown, Ph.D., chair of the Faculty Senate and assistant professor in the Department of English; Arturo Fuentes, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering; and Jerry Polinard, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Political Science, will serve on the committee as faculty representatives. Representing the UT Pan American staff is Mary Lou Cano, an administrative assistant in the university advancement division.

John-Robert Iruegas, a junior psychology major, will represent the student body on the committee. Roland Arriola, Ph.D., will serve on the committee by virtue of his position as UTPA Alumni Association president.

The external community representatives are Marla Guerra, Ph.D., superintendent, South Texas Independent School District; R. David Guerra, president, International Bank of Commerce; Nat Lopez, president, Harlingen Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and former regent and chairman, Pan American University; Margaret McAllen, former regent, Pan American University; Jaime Ramon, chairman, UTPA Foundation and partner, K&L Gates; Anne Shepard, former CEO, Harlingen Area Chamber of Commerce.

Storbeck/Pimentel & Associates, an executive search firm, is assisting the UT System in the national search.



Pictured from left to right are UTPA Interim President Dr. Charles A. Sorber and UT System Chancellor Dr. Francisco Cigarroa on March 13.

CIGARROA MAKES FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO CAMPUS AS UT SYSTEM CHANCELLOR

The University of Texas System Chancellor Dr. Francisco G. Cigarroa visited The University of Texas-Pan American Friday, March 13 to talk with key members of the University, community leaders and elected officials about the future of higher education.

Cigarroa's visit was the first to the University since he was selected as the 10th chancellor to lead the UT System Feb. 2, but he has been to the campus many times before.

“Reflecting back on the moments that really made a difference in my life, this was the first university I ever stepped foot on,” Cigarroa said of UTPA. “I remember leaving junior high on a yellow bus and coming to this wonderful city and campus and being introduced to the observatory and planetarium. What a remarkable experience that was. It was an incredible introduction to the wonders of science. I've never forgotten that moment and I remember going back to school energized to study.”

Cigarroa said he enthusiastically looked forward to the opportunity to learn from the administrators, faculty, staff and students at UTPA during his visit.

“I believe that you can't be a great chancellor unless you walk the halls and meet the people who are working so hard every day and listen to them about how we can make The University of Texas System better,” he said. “I'm really looking forward to this interaction, to the lessons learned and for allowing me to become a better chancellor.”

As the first Hispanic to lead a major public university system in the nation, Cigarroa said universities have an important responsibility to not only the community, but to the state and country as well.

“UTPA is a tremendous asset to the Rio Grande Valley and to the world,” Cigarroa said. “My pledge to all of you in my new role of chancellor is that I will continue to do my very best to

enhance the opportunities for this area.”

During the breakfast meeting hosted by UTPA and UTPA Foundation, Cigarroa talked about his passion for bettering lives through educational opportunities.

“At the end of the day, when we fulfill our whole life's duty, what makes us most proud is not what we have received, but what we have given,” he said. “And the greatest gift you can give anyone is an education. No one can take an education away from you, and it can allow any childhood dream to come true. I'm a perfect example of that.”

Cigarroa was welcomed by Interim President Charles A. Sorber and commended for his courage for assuming his chancellor duties at the start of a difficult economic time for the state of Texas.

“He took on the challenge, and I know he will do a great job,” Sorber said. “He is a wonderful leader and he is going to do tremendous things on our behalf and for the UT System.”

A Laredo native, Cigarroa most recently served as president of the UT Health Science Center in San Antonio for eight years. He is a third-generation physician and has been director of pediatric surgery and director of abdominal transplant surgery. The chancellor of the UT System serves as the chief administrative officer of one of the largest public systems of higher education in the nation, overseeing nine universities and six health institutions.

“UTPA is a
tremendous asset
to the Rio Grande
Valley and to the
world.”

- Dr. Francisco Cigarroa
UT System Chancellor



First CLASS ACT:

Cárdenas bids farewell to UTPA



When I came to the Rio Grande Valley, I fell in love – with the University, the sincerity and sweetness of our very smart students, the gentle beauty of our landscape, the sense of community, the spirituality and kindness of the people, their intelligence and dedication. There is so much good here. Thank you for your welcome, your support and for all your help in our efforts to make The University of Texas-Pan American a place of pride and progress. I leave it in your hands.

Dressed in their traditional charro suits, The University of Texas-Pan American's Mariachi serenaded Dr. Blandina "Bambi" Cárdenas one last time Jan. 30 at a farewell bash in honor of her successes and commitment to UTPA, a place she called home for four and one half years as its first Hispanic female and seventh president.

Hundreds of students, faculty and staff packed the University Ballroom to hear a final lecture from Cárdenas, who announced her retirement from the presidency Jan. 20, citing health reasons for the decision. Cárdenas, who entered the ballroom to roaring applause, hugged and greeted countless members of the UTPA community as she made her way to the podium for an hour-long celebration of her time at the university.

With a heavy-heart and tears in her eyes, Cárdenas addressed the standing-room-only crowd and said "I look across the room, everything is a moment that I cherish. I could go one by one ... they are all good memories."

"What you gave to me at UTPA was an affirmation, a validation of everything I have worked for all of my life because you proved and we proved together ... that if we align our resources and commit our abilities there is nothing that our kids cannot do. And the affirmation of that proof made all of my life worthwhile ... so thank you for that gift," she added.

Cárdenas asked the UTPA community to continue working together and carry on with the progress that has been made during her tenure – a 58 percent increase in students receiving degrees, an increased six-year graduation rate of 36.7 percent, which is above the 35 percent national average for peer institutions, adding a fourth Ph.D. program in rehabilitation counseling, and strengthening the freshman to sophomore retention rate to 71.5 percent.

"I have truly only talked and you have done the work. It is true. So as I leave, I simply leave you with a thought that you have within your capacity everything that it takes to multiply the efforts of

the last four and one half years many times over and if I am not here to do the talking, I ask you to talk to each other and to continue to infuse in that equation for success – the quality of the heart and the quality of the smart," she said.

During her emotional speech, Cárdenas thanked numerous campus groups for their support including the administration and the faculty for their willingness to work together to create processes to expand productivity and service to students.

To students who attended the event, Cárdenas told them her favorite time of every year was commencement as that was her opportunity to observe how a UTPA education had changed so many lives.

"In the final analysis, the work of any educator only has meaning when a student has the opportunity to change his or her life and to make contributions that in fact regenerate the educator. ... So I say to students, the torch passes to you. You live in a time of unprecedented opportunities. If you don't make this world better, I will come back to haunt you," Cárdenas said with a smile.

For Tania Chavez, a UTPA graduate student, attending the celebration was important as it was her chance to let Cárdenas know how much she impacted her life.

"She was very inspiring to me," Chavez said. "One day I will be like her and I will be the president of a university. It just breaks my heart that she is leaving."

Chavez, who received a hug and a few kind words from Cárdenas, said she was happy she had a memento of Cárdenas' time at UTPA, her signature on her diploma.

"I'm so glad that she signed my degree. ... I don't feel UTPA will be the same," Chavez added.

During the event, Cárdenas was presented with several gifts including a complete computer system from the division vice presidents, staff and faculty, and a wooden easel and oil paints given to her by the Student Government Association, who also presented her with a resolution that was passed in

her honor Jan. 29 recognizing her years of service to UTPA.

The Faculty Senate also expressed their appreciation to Cárdenas for approving a significant amount of funds averaging \$3,800 each for 110 faculty members, who were found to be underpaid in a recent Faculty Senate study, said Dr. Ranjiv Nambiar, associate professor in mechanical engineering and Faculty Senate member.

"The faculty want to thank Dr. Cárdenas for her service to the University. She has been extremely approachable to faculty," Nambiar said. "The faculty members have had an extremely positive relationship with the president and we are genuinely sorry to see her go."

Staff Senate Chair Terrie Garcia commended Cárdenas for appointing staff members to key campus committees and establishing the Educational Benefit Program, a tuition waiver program for full-time staff interested in pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees at UTPA.

"President Cárdenas creates opportunities that reveal the potential in all of us. Thank you Bambi for advocating for each staff member, for our university and for our community – leaving us a legacy of unlimited potential. Your efforts are not lost and will not be forgotten," Garcia said.

Former president of UT Permian Basin and former interim president of UT Arlington Charles A. Sorber is currently serving as UTPA's interim president while a national search begins for a permanent successor to Cárdenas. The search, which is expected to take approximately nine months, has already begun with the appointment of members of a presidential search advisory committee to advise The University of Texas System Board of Regents on the selection of a new UTPA leader.

"You must move on and look for the good of those who will lead you in the future. No institution is the product of one individual. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything that you did for me personally. You made every day at UTPA pure joy," Cárdenas said.





UTPA offers Ph.D.

in Rehabilitation Counseling

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has given The University of Texas-Pan American the approval for a doctor of philosophy degree program in rehabilitation counseling.

“With the approval of this degree, UTPA now has three doctoral granting programs,” Dr. Bruce Reed, dean of the College of Health Sciences and Human Services said. “This doctorate will focus on a specialty area of counseling focusing on the needs of people, especially adults with disabilities.”

Reed said the approval is significant because there is a clear and urgent demand in the profession to produce doctoral-level rehabilitation counselor educators.

According to the president of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education Linda Holloway, it is expected that approximately 50 percent of the estimated 670 rehabilitation educators across the United States will retire within the next 10 years.

Reed said the main goal of the program will be to prepare educators in the field.

“The primary goal of most graduates will be to become faculty members; however, additional careers include researchers, licensed professional counselors, and administrators/directors of community-based nonprofit organizations,” he said.

The National Council on Rehabilitation Education (NCRE) said there were 26 universities across the country that offer a doctoral degree in

a rehabilitation counseling related field. Of these, just 10 offer a Ph.D. curriculum specifically in rehabilitation counseling, and only three had a specific degree in rehabilitation counseling, but none of these programs were in the state of Texas.

“Ours is the only Ph.D. in rehabilitation counseling in Texas,” Reed said. “With a focus on assisting people with disabilities, potential students can also be drawn from fields such as psychology, social work, education, occupational therapy and communication disorders.”

The Ph.D. program, which starts fall 2009, is a 66 semester credit hour program for rehabilitation counseling graduates consisting of 12 hours of dissertation, 12 hours of doctoral level research statistics and 15 hours of electives. Students holding unrelated master’s degrees may be required to take an additional 27 semester credit hours of leveling courses based on academic and experiential backgrounds.

Admissions requirements for the Ph.D. program in rehabilitation counseling include a graduate degree from an accredited institution in a related field to rehabilitation counseling; a GPA of 3.25 or higher in the student’s graduate program; Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores; official transcripts of all graduate coursework; three letters of reference from former professors and/or employers; at least two years of work experience with people with disabilities performed concurrently while earning a master’s degree or postgraduate experience; and an interview with faculty regarding the applicant’s personal, social and academic attributes.

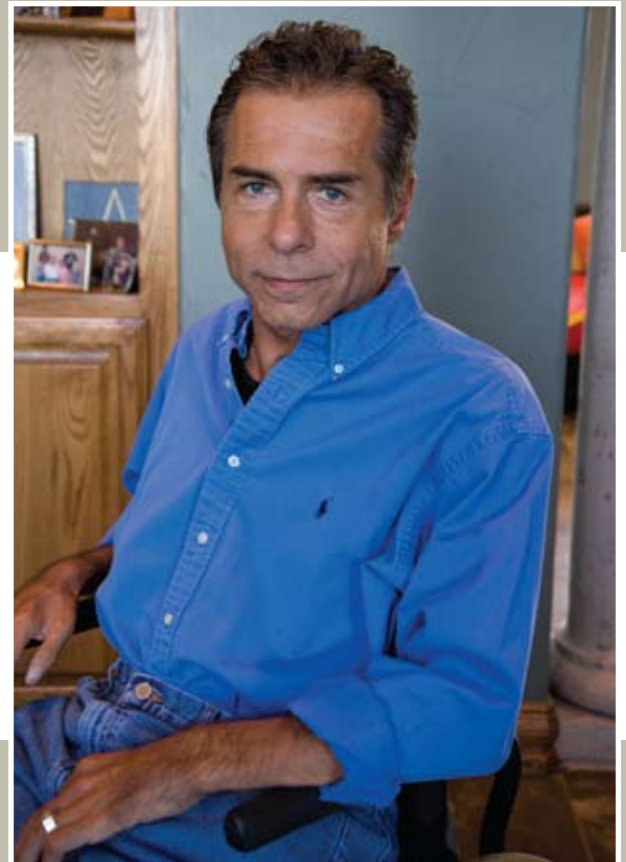
UTPA has the No. 24 top ranked rehabilitation counseling program in the nation according to the U.S. News & World Report 2009 edition of America’s Best Graduate Schools. With 13 full-time faculty members, the UTPA rehabilitation department is one of the 10 largest rehabilitation counseling programs in the country.

For more information about the Ph.D. in rehabilitation counseling or to apply, call 956/316-7036 or e-mail imarini@utpa.edu.

Q & A

with Dr. Irmo Marini

After a college hockey accident left him paralyzed from the chest down 28 years ago, Dr. Irmo Marini said he had the choice to accept his fate or get back in the game and earn as many degrees as possible. He chose the latter. His decision to stay “in the game” led Marini, professor and Ph.D. coordinator for the Department of Rehabilitation, to be honored with the National Council on Rehabilitation Education 2009 Distinguished Career in Rehabilitation Education Award in February. NCRE, a professional organization of educators dedicated to quality services for persons with disabilities through education and research, recognizes educators who have made significant contributions to the rehabilitation field and to the training of rehabilitation professionals. As a 12-year faculty member, he helped establish the master’s in rehabilitation counseling program in 1997 as the coordinator, a part of his career of which he is most proud. Beginning this fall, Marini will once again serve as coordinator of a new program at UTPA and the first program of its kind in the state, the Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Counseling Program.



WHAT DOES WINNING THIS AWARD MEAN FOR YOU PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY?

I think what this says about me indirectly as a person is that I must be intrinsically interested and driven in my profession to have accomplished so much in such a short period of time. I feel honored and privileged to be able to shape the next generation of young minds, so I’ve never really considered my work to be work. Secondly, what it says about me as a UTPA professor is really reflected back on just how supportive UTPA has been of me over the years in helping me nurture my skills and allowing me the autonomy and flexibility to pursue my research, teach to my strengths, and allow the time away to serve my profession. We have some brilliant students here who I’ve enjoyed researching and publishing with as well as having hired for my forensic consulting practice.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FORENSIC CONSULTING PRACTICE?

I have had a forensic rehabilitation consulting practice since 1994 under the name of Marini & Associates with offices in San Antonio and Las Vegas. Essentially, we get retained by plaintiff and defense lawyers to develop the overall vocational and future medical care monetary damages when clients are injured either through medical malpractice or product liability. As expert witnesses, we testify as to how much money a person may lose vocationally over their lifetime, and alternatively, what will their future medical care costs be. Probably the most exciting thing about this practice is that I not only hire former students to be my associates, but I get to bring these real-life case study experiences into the classroom to share with them.

WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I guess what people don’t know about me is that there really isn’t anything special about me at all. I’m asked to give a lot of motivational speeches, and as you know, my CV (curriculum vitae) looks like I’ve accomplished a lot, and therefore there must be something special about my skills, drive, motivation, etc. But the reality is, I was backed into a corner in 1981 that few of us will ever have to encounter. I think most people have the ability to scratch their way out; mine was the drive to be in control of my life. The reality of it is I think I am unrealistically overly optimistic about what I can accomplish. I’m not afraid to try things, not intimidated by authority if I think they are wrong, and I believe I listen too, and have confidence in my intuition much more so than most people. Excelling as an academic or anything else in life isn’t difficult; many of us just make it so.

DID YOU KNOW?

Dr. Irmo Marini has published more than 60 journal articles nationally and 10 book chapters on a wide range of subjects relevant to the rehabilitation field. He recently published an 81-chapter guide, “The Professional Counselor’s Desk Reference,” a first resource of its kind, serving as a quick, user-friendly guide for both counseling students working toward counselor licensure and certification and for professional counselors. While at UTPA, Marini has been awarded half a dozen awards for outstanding achievement, teaching, service, and research, and has served as a national and international presenter at conferences and workshops.

YOU HAVE BEEN QUOTED AS SAYING “MY LIFE HAS BEEN BETTER BECAUSE I HAVE A DISABILITY.” HOW TRUE IS THAT STATEMENT FOR YOU?

My hockey accident and resulting tetraplegia did have a positive impact on shaping my philosophy of life as well as my career. Prior to my hockey accident, I was a mediocre student at best, focused almost exclusively on athletics and looking at most likely a semi-pro hockey career. These careers are generally short-lived and often don’t pay all the bills. Post-injury, however, I was forced to rethink my whole future since I no longer was going to use my brawn to make a living. So instead, I recommitted myself to using my brain, which meant completing a bachelor’s degree, then a clinical psychology master’s, then eventually a Ph.D. in rehabilitation. What I learned in the process is that I loved to learn and had never really known that. I consumed every book I got my hands on in psychology, and intuitively realized that I would need as much education as possible to counterbalance any potential employer prejudice over hiring someone with a disability. Now, having moved up through the ranks to professor in minimal time as well as having a successful private practice, has afforded me the option of doing what I love best while providing me with a great quality of life to go with it.

Professor receives major grant to improve cancer research

With cancer diagnoses expected to hit 12 million this year and global cancer deaths expected to reach seven million, The University of Texas-Pan American is working toward improving cancer research, specifically along the U.S.-Mexico border, with the help of a major grant received recently.

The more than \$1.5 million grant, which was awarded by the National Institutes of Health, will develop collaborative research and student training partnerships between UTPA and the Cancer Therapy and Research Center at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The projects, which started September 2008, will develop basic, translational, clinical and educational research on cancer-related health disparities and will continue through August 2013. As principal investigator and program director, Dr. Bimal Banik received \$910,000 of the grant for his work on the project.

"This grant is a great honor because it provides an avenue to improve cancer research in the Rio Grande Valley. It's great news for me, other faculty members and students here at UTPA, as it offers students a great opportunity to get actively involved in research that concerns them and their Hispanic community," said Banik, who is the first President's Endowed Professor and a professor of chemistry at UTPA. "I see each grant as an opportunity to make research advancements and for that I will always be thankful."

Banik said the objectives of the collaboration are to develop and foster cancer research at UTPA, foster research dedicated toward reducing the cancer burden on the Hispanic population, and increase the number of cancer researchers coming from South Texas. He said the partnership will be a great opportunity to encourage students toward creative thinking, enhance high-quality work techniques and acquire basic knowledge in the areas of medicinal chemistry, cancer biology, cancer disparities and research strategies.

"These students will be focusing on synthetic design of novel anti-cancer drugs, and we will be collaborating with UTHSCSA in order to test these drugs against cancer cells," Banik said. "Many of the chemicals that have been synthesized in prior research have proven to be effective in killing cancer cells and were relatively non-toxic to normal cells so they are potential candidates for further animal studies."

According to Cancer Facts and Figures (2008), approximately 82,000 people in the Latino/Hispanic population in the United States were diagnosed with cancer in 2006. During that same year, approximately 23,000 Latinos/Hispanics died from cancer.

"Because many are affected by cancer in some way or another, our research is important, timely and significant," Banik said. "This grant is only awarded to the most significant and cutting-edge research that is going on in the United States today. In general, NIH funds only three or four of these types of proposals a year."

Banik said students are also getting to explore an area of chemistry and biology not generally offered during regular lectures.

"We have been exposed to an area of science that requires hands-on experience – an area that many individuals are not exposed to until they are very far into their careers," said Sonya Rivera, a senior majoring in biology who is working on the research project under Banik. "I feel very privileged to be given the opportunity to be working with one of the most renowned scientists in the nation and at the same



time working toward improving science and the well-being of my community."

Robert R. Rodriguez, a senior majoring in chemistry who is also working under Banik on the research, said working with a leading scientist has given him a lot of experience that will help him in the future.

"Exposure to research such as what we are doing in our lab gives young minds great ideas for the future and makes our hope for curing such diseases much greater," Rodriguez said. "I feel fortunate that the work I am doing will benefit the well-being of others and will significantly contribute to the pursuit of fighting cancer. This opportunity gives me a feeling of very high purpose because I can help with fighting a terminal disease."

Dr. Edwin LeMaster, dean of the College of Science and Engineering, said the partnership between UTPA and UTHSCSA in the area of cancer research will promote research excellence in the University's students.

"The partnership will enhance the collaboration between the institutions that will benefit the research faculty at UTPA and UTHSCSA and also give outstanding opportunities to our students to work in research labs here at UTPA and also at the medical school in San Antonio," LeMaster said.

Banik said this type of research experience is beneficial to both students and the Valley in general.

"This grant will provide a major boost in the development and awareness of cancer research in the Rio Grande Valley," Banik noted. "All of this will definitely help UTPA students interested in obtaining Ph.D.'s, M.D.'s and those that are going into health related fields specializing in cancer treatment and drug development."

For more information about the cancer research and partnership with UTHSCSA, call Banik at 956/381-3371.

Invention wins commercialization award from UT System

A team of researchers at The University of Texas-Pan American have invented a machine that will manufacture nanofibers more easily, safely and at a lower cost. To help facilitate the commercialization of the invention, The University of Texas System Board of Regents recently awarded the University a \$50,000 grant from its Texas Ignition Fund to take the product from the lab to the public.

Drs. Karen Lozano and Kamal Sarkar, faculty in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, were awarded the grant for their invention – the Multi-Level Superfine Fiber Creation that includes a device and the methods that will simplify the nanofiber manufacturing process. Also, collaborating on the development of the invention was Dr. Horacio Vasquez, assistant professor in mechanical engineering, and several undergraduate and graduate students.

Lozano, the Julia Beecherl Professor of Engineering and the first woman from Mexico to graduate with a doctoral degree from Rice University, has been awarded 34 grants and has filed five patents since joining UTPA. She said the development of the device is a simple and new way to create nanofibers instead of the traditional process of using electrospinning processes, which can be lengthy and costly.

“This is a simple device that can not only be effective commercially, but even students in research labs will be able to use it safely. Most of the nanofibers made in labs are created through the electrospinning method with the use of hypodermic syringe needles and an electric field of 35,000 volts. Our machine does not require any additional voltage except for what you get from the outlet. As long as it is spinning it is creating fibers,” she said.

Through the invention, Lozano said nanofibers will be created in large quantities, which is not done by similar equipment commercially today. She said the mechanism could possibly replace electrospinning.

“Basically everybody that is doing research with nanofibers, new textiles, smart materials, and filtration can use this machine. You will be able to create superfine

fibers and test out your application more quickly,” Lozano said.

Applications for nanofibers commercially include textiles in which nanofibers can be woven together to create material for sport and outerwear and even produce lightweight diapers that can absorb more than regular diapers. Also, nanofibers can be used to create scaffolds for tissue regeneration, filters, sensors, and much more.

According to Jackie Michel, director for the Office of Innovation and Intellectual Property, four patents to protect the discovery have been filed. Michel said the patents protect both the machine and the methods to produce the superfine fibers it creates.

Since the Office of Innovation and Intellectual Property was created in 2005, to

“UTPA, a premier learner-centered research institution in Texas, is committed to commercializing our inventions as part of our mission.”

- Jackie Michel

Director for the Office of Innovation and Intellectual Property

date UTPA has received 29 invention disclosures, filed 16 patents and licensed three inventions, and two start-up companies have been started based on jointly owned technologies.

“UTPA, a premier learner-centered research institution in Texas, is committed to commercializing our inventions as part of our mission,” said Michel. “We are fostering a culture to promote entrepreneurship and to capture our ideas leading to inventions. We are encouraging faculty and students to disclose inventions in order to encourage the growth of technology-based economic development of the South Texas region and the state.”

Grants totaling nearly \$450,000 from TIF were awarded to UT System institutions. According to a press release from the UT



UTPA FACULTY

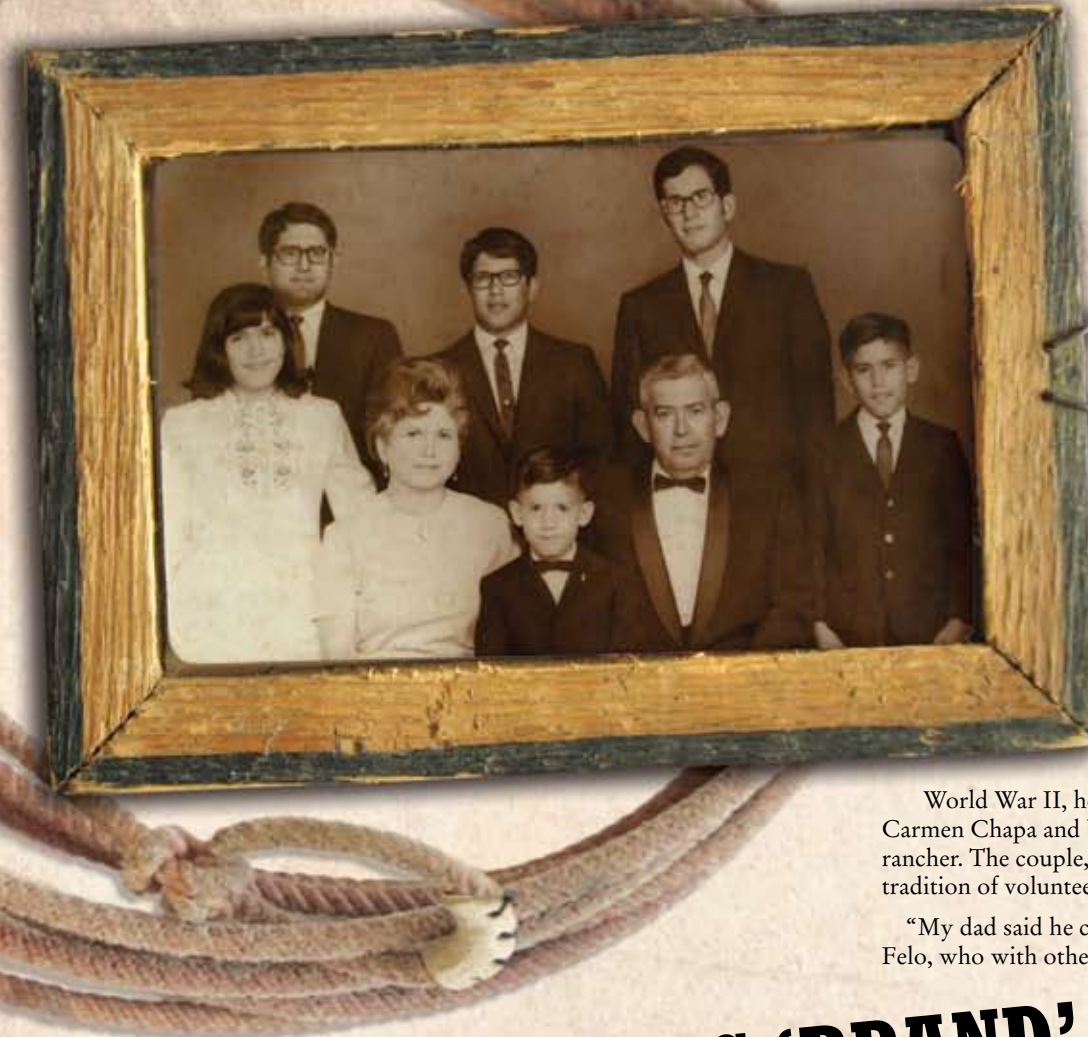
System, the grants came from a \$2 million fund approved by the UT System Board of Regents late last year to speed commercialization of products created at UT System institutions. In the first three TIF rounds,

the Office of Research and Technology Transfer (RTT) and the Ignition Fund Advisory Board (IFAB) approved \$1.16 million in TIF awards for 28 proposals from 11 System institutions.

“We are pleased at the high quality of proposals submitted to the TIF program from our institutions,” UT System Interim Chancellor Dr. Kenneth I. Shine said. “They reflect the remarkable talent and innovative thinking on our campuses and reinforce our belief that higher education is an economic driver in Texas. We have high hopes that these ventures will begin to produce new commercial products and startups as early as next year.”

The TIF fund was authorized to address the challenge that research discoveries and inventions at UT institutions often cannot reach their potential without additional effort to develop product applications that can attract investor capital to commercialize them. TIF funds are used mainly for personnel, equipment, supplies, instrument use fees, market analyses and business plans.

To learn more about UTPA inventions and patents, contact the Office of Innovation and Intellectual Property at 956/292-7415.



us to use this program to assist as many more students as possible to achieve their greatest potential,” said the family of their humble parents. “We also offer thanks to our Lord for our many blessings and to be able to share those blessings with others.”

The family members recalled how dedicated their parents were to advancing higher education and when that interest first began – early in the last century.

“It was first documented in the early 1900s when our grandfather Arcadio, who only had a third grade education, built a school at our La Reforma Ranch in Starr County. He (Arcadio) would always encourage the young students to further their education and helped many of them through college,” said Carlos, who bought the Guerra Brothers’ registered cattle with the Muñeca brand in 1989. He now runs La Muñeca Cattle Co., named after the brand his great grandmother registered in 1873.

Rafael, who was born to Arcadio and his wife Leonor, first attended school at La Reforma and eventually took classes at Texas A&I, now Texas A&M University-Kingsville. After serving honorably in the U.S. Army in the Pacific during

World War II, he returned to South Texas where he wed his sweetheart Carmen Chapa and began his life as a successful merchant, farmer and rancher. The couple, married 59 years, also continued the Guerra’s famed tradition of volunteerism and benevolence.

“My dad said he came back from the war as a ‘do-gooder,’” said his son Felo, who with other family members runs the Guerra Brothers Successors. Felo is also a longtime member of the UTPA Foundation Board of Trustees.

Rafael served on many school and community boards, a number of them related to his interest in agriculture and ranching. He also helped found the South Texas Independent School District. His service reflected the family’s belief in the positive impact of education on people’s lives.

“In our family getting an education wasn’t an option. We were supposed to do that, it was mandatory,” Felo said. “My dad believed that higher education provides more opportunities and better

prepares a person for life and its challenges.”

Rafael and Carmen’s excellent example of giving back to their community is a quality their children have carried on and have passed down to their children.

“The Guerra name represents many different families all of whom believe in working hard to improve our quality of life,” Carlos said.

To date, the Guerras have contributed countless volunteer hours and monetary support to UTPA and other efforts to increase higher education opportunities for South Texas students.

In addition, the family heads a scholarship program that honors Guerra family members including their youngest brother Victor who was killed in a 1979 accident. Through this program, more than \$500,000 in scholarships has been awarded to students residing in communities surrounding the Guerra ranch properties. Approximately 60 percent of the scholarship recipients have made UTPA their school of choice.

“The legacy of the Guerra family has to be one of having an impact in higher education for South Texas families for at least three generations,” said Lydia Aleman, associate vice president for University Advancement at UTPA.

“They are so successful in this because of what I refer to as the two-step approach they take. First, they entrust scholarship support to institutions of higher learning to advance the chance for students to earn their degrees and second, they take a hands-on approach by inspiring, mentoring, and advising individual South Texas students on how to be successful in college,” Aleman said.

Founded in 1963, the Honors Program provides students the chance to conduct research at the undergraduate level and to exchange ideas in a challenging and supportive academic environment through honors classes,

GUERRA FAMILY’S ‘BRAND’ OF SUPPORT BURNS BRIGHTLY AT UTPA

The late Rafael A. “Felo” and Carmen Guerra are known in South Texas as one of the state’s pioneer ranching families, with world-renown cattle brands and ranch holdings dating back to the early 1870’s.

But just as significant to this region’s history is the generational impact of the Guerra family’s long tradition of volunteerism, philanthropy and strong commitment to higher education in their community.

To forever link their name to that commitment, The University of Texas System Board of Regents on Feb. 12 approved the honorific naming of the Honors Program at The University of Texas-Pan American as the Rafael A. “Felo” and Carmen Guerra Honors Program in their memory.

“There could be no better role models for our young people in South Texas than Mr. and Mrs. Guerra, and we look forward to sharing their story of philanthropy and caring with the many students who will pass through the Rafael A. ‘Felo’ and Carmen Guerra Honors Program in the years to come,” said UTPA Interim President Charles A. Sorber.

The Guerra family said they were honored to have this program named for their parents – Rafael “Felo” (1915-2005) and Carmen (1920-2008). The Guerra family today includes five surviving children – sons A.R. “Felo,” Gerardo, Carlos and Hector Guerra and daughter Carmen Elvia Guerra Yzaguirre – along with 17 grandchildren.

“We are sure that they are both smiling down on all of us and would want

study abroad, an honor society and developmental seminars. From 1985 through fall 2008, the Honors Program has graduated 199 students.

“The Honors Program represents a standard of excellence to which the entire South Texas community can aspire with a tradition of rigor, purpose and distinction,” said Dr. Ken Buckman, Honors Program director. “The Rafael A. ‘Felo’ and Carmen Guerra Honors Program is a nursery for tomorrow’s leadership. We commend the Guerras for their vision and support of UTPA.”

Family members agreed that their parents would have offered these words of advice for students entering the Rafael A. “Felo” and Carmen Guerra Honors Program: “Make the most of the opportunity and use it to expand your horizons, advance your level of education, meet new friends and challenge yourself to learn to your best ability.”

To learn more about the ways to give to UTPA, visit <http://dua.utpa.edu/>.



Guerra Honors Program provides world-class education

Camilo Gonzalez is glad he didn't have to leave the Valley to get an Ivy League quality education on a state university's budget.

Gonzalez, a junior premed major at The University of Texas-Pan American, is getting that kind of education as an honors student in the Rafael A. “Felo” and Carmen Guerra Honors Program. The program has enabled him to take a rigorous liberal arts curriculum and closely interact at the undergraduate level with the University’s most talented professors in both teaching and research.

“It has encouraged me to study topics that I used to consider ‘too fancy’ to have taken normally. The ability to do research as an undergrad is also extremely useful and puts honors students on par with students in other universities,” said Gonzalez, who heads Eta Omicron Nu, the program’s Honors Society.

The Honors Program also offers academically ambitious students opportunities to receive prestigious scholarships, participate in independent study classes and developmental seminars, meet and integrate with local and national speakers, study and connect with like-minded students and to join in Honors Program study abroad.

“Traveling abroad is an important component of the program. It gets students out of their comfort zones and puts them in contact with other cultures. It transforms text education into a tangible reality of how these things affect their lives,” said Dr. Kenneth Buckman, associate professor of philosophy and Honors Program director since 2007.

Buckman also teaches the humanities honors courses while the students are abroad in such far flung places as Rome, Paris, Vienna, Prague and Budapest. In May, students are scheduled to travel to Turkey.

“When I see them do their presentations while

abroad I get chills; there is something more incredibly powerful about giving a presentation at the Place de la Concorde in Paris, where Marie Antoinette was beheaded ... and there we are standing where it happened. It gives you the texture, the feel of the place like nothing else,” he said.

The academic requirements are high to be admitted and students must take 20 to 25 percent of their classes as honors classes and maintain a 3.3 grade point average while in the program. From 1985 through fall 2008, the Honors Program graduated 199 students. Currently nearly 100 students are enrolled in the program.

“The humanities curriculum at the core of the Honors Program was fundamental to my growth as a person, not just as a student or as a professional.”

*- Joey Nichols
2006 UTPA Alumnus*

Joey Nichols, a 2006 UTPA alumnus, said his path to graduate and medical school was made easier due to the skills he learned and the mentoring he received while working on his honors thesis, another program requirement. After finishing a master’s in public health in only one year at The University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston, Nichols is now a second-year student at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

“I knew how to interact with my committee members, how to formulate an original research question and how to select and interpret data and report it in a useful way. It was the perfect first step for transitioning from undergrad education to graduate school and then medical school,” Nichols said. “Also, the humanities curriculum at the core of the Honors Program was fundamental to my growth as a person, not just as a student or as a

professional.”

For Gonzalez, being an Honors Program student also broadened his interest in the world beyond his premed major.

“The Honors Program allows me to step back from my microscope and examine great pieces of art, important moments in history and the development of the ideas that shaped my life even before I was born,” he said.

Buckman said the University has its eye on expanding the program into an Honors College but that step will require greater resources to provide more scholarships, programming, honors faculty and classes and dedicated physical spaces for the program’s students and staff.

“The lessons of successful strategies for teaching and research learned and the opportunities availed through their ‘honors experience’ resonate out from the Honors Program to the general university community and represents a standard of excellence to which the entire South Texas community can aspire,” Buckman said.

Both Gonzales and Nichols appreciate the support of higher education benefactors such as the Guerras to provide the educational opportunities of a first rate institution here in South Texas.

“The Honors Program helps students to reach beyond the Valley, Texas and the United States and become real citizens of the world and to seek out new and interesting knowledge, experiences and skills that hopefully return to the Valley and make things better for people living in our home communities,” Nichols said.

For more information on the Rafael A. “Felo” and Carmen Guerra Honors Program, go to www.utpa.edu/honors. To learn more about how you can support the advancement of UTPA, call 956/318-5301.



STUDENT SUCCESS

Graphic design student recognized as Most Promising Minority Student



CHRISTOPHER RAMIREZ, a senior graphic design major at The University of Texas-Pan American, has had a passion for advertising since he was a senior in high school. In February, Ramirez was recognized as one of the American Advertising Federation's (AAF) Most Promising Minority Students (MPMS) in the country for his dedication to the field.

Ramirez attended the MPMS three-day program in New York Feb. 3-5 and was accompanied by Dr. Kimberly Selber, communication assistant professor, who nominated him for the honor.

"Growing up I was always drawn toward certain advertisements, and I didn't know exactly why I was prompted to believe things that were just a bunch of images and type or rhetoric on the visual screen," Ramirez said.

"Once I got to UTPA, having met Dr. Selber through the Ad Club my freshman year, she kind of I guess groomed me into the person who she thought eventually would be a good art director and successful in advertising."

The MPMS program honors the top 40 minority advertising students in the country who apply for the award. The award is based on excellence within the advertising, marketing, media and communication fields. According to Selber, Ramirez has demonstrated outstanding leadership and is now the fourth UTPA student receiving the honor. Each year a student from UTPA has been nominated and selected as a MPMS.

"He was a strong candidate because he embodied what the AAF was looking for. He participated in many extracurricular activities that related to his field of study, and really exemplifies excellence and passion for advertising. Our students are competitive on a

"I feel like everything that I do as a graphic artist has some purpose to it, and when you can convey them in the form of advertising, I feel that it has served its purpose."

- Christopher Ramirez

national level," Selber said.

Ramirez is a University Honors Program student, and a member of the Advertising Club, and the Student Leadership Program, and was previously design editor for the *Panorama* student publication. Ramirez enjoys painting and drawing and was the director for the University Art Yard event in 2007, a 30-person art show for which he designed all creative and promotional materials.

The MPMS program offers students the opportunity to network with advertising professionals as well as with other students interested in the same field of study. The students participate in an intensive industry program, and are interviewed and recruited by some of the top advertising agencies in the country.

Ramirez, who graduates in May 2009, plans to attend graduate school and study advertising.

Students reach out to thousands by volunteering

With 8,713 Texans waiting for organ donations, and 3,000 of them in South Texas according to the Department of State Health Services, three UTPA students volunteered their time with the Texas Organ Sharing Alliance (TOSA) to further their leadership skills and educate the public on the importance of giving the gift of life.

John-Robert Iruegas, a junior psychology major from Laredo; Mayra Lopez, a senior nursing major from Edcouch-Elsa; and Marcelina Pena, a senior biology (premed) major from Mission, were honored in February by TOSA for their volunteer efforts. The three students combined for a total of 310 volunteer hours to the organization, with the majority of time spent at donor recruitment events and meeting with families of organ donors as well as recipients. In addition, Lopez was honored by TOSA as the Volunteer of the Year and UTPA was also recognized for its dedication and contributions to the organization.

The three UTPA students are all participants in the UTPA Student Leadership Program (SLP), a program designed to develop the next generation of leaders for Texas through community involvement, academics and mentoring.

"Without volunteers, we (nonprofits) would be nothing. They take the message of organ donation to their families, peers and everyone in the community," said Tricia Barrera, public relations coordinator, Texas Organ Sharing Alliance.

Barrera said she was appreciative of the volunteers that came by way of the SLP, which allows students to obtain a minor in leadership studies. With the three UTPA students' volunteer efforts, Barrera estimates they were able to reach out to 10,000 at recruitment events and activities.

Dolores Villarreal, assistant director for the Student Leadership Program, said there are currently 50 students in the SLP program. As part of



Pictured left to right are Mayra Lopez, Marcelina Pena, Dolores Villarreal, Tricia Barrera, and John-Robert Iruegas.

their SLP requirement, they all must join a UTPA student organization, complete at least five hours of volunteer service per month, and second-year SLP students must participate in a community mentorship with a nonprofit agency on or off campus.

"Volunteering will allow them to work on their leadership skills, whether it is communication skills, networking or working with others. Many students will remain in the Rio Grande Valley after they graduate and hopefully as leaders they will contribute to the well-being of their community and local area," Villarreal said.

To learn more about SLP, e-mail slts@utpa.edu or call 956/381-2659.

Partnership with STISD focuses on enhanced student success

Enhanced college readiness and success by Rio Grande Valley students is the goal of a new partnership agreement announced between The University of Texas-Pan American and the South Texas Independent School District (STISD).

The partnership, titled "Pathways to Success," will provide new programs at the district's four high school campuses designed to ease the transition to and support the success of STISD students in postsecondary education. STISD high schools include South Texas Business, Education and Technology Academy (BETA) in Edinburg, South Texas High School for Health Professions (Med High) and Science Academy of South Texas, both in Mercedes, and South Texas Academy of Medical Technology (Med Tech) in San Benito.

Dr. John Edwards, UTPA vice president for Enrollment and Student Services described the agreement as historic.

"I know of no other University/school district agreement like this one which provides three avenues or pathways to prepare different cohorts of students for enhanced success at the University," he said.

The partnership, which was approved Jan. 20 by the STISD Board, includes a "Summer Start Program" that will provide developmental courses to entering freshmen students who will need this assistance to be eligible to enroll in regular University classes. A "Summer University Prep Program" will provide specially designed short-term courses as well as tutoring, mentoring and career assessment to district-identified students who have completed their sophomore year in order to better prepare academically for their remaining years in high school.

Pathways to Success also creates a "South Texas Scholars Program," which will enable high achieving students who have completed their sophomore



Former UTPA President Dr. Blandina Cárdenas (left) and South Texas Independent School District Superintendent Dr. Marla Guerra (right) sign agreement Jan. 22.

year in high school and who met certain academic standards to enroll both in Dual Credit classes at the high schools as well as in Concurrent Enrollment classes on the University campus or via interactive video. Students who complete 12 hours of Concurrent Enrollment courses would be eligible to apply to become University Scholars at UTPA and receive a \$3,000 a year scholarship. Edwards said because of the partnerships and programs established over the years by UTPA with Valley schools, have resulted in students entering the University more prepared and not only pursuing baccalaureate degrees but going on to graduate school to earn master's and doctoral degrees.

"That will impact our Valley in ways that will be difficult for us today to see," he said.

University administrators said they approached the STISD for this collaboration because of its long track record of providing its students excellent preparation for college. STISD high schools consistently rank in the top tier of high schools in the state and nationally.

The agreement states UTPA faculty will work with selected STISD teachers who will be hired to provide developmental instruction or as adjunct professors to teach Dual Credit courses on the high school campuses. The initial goal is to start the programs in summer 2009.

Dr. Marla Guerra, a UTPA alumna and STISD superintendent, said the district is excited about this first "official" partnership with UTPA and for the district's teachers to have the opportunity to plan and collaborate with University faculty to make sure their students are prepared to perform successfully at the university level and to graduate.

"Our ultimate goal is that they come back to the Valley and stay here and give back to the community to make the Valley a better place to live and work," she said.

For more information on the partnership, contact the Division of Enrollment and Student Services, at 956/381-2147.

TRANSFER CENTER OFFERS CONVENIENT TRANSFER INFORMATION FOR STC STUDENTS

The University of Texas-Pan American has now made it easier for students to transfer from South Texas College to the University through the help of the newly opened UTPA Transfer Center.

A grand opening was held Jan. 13 at the center, which is located at Pecan Boulevard and 29th Street in McAllen.

Mary de Leon, associate director of Admissions and New Student Services, said the center was developed to assist STC students in the transfer process from STC to UTPA.

"The center was created to provide students with UTPA information in the beginning of their freshman year at STC and to assist them in transitioning successfully to UTPA," de Leon said.

UTPA Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services Dr. John Edwards said the center will provide a convenient place for students to get information.

"We want to do anything we can do to help ease the transition for students coming from STC, or even for those preparing to transfer," Edwards said. "An office right across the street will enable students to walk over and receive accurate information about all of the transfer processes."

STC President Dr. Shirley Reed welcomed UTPA to the neighborhood and said this act of customer service was to be commended.

"This is going to go a long way to serve the almost 7,000 students who have taken classes at South Texas College who are now at UT Pan Am pursuing many programs including master's degree programs," Reed said.

The Transfer Center provides assistance with admission and academic counseling as well as financial aid and scholarship information. The center is equipped with laptops to facilitate the processing of admission applications, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) submittal, transfer orientation reservations and class registration.

According to de Leon, approximately 1,000 students transfer from STC to UTPA each year.



Pictured from left to right are STC Board of Trustees Chair Mike Allen; UTPA Associate Vice President and Dean of Admissions and Enrollment Services Dr. Magdalena Hinojosa; UTPA Provost and Vice President Dr. Paul Sale; Former UTPA President Dr. Blandina Cárdenas; STC President Dr. Shirley Reed; STC Board Member Alejo Salina; and McAllen City Manager Mike Perez.

In addition to the Transfer Center, UTPA will be working with STC to begin the curriculum alignment process through 30 articulation agreements between the two campuses for the Start Here, Finish There Student Transfer Success Action Plan, a collaboration in which students who have completed two years at STC may transfer seamlessly to UTPA in pursuit of a bachelor's degree. The program, along with its full set of agreements, is anticipated to be completed by December 2009.

The Transfer Center is open from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. on Friday. The staff will also collaborate with STC staff to schedule campus visits for students who are interested in learning more about UTPA.

For more information about the center, call 956/292-7441 or 956/292-7442.

Dr. Matthew Garcia

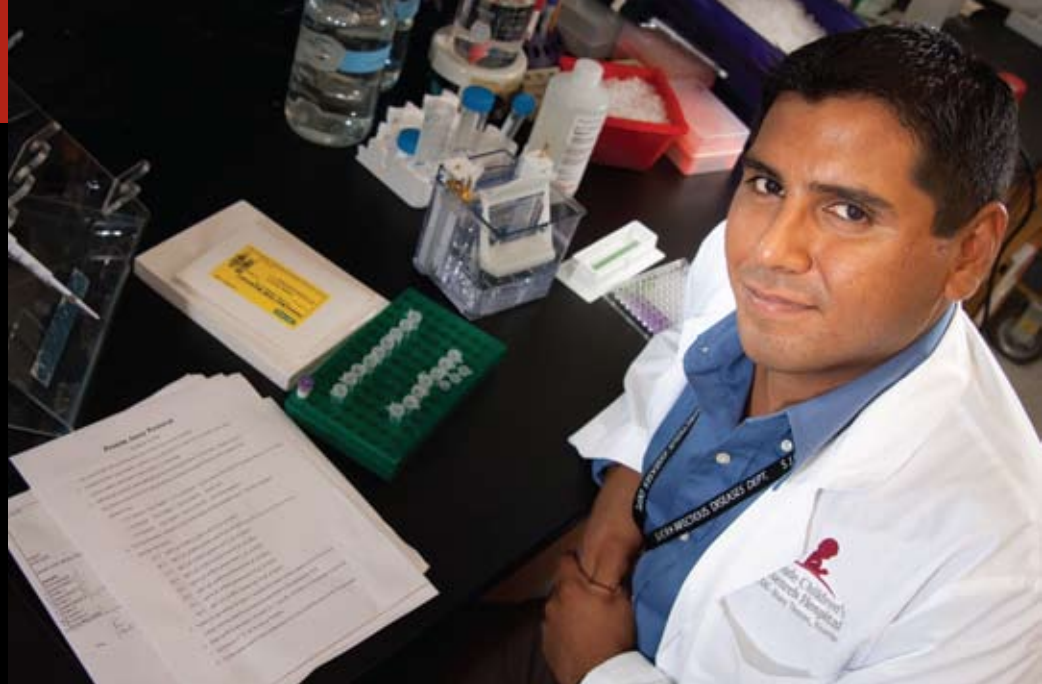


Photo courtesy of Seth Dixon, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

After watching an episode of “NOVA” on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) station about the human brain, Matthew Garcia’s fascination with how the human body functions was born. This interest continued through school, but it wasn’t until college that he finally appreciated the true scope of the vast mysteries of biological life. After receiving his bachelor’s in biology from The University of Texas-Pan American in 2002, Garcia pursued his graduate studies at the University of Kentucky, where he graduated with a Ph.D. in anatomy and neurobiology. Today the Weslaco, Texas native is helping to save lives as a postdoctoral research associate in the Department of Infectious Disease at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tenn.

How did your undergraduate degree at UTPA prepare you for your career now?

What was great about UTPA was all the support I received from the faculty. Also, it was at UTPA that I had the opportunity to be a lab assistant as an undergraduate, which was very unique. This experience had a lot to do with me eventually going to graduate school and choosing research as a career. When I first started to steer toward a career in research, the faculty were extremely supportive, and letters of recommendation were never hard to come by. To this day, every time I come down to the Valley, I make a trip to the UTPA biology department just to say hi; it’s that kind of place.

When did you realize you wanted to pursue a research career?

In my junior year at UTPA, I applied for a summer research fellowship at the University of Kentucky. For eight weeks I conducted a research project in the Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology. It was then that I truly became hooked on biomedical research.

Why are you so passionate about research?

I enjoy research because no two days are quite the same. You are continually learning new things, and along the way you are contributing to the creation of new knowledge that is of benefit to the health of people. Every day presents an opportunity to change the world.

Can you describe the kind of research you do at St. Jude?

My project deals with a rare childhood neurodegenerative disorder called pantothenate kinase-associated neurodegeneration (PKAN). It is a chronic and fatal condition that has a number of striking similarities to another neurodegenerative disorder that affects a number of people, Parkinson’s disease. In short, both disorders have a common clinical phenotype, presenting as a progressively debilitating movement disorder. Mutations in a protein that is localized to the mitochondria in the neurons of humans causes PKAN, but the exact mechanism of how this is accomplished is unknown. It is hoped that by figuring out how PKAN is caused, we can use this information to not only treat PKAN but also find novel therapeutic strategies in Parkinson’s disease.

Who has been the biggest influence in your life?

I would have to say the biggest influence in my life has been my mom. She always made sure I was exposed to as much as possible, taking me to museums and libraries, making sure I got out of the Valley on school trips or on trips with family. She wanted me to know that there was much more in the world than our little part of it. She put a high emphasis on education and academics. I doubt I would have made it through junior high school without her constant pushing and involvement in my education. I’m pretty sure there wasn’t a teacher I had who didn’t know my mother’s name.

What advice would you give current students who are interested in pursuing a research career?

Over the summer I had the opportunity to come back to UTPA and conduct a seminar and a career workshop with some biology department students in an undergraduate research program – Research Experiences for Undergraduates. This is the first step for someone interested in a career in research science, to get involved and apply for programs like this. Nothing can replace the experience of actual hands-on bench research, and you’ll know very quickly whether this is the right career path. Research is the type of position that requires self motivation and determination. It is a roller coaster ride with extreme highs and extreme lows and being able to deal with that is the ultimate litmus test of being a scientist.

What is the most unique aspect of your job?

Every day presents its own set of unique challenges, and I am constantly being pushed to my creative and intellectual limits. I learn something new every day, and sometimes I’m the one who discovers that something new.



to become nurses then. I feel that really helped me become part of the change (in nursing),” said Segura, who is originally from Mexico and chair for the Trauma Society of the Rio Grande Valley.

Today, Dr. Carolina Huerta, Department of Nursing chair, said approximately 25 percent of the graduating class for UTPA’s Bachelor of Science in Nursing are males compared to the national average of seven percent. A trend that has continued to increase over the years in the department, Huerta said.

“At UT Pan American we have always had males enrolled in our

program. I think that men in the U.S. have found nursing to be a fulfilling career that also pays the bills,” Huerta said.

That is just one of many achievements that have occurred in the department during its existence, Huerta said. As the department celebrates 40 years, Huerta reminisced about the program that was started in 1967 as an Associate’s Degree in Nursing (ADN) program. Huerta, who began her career at UTPA in 1972, said the department has grown tremendously from once being housed off campus at Edinburg North Junior High to the modern Health Sciences and Human Services Building on campus.

“Obviously we have grown tremendously,” Huerta said. “When I started here, none of the faculty had a Master of Science in Nursing degree, and now close to 50 percent of all faculty have doctoral degrees.”

Today, the program employs more than two dozen faculty members, compared to seven in 1969.

The first batch of graduates in the ADN program graduated in 1969 with 15 receiving their degrees. In 2000, the ADN program came to a close and graduated 21 in its last class. Today the number has ballooned to more than 3,000 graduates among the three programs – the one-time ADN program,

Bachelor of Science in Nursing, which began in 1982, and Master of Science in Nursing, which started in 1993.

Huerta recalls when the Rio Grande Valley had only one main hospital, McAllen General Hospital, and a few small hospitals scattered throughout the community. Today, the South Texas health care facilities – in McAllen, Edinburg, Weslaco and Rio Grande City – serve as clinical sites for the BSN and MSN students and employ 90 percent of UTPA nursing graduates.

“It seems that there are new hospitals being built every day around here. Obviously, UTPA has contributed to providing the nursing manpower needed to run these institutions. There are many home health agencies in the Rio Grande Valley that employ many of our graduates. too. Many of these agencies are owned by our graduates and are very successful financially,” she said.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs in the healthcare field are anticipated to grow by 25.4 percent with 4 million new jobs being added. Employment for registered nurses across the country is expected to increase 23 percent between 2006 and 2016 and likely to continue.

Huerta said she is proud of the department’s many accomplishments, including in 2008 when graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program received a 96.72 percent pass rate on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX), an exam they are required to pass to become registered nurses.

Sixty-one students, the majority of whom were December 2007 graduates, took the NCLEX and received one of the highest pass rates in the state, according to Huerta.

“I felt quite elated and proud of our nursing program and faculty,” Huerta said. “I believe that we have wonderful, committed faculty, who have worked very hard to prepare our students for success upon graduation.”

The UTPA nursing graduates, with a pass rate of 96.72 percent, performed above the state average of 90.68 percent and many other nursing schools.

Courses in medical Spanish to train bilingual health care professionals

To help bridge the language gap among patients and health care providers, The University of Texas-Pan American is now offering courses in medical Spanish.

According to Dr. Glenn Martinez, director of the Medical Spanish Project at UTPA, language barriers are responsible for missed diagnoses, medical errors, delayed treatment and unnecessary tests.

“Those barriers not only compromise the quality of care for limited English proficient patients, they also increase the cost of care for all Americans,” Martinez said. “Given their previous background in the language, UTPA students are capable of quickly and effectively developing advanced language skills that will be useful in clinical settings.”

The Medical Spanish Project consists of four courses that constitute a track or concentration within the regular Spanish minor.

“We hope to have a minor in medical Spanish approved before the end of the semester,” he said.

“Once approved, we will offer the nation’s first academic minor in medical Spanish.”

Martinez, who also serves as chair and associate professor of modern languages and literature, said the project addresses a national need in healthcare today.

Martinez said any student majoring in premedical, predoctoral, nursing, pharmacy, social work, rehabilitation studies, communication disorders and psychology would benefit from the courses.

“The courses would also be useful for students interested in pursuing public health from majors such as sociology, anthropology and kinesiology and health education,” he said. “We are also working with South Texas College to ensure that this program is available to health professionals at both the associates and baccalaureate levels.”

Through the courses – Intermediate Spanish for Health Professions I and II, Advanced Spanish Composition for the Health Professions, and Sociolinguistics and Latino Health – students

will learn about medical terminology for chronic illnesses, medical translation interpreting, patient interviewing skills, and writing in Spanish for health purposes, as well as participate in a capstone course about the threat of language barriers to public health.

“We want Tennessee, Iowa, Michigan and Minnesota to look to UTPA to recruit bilingual and bicultural doctors and nurses who will ensure that all people have access to quality healthcare,” Martinez said.

The Medical Spanish Project is funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE). FIPSE is a grant program intended to support innovative educational reform projects that can serve as national models for the improvement of postsecondary education.

For more information or to enroll in the courses, contact Martinez at 956/381-3441 or via e-mail at martinezg@utpa.edu.



most likely receive an offer from that employer,” Servantes said. “We are seeing students who have done multiple internships obtaining multiple offers from a variety of organizations in different industries even in this economy.”

According to a 2008 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, employers extend full-time job offers to interns 60 percent of the time.

Servantes said internships offer students the opportunity to learn how to explore and clarify their major and career goals with professionals in the field; develop knowledge, competencies, and experience related to their major and career goals; gain practical employment experience that employers look for when hiring college graduates; take responsibility for their own learning and create a more rewarding college experience; and establish a network of professional contacts, mentors and references for after graduation.

UTPA’s Office of Career Services also conducts regular workshops on résumé writing and interviewing skills, as well as internship panel discussions where students who have participated in internships can share their experiences with others.

“I think the workshop helped me to get the internship because it prepared me to interview – everything from how to dress to giving examples of possible questions an employer may ask was covered,” Renteria said.

Renteria’s grades, leadership experience and determination were critical in helping her to acquire an internship according to UTPA Career Adviser Ronnie Garcia.

“Mercy had a successful internship search because she committed to the process. In addition to following the standard methods of applying, she utilized her networks to ensure she would have every opportunity to meet with the employer face-to-face,” Garcia said. “Mercy attended company information session meetings, and interviews and encouraged professors to invite her as a student representative whenever they had contact with employers.”

With the current economic downturn, Mercy Renteria knows the value of getting firsthand experience with a company through an internship before she graduates this May and begins her job search.

A senior majoring in management at The University of Texas-Pan American, Renteria took advantage of the career services available to her through UTPA to secure a competitive internship with PICO Technologies, LLC – a division of the oldest and largest Egyptian company operating in the oil and gas industries.

“Through my internship, I’m working on implementing a marketing strategy which is seeking to target not only U.S. markets, but Mexico and Venezuela,” Renteria said. “I would love to pursue a career in the oil industry after I graduate.”

Lourdes Servantes, interim director of Career Services, a department dedicated to helping students and alumni with job searches and career information, said it is vital for students to expand their skills through internships to better prepare themselves for employment, especially during a difficult economy.

“Although some organizations have limited the number of internship opportunities they are offering, the opportunities are still there,” Servantes said. “At career services, we have noticed an increased interest by students in internships, and the internships we are posting are becoming more competitive. Obtaining an internship at this time is a great boost to a student’s marketability.”

Servantes said there is also a greater potential to obtain full-time employment with an organization that has hired a student as an intern.

“Students who perform well in their internships will

During Fiscal Year 2008, there were more than 3,500 students actively using Career Services’ Bronc Career Connection, an online database of job vacancies and internship/co-op opportunities from the local area and across the country, which is available 24 hours a day.

For more information about the Office of Career Services and internship opportunities for students and employers, call 956/381-2243 or visit www.dua.utpa.edu/careerplacement/.

Internships Boost marketability



Initiated in the Department of Communication in 2006 but open to all majors, Bronc TV/Radio provides programming ranging from campus news stories and interviews to music and Bronc athletics broadcasts. In September 2008, Bronc Radio began podcasting newscasts on its own Web site at www.utpa.edu/broncradio. As of March 2009, the Web site has attracted more than 30,000 hits from 18 countries.

As a Bronc TV/Radio volunteer, Alanis was able to use top-notch production equipment in a broadcast studio atmosphere to gain skills in script writing, researching story ideas, editing and doing in-studio recording of stories in both English and Spanish. He said he learned a lot from Mann, a co-founder of

“Overall, UTPA has helped me out in so many ways that I will forever be thankful.”
- Omar Alanis

Student Television Network (www.studenttelevision.com), the nation’s largest affiliation of schools interested in furthering scholastic broadcasting.

“Professor Mann’s mentorship is unique. He not only believes in his students but also provides encouragement and determination, which comes from seeing his students succeed,” Alanis said.

Mann said, besides having top grades, Alanis always strives to do his best.

“Omar always came to work with a smile on his face and willing to help others,” he said, also noting Alanis’ courage to try radio work as a marketing major.

As a CBS intern, Alanis has also had the thrill of attending the Obama inauguration ceremony and meeting renown broadcast veterans like Bob Schieffer. However, his more typical day-to-day tasks involve editing broadcast pieces, setting up phone interviews, and recording and editing sound bites to include in the next news broadcast.

“I am primarily shadowing the current radio broadcasters, observing how they produce newsworthy stories,” Alanis said.

While his short-term goals include the dream of making it big as both a radio and television bilingual broadcaster, Alanis said he is also interested in one day starting a business or leading the marketing division of a Fortune 500 company.

Alanis said the education and mentorship he received from faculty and staff have prepared him well for success.

“My involvement with UTPA’s Bronc Radio/TV was fun, allowed me to get my feet wet and gave me the hands-on experience I needed. I was also able to create more inner confidence and become a better person,” he said.

“If it was not for the Career Services staff, I do not think that I would be where I am today, at CBS radio. They constantly e-mailed me of great internship opportunities and helped me prepare for interviews by reviewing my cover letters and résumés. Overall, UTPA has helped me out in so many ways that I will forever be thankful,” he said.

Opportunities Omar Alanis took advantage of as a student at The University of Texas-Pan American recently landed the senior marketing major in the White House Press Room as an intern with CBS network radio.

“Never did I imagine I would be at a press briefing by President Obama’s new press secretary, especially not as an intern. I was literally the youngest person in the room and got to see well-known reporters showcasing their talent and other great reporters asking tough questions,” said Alanis, a San Juan resident and first generation university student.

Alanis got this unique chance for hands-on learning thanks to an internship program he learned about from UTPA’s Office of Career Services. He also gained valuable experience for the job as a volunteer for Bronc TV/Radio, which features University news written and produced by students and broadcast via the Internet.

Alanis was selected to participate this spring 2009 semester in the Bill Archer Fellowship Program, a prestigious internship initiated by the former congressman from Houston to give Texas students a chance to live and learn in Washington, D.C. while taking classes in policy, economics and persuasion.

As an Archer Fellow, a student is matched to a position related to his or her skills and career interests. Alanis immediately pursued an internship opening in radio with one of the nation’s top media companies.

Alanis said he had the usual voice change at puberty but as he neared age 21 in 2008 his voice deepened even more grabbing the attention of his communications class instructor and Bronc TV/Radio adviser Fred Mann.

“I was doing a mock report in front of the class when Professor Mann told me that I had a good radio voice and wanted me to volunteer for Bronc Radio. I seized the opportunity and really enjoyed volunteering,” Alanis said.

ability for Students

HAVE YOU SIGNED UP YET?

University installs new safety measure



Victor Ituarte, a 22-year-old senior communication major at The University of Texas of Pan-American, clearly remembers April 16, 2007, the day of the Virginia Tech incident that left 33 people dead and others wounded. Because of this national tragedy, embedded in so many lives in America, especially those of college students, Ituarte decided to sign up for Bronc Alert, a new safety measure at UTPA that includes mass text, voicemail, e-mail, and a siren system.

"It didn't take very long to sign up, and I figured it would pay off if it had to be put to use," Ituarte said. "We have a large campus. The system can inform the largest amount of people, in the shortest amount of time, to create the safest environment for all in the event of an incident."

According to Richard Costello, director of Environmental Health and Safety, and James Loya, UTPA assistant chief of police, the mass notification system is designed to warn the campus community and anyone who signs up, like the Edinburg police and fire departments and local media, of a campus crisis such as a terrorist act or tornado.

"UTPA police officers train once a year on active shooter responses. We want to make sure everyone here is safe in all aspects, and we work very closely with Environmental Health and Safety," Loya said.

In case of an emergency, mass text messages and voicemail can be sent to two phone lines per person. A student on campus, as well as a parent at home, may receive the message. E-mails can also be sent to a preferred address, and a siren will sound on campus with an audible warning to either stay in shelter or follow further instructions.

"The mass notification system was an initiative that began after the Virginia Tech incident and championed by former University President Dr. (Blandina) Cárdenas," Costello said. "We want to ensure the campus community is warned so they can take the proper action to protect themselves in the event of a major man-made or natural emergency."

Other safety measures at UTPA include new crosswalks and signage designed to warn motorists of pedestrians, as well as lighting to illuminate designated crosswalks. According to Costello, the improvements will aid in preventing any accidents with pedestrians on campus.

"We had prior to the installation of the crosswalks some near misses pertaining to students crossing the streets and a couple of accidents. Since the installation of the crosswalks, and signage, the near misses have been significantly reduced," Costello said.

Future initiatives by Environmental Health and Safety in collaboration with student groups include energy conservation and storm water management.

To sign up for Bronc Alert, visit the UTPA emergency Web Site at www.utpa.edu/emergency.



Transportation options offered to students

With 96 percent of students commuting to The University of Texas-Pan American, according to the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, the cost of gas can be a burden. To help relieve the strain on student's pocketbooks, public transportation for students at UTPA will be free thanks to a partnership the University has started with the Rio Metro Urban Transportation System, a service provided by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC).

Rio Metro offers travel to and from UTPA from supporting cities in the Rio Grande Valley. This service is available to students in all cities with Rio Metro bus stops. The collaboration will also include South Texas College and the city of La Joya. Students with a valid University ID will be able to take advantage of the bus system.

"The program will positively affect those students who struggle to meet their academic endeavors due to unavailable or unaffordable transportation," said Leticia Benavides, director of UTPA's auxiliary services.

Students may present their UTPA ID at any Rio Metro Bus Station in the Rio Grande Valley from 6 a.m.-10 p.m. Depending on the route, riders may change shuttle busses until they are on a designated bus commuting to the University. The UTPA/Rio Metro bus stop is located on University Drive in Edinburg in front of the Marialice Shary Shivers Administration Building.

According to Benavides, the partnership began on Sept. 2 as a result of former UTPA President Dr. Blandina Cárdenas's recommendation to assist students struggling to attend their classes due to escalating gasoline prices. The program currently serves nearly 100 UTPA students, and is designed so students will be on campus by 7:45 a.m.

"Last summer when gas prices began to spike, we became concerned about our students and their ability to get to campus. We put together a group to study ways that the

University might help with student transportation," said Dr. John Edwards, UTPA vice president for Enrollment and Student Services.

Another transportation option offered to students by the UTPA Student Government Association (SGA) is Ridesharing. The online service aids students, who are either looking for a ride to campus, or who would like to offer a ride to another student. Ridesharing is intended to save money on gas by sharing the cost, alleviate traffic congestion, and help the environment.

According to SGA president and senior psychology major Marcos Silva, the Ridesharing idea was first introduced in the summer when the price of gas was almost \$4. He said that since UTPA is primarily a commuter school, SGA saw the impact it had on University students and wanted to do something to alleviate the stress.

"We hope that every student can take advantage of the program. We know that gas prices have gone down, but even if you spend \$20 on gas each week, you can save yourself around \$80 every month," Silva said. "We would like to see a minimum 50 students utilizing the program by the end of this semester."



For more information about Rio Metro bus schedules and routes, visit the LRGVDC Web Site at www.lrgvdc.org, or visit the SGA Web Site for information on Ridesharing at www.utpa.edu/sga.

mobile GO CENTER

Migrant students get a helping hand from UTPA's mobile access center

Nydia Acosta has a better understanding of the type of career she should pursue in the future and what classes to take in high school to better prepare her for college after a recent visit from The University of Texas-Pan American's University Migrant Mobile Access Center (UMMAC).

The initiative is designed to utilize a combination of school and community-based Mobile Go Center visits to deliver college access and readiness information to migrant students and parents.

"Through the Valley Outreach Center, UTPA is assisting this population because students of migrant farmworker families have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education," Sarah Viranda, Mobile Go Center coordinator, said. "We want to offer support and access to migrant students to help them plan out their college careers."

The UMMAC is reaching out to more than 22,000 migrant students in the Region One Education Service area from Laredo to Brownsville, by way of UTPA's Mobile Go Center – an Internet-equipped mobile computer lab.

Acosta, a sophomore at Mission High School and migrant student, participated in Career Cruising – a Web-based career and college exploration and planning program where students answer questions and are given suggested careers based on their hobbies and interests – when the mobile unit visited her high school.

Acosta said the program was very helpful and she liked learning about which career she would be best suited for.

"I enjoyed looking at the level of education I would need and the earnings of the different careers I want to pursue. It said I should look for a career in economics," she said. "I think the services are great because we also learn about what kinds of classes we're supposed to take now to prepare us for

college."

Viranda said migrant students face many educational challenges due to their status.

"Because of interruptions in their education, migrant students are more likely to miss out on a school's planned career and college information events or activities since they leave," Viranda said. "If they are behind in their academic progress, they are also less likely to be allowed to participate in visits to college campuses, so we are here to help them plan out their college career early on and give them access to those things they missed."

The UMMAC provides financial aid services by helping students and parents with filling out and submitting the Free Application For Federal Student Aid online. It also helps them apply for admission to Texas universities, provides the Career Cruising program, and offers an interactive Spanish DVD, "Camino Al Colegio," to migrant parents.

"I believe that the Go Center through the UMMAC project can make a difference with migrants because the mobile center will give special attention to this population," Viranda said. "We will encourage them through one-on-one mentoring and show them that they can go to college and pursue a career. You don't have to continue working in the fields. We can help you."

The mobile center is free of cost and school districts, and organizations throughout the Rio Grande Valley are encouraged to take advantage of the UMMAC for their migrant events.

For more information or to reserve the mobile unit, call Viranda at 956/292-7597 or visit <http://www.utpa.edu/voc>.



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