

UTRGV hopes for same funding amid COVID-19, budget cuts

Jacqueline Peraza
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley hopes to receive the same amount of funding during the 87th Legislative Session as it did previously in 2019, according to a UTRGV official.

Veronica Gonzales, UTRGV vice president for Governmental and Community Relations, said the university understands this will be a tight session due to a 5% budget cut affecting all state agencies with the exception of COVID-19 response agencies.

"We are asking to maintain the funds we received for both the general academics and the medical school," Gonzales said.

The university's legislative priorities can be broken down to fit within two categories: formula and non-formula funding.

Formula funding is calculated and based on different institutional factors.

"For every student we have, we get a certain amount of money [that] depends on what their major is, their college," Gonzales said. "So, we want to make sure that the formula stays intact."

If an institution grows in terms of enrollment, the for-

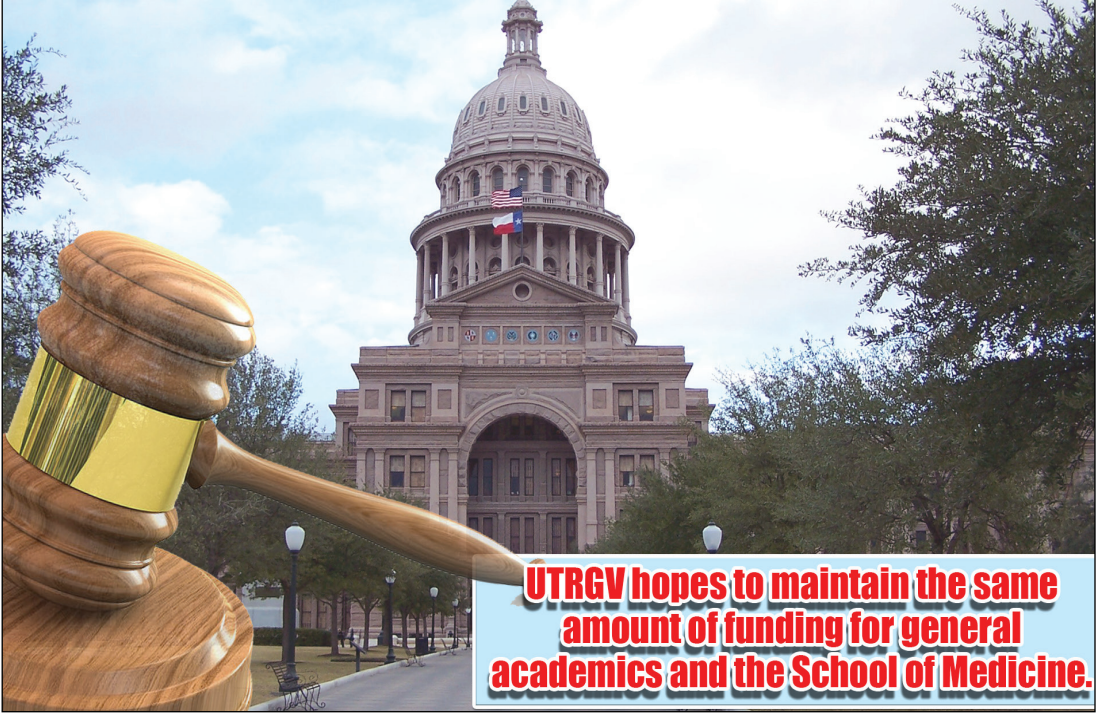
mula grows as well, she said. "Despite the pandemic, we were very fortunate to have had enrollment growth," Gonzales said. "We're hoping that the Legislature takes that into account and looks at the enrollment growth, and as the schools are growing ... they increase the amount of the formula. But even if they maintain the formula at the current level, we would see some increases because we were able to increase our enrollment."

Non-formula funding supports startups of new programs and projects at institu-

tions. "On the non-formula, they give us monies to help us grow our programs," she said. "[In general academics,] we're asking to keep the same level we had last time which was, I believe, \$21 million so we can continue to be able to grow programs, and that's called institutional enhancement."

According to a rack card provided by Gonzales, UTRGV will set aside \$16.8 million for "institutional enhancement, which is critical for funding four new programs."

The new programs include Doctor of Podiatric Medicine, Doctor of Nursing Practice, Bachelor of Science in Integrated Health Sciences, and Bridge Pipeline Program to Biomedical Sciences and Other Health Professional Pro-



UTRGV hopes to maintain the same amount of funding for general academics and the School of Medicine.

Roxanna Miranda/ THE RIDER PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

grams. "We would be the first university in the entire state to have a doctor of podiatry," Gonzales said, "which is pretty exciting because if you think about how much diabetes we have in the Rio Grande Valley, a lot of people suffer from problems with their feet and ankles."

During the 86th Legislative Session in 2019, the university was awarded \$42 million for the School of Medicine in startup funds. This year, UTRGV asked for \$39.8 million in non-formula funds for the next two years to continue

growing the School of Medicine.

"Formula funding is limited due to enrollment caps until full accreditation is received and our young practice plan, while it has grown to over 30 sites across the region, serves a largely uninsured/Medicaid population and lacks a regional hospital district to help support operations," the rack card states. "Continued startup funding is necessary to maintain and grow operations and to achieve full accreditation."

Gonzales said she hopes the state budget, which has

not been released yet, stays the same as the last time the session took place, but she is aware there will more than likely be cuts.

"The university had to take a 5% cut," Gonzales said. "The Legislature had asked us to return, basically, the money they gave us from last session; they asked us to return 5%, which we did. They asked all institutions to do that."

Asked what contingency plan the university has prepared in the event it receives less funds than it requested,

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Vaccination race against variants' fast pace

Alejandra Yañez
THE RIDER

A UTRGV official says increasing the number of people who get vaccinated against COVID-19 would decrease the possibility of a new mutation that would be resistant to the vaccine.

Dr. Michael Dobbs, vice dean of Clinical Affairs for the UTRGV School of Medicine and chief medical officer for UT Health RGV, also explained how these new variants came to be.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the new strain SARS-CoV-2, B.1.1.7, arrived in the U.S. Dec. 29 from the United Kingdom and has been detected in 12 states.

Asked what this new variant consists of and how it is different from the original COVID-19 strain, Dobbs replied, "The variants that are popping up right now, they seem to be more contagious and they are mutations that affect the spike protein to make it stick to cells better. That's why it's more contagious."

He said experts expect more new variants because viruses, such as COVID-19, mutate at rapid rates to stay alive when they are out in the public.

"So, the more people get vaccinated,



Aaliyah Garza/ THE RIDER

A UTRGV health care worker takes notes Jan. 12 while speaking to a person at the UTRGV COVID-19 testing site on the Edinburg campus.

the less likely that we would get a mutation that would make the virus resistant to vaccination," Dobbs said.

Besides the variant detected in the United Kingdom, others have mutated in Brazil and Columbus, Ohio, according to Dobbs.

Asked what the common misconcep-

tions are about these variants, Dobbs replied, "That the variants are more deadly. Another misconception I've seen is that the vaccine doesn't work on the variants."

He said the new variants seem to be more contagious but not more harmful and that both the Pfizer and Moderna

vaccines appear to work against the new variants.

Asked if he anticipates the new strain to spread to the Rio Grande Valley, Dobbs replied that it is possible the variant is already here.

"It's a race to get people vaccinated and, at the same time, continue to do aggressive social distancing and also get tested if you have symptoms or exposure," he said.

Dobbs said the university is not changing any protocols at the moment to accommodate the new variant.

"The most important thing, though, is that people need to get vaccinated so these variants stop showing up," he said. "Once everybody gets vaccinated, then it won't be as likely to show up because the virus won't be as likely to mutate to new variants because it just won't be circulating in the population. It's kind of a race against the virus to get people vaccinated."

Asked if the tests administered by the university would be able to detect the new variant, Dobbs replied that the routine polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test for COVID-19 would not identify a positive test as a variant. It would merely identify the sample as positive.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE RIDER

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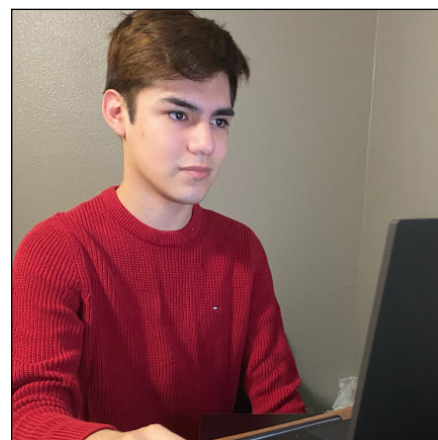
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MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER

Delivering news to UTRGV no matter the circumstances.



Today Astronomy Club Meeting

The Astronomy Club will host its first general meeting of the semester from 5 to 6 p.m. via Zoom. RSVP is available on VLink.

Netflix Watch Party

The UTRGV Student Union Netflix Watch Party events are back. The union will show "Easy A" at 6 p.m. via Zoom. Students will get the chance to chat with other Vaqueros and be entered in a giveaway. RSVP is available on VLink, and the Netflix party extension on Google Chrome must be downloaded.

Tuesday

DREAM Zone Advocate Training

The Center for Diversity & Inclusion & DREAM Resource Center will host an educational training via Zoom from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and from 2 to 7 p.m. Wednesday via Zoom. The training will review important terms, provide a brief historical overview, discuss current issues and how people can be DREAM Zone Advocates. RSVP is available on VLink.

Engaged Scholarship Workshop

Engaged Scholarship and Learning will host a workshop on how to prepare projects for presentations at conferences from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. via Zoom. People will learn about presentation opportunities and get tips and advice for projects. RSVP is available on

VLink.

Wednesday Leadership Involvement Fair

The Student Leadership Academy will host a virtual involvement fair from noon to 2 p.m. via Zoom. The fair will be a chance for students to learn about the Student Leadership Academy and the National Society of Leadership. RSVP is available on VLink.

National Puzzle Day

In celebration of National Puzzle Day, the Student Union will offer students a chance to win a UTRGV giveaway by completing a word search and sending it to the union's social media from noon to 6:45 p.m. via their social media. The word search will be available via its social media.

Virtual Involvement Fair

The Leadership and Mentoring office will host a virtual involvement fair from 5 to 7 p.m. via Zoom. The fair will be a chance for current and incoming students to learn about organizations specific to a college department or honor society registered at UTRGV. RSVP is available on VLink.

Thursday

Student Org Involvement Fair

The Leadership and Mentoring office will host a virtual involvement fair from noon to 2 p.m. via Zoom. The fair will be a chance for current and incoming students to learn about recognized student organizations registered at UTRGV. RSVP is available on

VLink.

Let's Talk about Comics

The Research and Instruction department of the University Library will host a virtual discussion series about graphic novels, cartoons and other pop culture issues from 5 to 6 p.m. RSVP is available on VLink.

Student Org Training

The Leadership and Mentoring office will host a virtual training with motivational speaker Dave Kelly from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. via Zoom. The training will teach students how to improve organization operations, recruitment approaches, events and meetings. RSVP is available on VLink.

Friday

Back-to-School Social

The Bilingual Education Student Organization will host a back-to-school social from 6 to 8 p.m. via Zoom. Students will play games virtually and get to meet members of the organization. RSVP is available on VLink.

Saturday

LGBTQ UTRGV Conference

The Center for Diversity & Inclusion & DREAM Resource Center will host a virtual conference to bring awareness, knowledge, empowerment and pride to the LGBTQ+ community at UTRGV. Topics will be broadly focused on queer issues and other intersecting identities. RSVP is available on VLink.

--Compiled by Omar E. Zapata

POLICE REPORTS

The following are among the incidents reported to University Police between Jan. 11 and 14.



Jan. 11

10:59 a.m.: A faculty member reported a medical emergency at another faculty member's off-campus residence

in Rancho Viejo. The faculty member reported that a student, while having a Zoom meeting with the faculty member, observed the faculty member collapse. An officer, Brownsville Emergency Medical Services and the Rancho Viejo Police Department responded to the residence. The faculty member was then transported to the Valley Regional Medical Center in Brownsville for further evaluation.

Jan. 12

3:09 p.m.: A faculty member reported he could not locate his girlfriend on the Edinburg campus. The faculty member was concerned because she had left her phone with him, so he could not communicate with her. The officers assisted him and located the woman at the library.

Jan. 13

4:58 a.m.: An officer conducted a traffic stop on a vehicle for a violation off campus in Edinburg. An investigation revealed the non-affiliated operator had an active warrant out of Bexar County Sheriff's Office in San Antonio for a probation violation. The original charge was for unlawful carrying weapons, a misdemeanor arrest in 2019. After the warrant was confirmed, the operator was transported to the Hidalgo County Jail and issued a written warning for the traffic violation.

11:17 a.m.: A staff member at the Harlingen Multispecialty Clinic reported a non-affiliated patient being rude to the staff. After making contact with the patient, the officer informed him of the consequences of his behavior. The patient left the location without incident.

4:46 p.m.: A student reported an unknown person(s) had entered her vehicle without her consent. She reported parking her vehicle in Lot B-1 and properly securing it. Upon her

return, she found her vehicle to be unlocked and observed several items scattered around the interior. No forced entry was observed, and nothing was reported stolen. The case is under investigation.

Jan. 14

8:50 a.m.: Officers and the Edinburg Fire Department responded to a fire alarm at the Marialice Shary Shivers Building on the Edinburg campus. Firefighters inspected and deemed the building safe for reentry.

1:25 p.m.: A faculty member reported a student had accidentally dropped a bottle containing a chemical on the classroom floor, which caused a chemical exposure to the student's eye. The student had not worn eye protection at the time of the spill. The student performed an emergency eye flush and declined emergency medical services. The area of the chemical spill was cleaned, and Environmental Health and Safety was notified of the incident.

--Compiled by Sol Garcia

FUNDING

Continued from Page 1

Gonzales replied that President Guy Bailey has been "very conservative in spending."

"We put a hiring freeze in place some time ago," she said. "We don't hire new people unless they're students. We've been careful to hold onto money as best we can so that we can continue to grow

programs. We've had some [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security] funds that have helped our students, primarily helped the students, and we've been able to use some of that also to get the faculty trained in online learning. ... So, we have a more robust online teaching that is being done."

Gonzales said she believes UTRGV should not be greatly affected by small cuts due to the university's enrollment

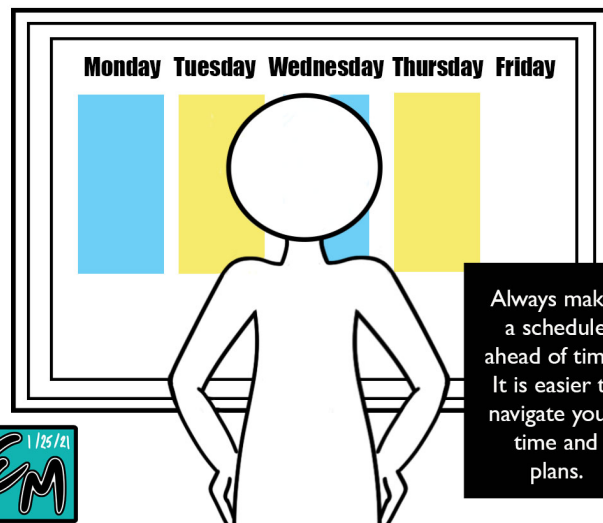
growth.

"But if it's a large cut, that would hurt not only UTRGV but all institutions of higher ed across the state," she said.

The Texas Legislature began its session Jan. 12 and will continue meeting until May 31. The Legislature has not approved or denied the university's funding requests as of press time.

The Doodler

By Elizabeth Mendoza



VAQUERO VOICE



COVID-19 VACCINE

On Jan. 19, The Rider conducted a poll on social media asking students, "When do you expect the majority of the country to be vaccinated?" The results are shown below.

facebook

8-11 MONTHS 29

OVER A YEAR FROM NOW 23

4-7 MONTHS 8



twitter

13 OVER A YEAR FROM NOW

5 4-7 MONTHS



4 8-11 MONTHS

1 2-3 MONTHS

Instagram

OVER A YEAR FROM NOW 15

8-11 MONTHS 15

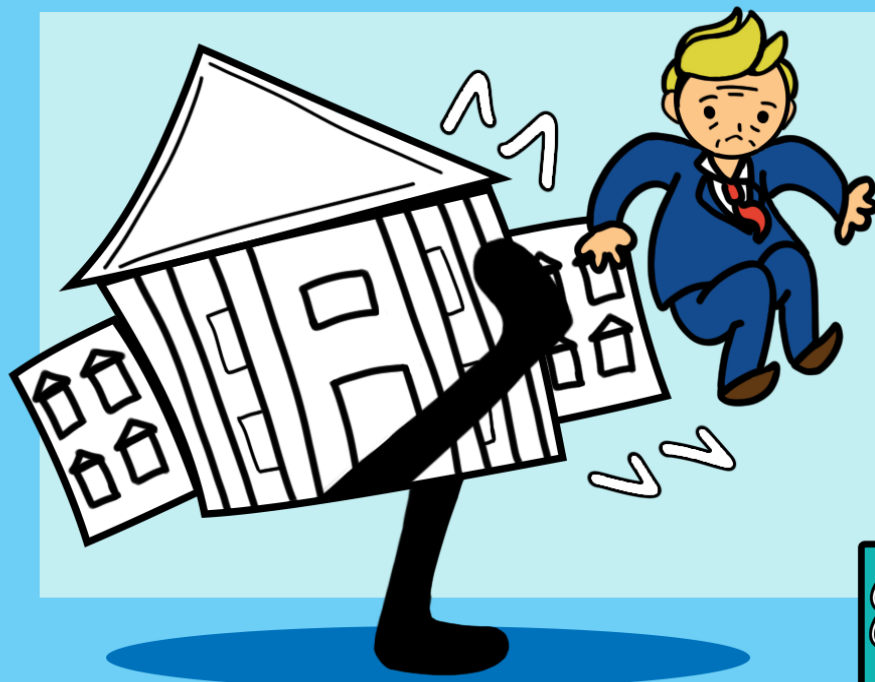
4-7 MONTHS 3



2-3 MONTHS 2

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO PARTICIPATE @UTRGVRIDER

Out of the White House



One more year



Omar Zapata

THE RIDER

You know what they say about a trainwreck, where it is so awful that you can

not look away? 2020 was that trainwreck. You wanted to look away, but you just could not because it was all around you.

2020 seemed like it had more downs than ups, from personal experience, but also due to the sheer number of events that have affected people. I believe something that really changed and shaped people's lives, for better or worse, is the COVID-19 pandemic.

Covering COVID-19 for The Rider, since the beginning of the pandemic: From the first cases in Texas to vaccines being administered, it has been a very long journey, and who knows how much longer it will be. It went from, "Oh, cool, we get an extended Spring Break," to wondering when life would be back to normal. But for myself, and probably many college students, even pre-COVID, normal was pretty chaotic and stressful.

I am not speaking for all college students. If you have your stuff together, then props to you. I am speaking for the college students like me who are worried about the present and the future, worried about

what we are going to do after graduating, what jobs we can get, the current state of our country and the daily struggles of life.

All of this, combined with the pandemic, makes it a very difficult and confusing time. Who would have thought we would have to navigate through this a year ago?

At least in pre-COVID times, people had more ways to release stress. Whether it was partying, spending time with friends and family, traveling or even going to the movies, these were things that people used to stay sane and calm in life. With COVID taking a lot of things away, people have been in their homes with no release valves, and this has led to many problems.

In late June, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use, according to a survey done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. From people becoming depressed and unmotivated to domestic violence rates going up, all this time inside has made life difficult for people.

As for me, all this time inside and all the other struggles that were present in my life made me depressed for much of the year. The almost daily negative stories of people struggling and dying from across the world, and in my own backyard, of COVID, and not being able to release that stress just really

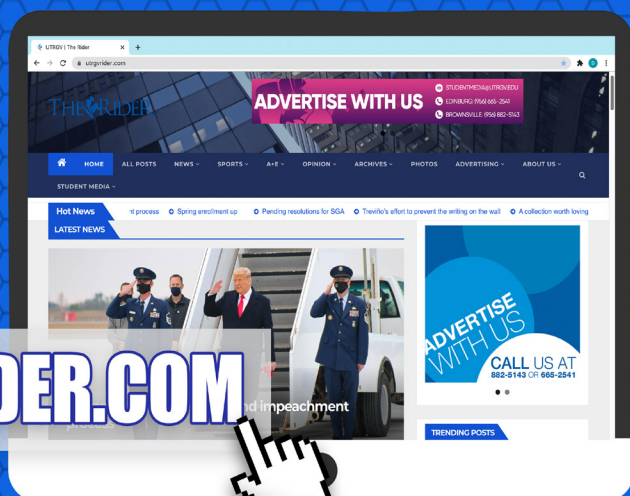
hindered my ability to look forward to days. Some days, it was very hard to even get out of bed and be a normal human being, but I got through it. For 2021, even as crazy as it has started, I want to commit myself to finding that motivation and passion for life again. I need to find the spark that made me excited for life. I am not ashamed to admit that this past year has been a struggle for me and admitting it is the first step for me to go forward, to not be held back.

With more and more vaccines being administered, it gives me hope for the future to go back to normal. A light at the end of the tunnel. Even if it might be a year away, hope is what carries and inspires life to flourish and to push through the struggles and pain. For anyone else who has gone through, or is going through something similar, I hope you, too, find it within yourself to commit to get better amid the craziness of life, and grow from it. There will be a time where you will be able to see loved ones, do the things you love and just experience life.

Life is a journey not a destination. Even with the whole world stopping due to the life-changing pandemic, time does not wait for anyone. So, I hope for myself, and other people, that we grow from this time and come out of it better, with a more appreciative view of life and its passions and pains.

VISIT US ONLINE AT

UTRGVRIDER.COM



Get involved virtually

Brigitte Ortiz

THE RIDER

The Leadership and Mentoring office is hosting virtual involvement fairs until Feb. 11. Students who want to be engaged in campus organizations can RSVP to the six remaining fairs on VLink.

In previous semesters, the Leadership and Mentoring office would schedule four involvement fairs on both the Edinburg and Brownsville campuses.

April Muñoz, student organization program coordinator for the Leadership and Mentoring office, said because they are working virtually, the involvement fairs will be combined.

"It's just a bit more flexible for everyone," Muñoz said. "Some involvement fairs are going to be specific to categories, and then others are intended to be for everyone at the same time."

She said their goal is to give all registered student organizations an opportunity to recruit. Students who are interested in getting involved can join.

"It can be in any sort of interest," Muñoz said. "You know, it can go anywhere from fraternity and sorority life, maybe a sports club. Maybe they're looking for an organization within their college to, kind of, tie them a little bit more to their area of study. We hope that those organizations that are out there [are] talking to students who are interested about what they do. ... But all in all, the in-

Involvement Fairs

GET INVOLVED!

- Jan. 27** College Organizations, Department Organizations, and Honor Societies
- Jan. 28 & Feb. 3** Registered Student Organizations
- Feb. 4** Cultural Groups, Faith/Spiritual and Service Organizations
- Feb. 10** Political Groups, Sports Clubs and any Special Interest Groups
- Feb. 11** Recognized Student Organizations

RSVP on VLink

Roxanna Miranda/THE RIDER GRAPHIC

volvement fairs are targeted for students to get involved and ... add more to their university experience."

The first involvement fair was last Wednesday from noon to 2 p.m., which included all registered student organizations. She said they decided on two-hour time frames so students could have plenty of time to speak with organizations.

Other dates for registered student organizations include from noon to 2 p.m. Feb. 3 and 11 and will be available for students to RSVP and join on the VLink platform.

"[Wednesday] we have an involve-

ment fair scheduled that focuses on all college organizations, department organizations and honor society and that would take place from 5 to 7 [p.m.]"

An involvement fair focused on culture, faith and spiritual and community service organizations will take place from 5 to 7 p.m. Feb. 4.

Political groups, sports clubs and any special-interest groups that are registered will meet from 5 to 7 p.m. Feb. 10.

"And the [categorical groups] are a little bit specific," Muñoz said. "We've done them in the evening. ... We're

hoping that this time frame, 5 to 7 [p.m.], would really help students who already know where they're going, ... taking into consideration that some students may have off-campus jobs, their full-time job and we're thinking ... that gives them the opportunity to chime in."

She said it is never too late for UTRGV students to get involved. If students are not ready, they can get in contact with the Leadership and Mentoring office and ask for help.

"[Students can] utilize our VLink platform, that's available to them on their myUTRGV account, to their advantage," Muñoz said. "On there, they can search organizations without having to do that face-to-face interaction if they don't feel like they're quite ready for that."

She said getting involved on campus is only going to add to students' college experience. It will help them build relationships, build leadership skills and get to meet new people.

Involvement fairs are not just for people who are ready to get involved.

"I see that a lot with our incoming freshmen," Muñoz said. "They're still trying to figure out, you know, their courses ... trying to get adjusted. So, we just want to encourage everyone to join. You can stop by, you can talk to an organization without any commitment, and that's really how students start learning a little bit more about what's on their campus and what their interests are."

SPORTS

UTRGV soccer teams return to competition

Karina Rodriguez

THE RIDER

The UTRGV Men's and Women's Soccer teams have their first competition of 2021 in the Texas A&M International Exhibition Wednesday at the UTRGV Soccer and Track & Field Complex in Edinburg.

Although the women's team plays at 4:30 p.m. and the men at 7 p.m., fans will not be allowed to spectate the exhibition.

UTRGV Men's Soccer Coach Bryheem Hancock said he believes the team is ready to begin competition again.

"I do think the team is prepared," Hancock said. "Right now, we've had a week of training, or week two now, [and] the guys have been working hard. [They're] fully focused on what we're working on tactically as a team, [and it is] just minor tweaks we are doing from the way they played in the past."

He said he has made changes in his coaching methods because of COVID-19.

"I think it's been more, you know, from a distance, smaller numbers, as opposed to being [in a] larger group, [and] more focused on individual player development programs," Hancock said.

UTRGV senior forward William Akio said he is excited to start this season.

"I'm very excited because I'm captain and, like, I was one of the younger guys when I first came in," Akio said. "And

now that I'm one of the older guys, [it is] kind of nice to, you know, try to share my knowledge and try to just give the best advice I can to the younger boys."

He urged his teammates to appreciate the time they spend as student athletes.

"Don't take any second that you're here for granted because it goes by very fast," Akio said. "I didn't really think it would go by this fast, but everything goes by super fast."

He is optimistic that the future could look different and encourages everyone to remain positive.

"I'd actually like to say that, you know, ... we made it past 2020," Akio said. "We proved that we can overcome any obstacle. We can get back to our playing ways [and] we can get back to, you know, seeing each other again. And, slowly but surely, it will come back to normal as long as you just keep following protocols [and] keep doing our thing and just try to be happy."

UTRGV junior forward Emily Zapata said that she is feeling excited to return to competition.

"We didn't have a full season, and we've been working hard, and I know we're all excited to start our first game," Zapata said.

She said that she looks forward to playing with her new teammates.

"There's so many new girls, and the way they play is so different," Zapata said. "[I] just [want to get] to know how they play in a different way. ... The team that we have, it's a great team. And I am



UTRGV senior forward William Akio trains Nov. 12, 2020, at the UTRGV Soccer and Track & Field Complex.

PHOTO COURTESY UTRGV ATHLETICS

looking forward to winning [the Western Athletic Conference] this year."

Hancock said he hopes his athletes have fun with the return of competition.

"The biggest thing for them is, just have fun," he said. "You know, I know

they're going to be excited and have a lot of nerves, a lot of energy, and, you know, it's not going to be perfect. We expect that, but [we] just [want] for them to get their legs under them again [and] just get a feel for playing again."

VACCINE

Continued from Page 1

With this new variant being highly transmissible, prevention is even more important.

"There are two things, basically, that we can do," Dobbs said. "One is get more vaccines in people's arms faster, and the second is continue aggressive social-distancing measures, including restrictions on bars and other gather-

ings, as well as wearing masks. So, it's still the same as what we've been doing. It's just trying not to loosen those restrictions. Now isn't the time."

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