

THE RIDER

THE STUDENT VOICE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

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FEATURE

A legacy for the Valley

University official honored as Woman of the Year

DAYRA GONZALEZ
THE RIDER

Veronica Gonzales, UTRGV senior vice president for Governmental and Community Relations, was recognized as the 2025 Woman of the Year by the Edinburg Chamber

of Commerce during its annual awards ceremony Nov. 1 at the Region One Education Service Center in Edinburg.

Gonzales said she felt honored and surprised to be selected, especially because of her long connection to the city

as a resident, former state representative and volunteer.

“Personally and professionally, it means a great deal to me ... from a community that I serve and that has served me and helped shape me over the years,” she said.

Ronnie Larralde, executive director of the Edinburg Chamber of Commerce, said the award highlights individuals who have made a strong impact

on Edinburg through service, leadership and community involvement.

The chamber selects its honorees through a committee made up of both board members and non-board representatives.

Larralde said Gonzales stood out for her service on the chamber board, including her role as board president during the COVID-19 pandemic,

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PHOTO COURTESY STACY SANCHEZ

The Edinburg Chamber of Commerce named Veronica Gonzales, UTRGV senior vice president for Governmental and Community Relations, the 2025 Woman of The Year.

STUDENTS

Survival guide for finals



DRAYA RIOS/THE RIDER

MARIAH ESCOBAR
THE RIDER

As finals season approaches, some students may be stressing and cramming to understand the material for their courses, according to a Learning Center lead tutor.

“We sometimes as tutors [do] not have many appointments or any people coming in ... but, finals week, it gets rough,” said Cristian Gonzalez, lead tutor in The Learning Center and accounting senior. “The Learning Center gets full.”

The Learning offers a variety of resources to students who want extra help preparing for their classes and exams, according to Hector Leal, program manager for peer-led team learning.

“Close to exam days, there’s usually an increase in [the] number of students, so it is really important for them to take advantage and book their appointments,” Leal said.

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DOWNTOWN

CITY SEEKS TO RENAISSANCE DOWNTOWN



El Toro Sporting Goods, Inc., photographed on Sept. 9, has a Spanish colonial design and is located at 1223 E. Elizabeth St. in Brownsville.

HUGO SEPÚLVEDA
THE RIDER

City of Brownsville officials discuss the Downtown Renaissance Master Plan, which seeks to revitalize and support the growth happening downtown by a community-led project.

The Downtown Renaissance Master Plan kicked off on Aug. 1, which by now is halfway through the planning phase which will end May 2026 for the city commission adoption, according to Brownsville City Downtown Manager Allan Garces.

Garces said the project is driven by downtown stakeholders, which include business owners, property owners, nonprofits and the community.

“This project is really about

getting their feedback, what they want to see,” he said. “If they have plans of their own, how we can help and incorporate that into our plans.”

According to the downtown manager, 870 people have filled out a survey for feedback.

“That just kind of shows how many people have been interested in the downtown area,” Garces said. “I think, considering it’s halfway through the process, I think that’s a lot of good feedback and we’re taking it all.”

He said, as far as the different feedback gathered from the community input, residents mentioned additional lighting, improvement on street furniture, trashcan replacements, a trolley



The Market Square, photographed on Sept. 9, is located at 625 E. 12th St. in Brownsville.

addition, shade for walking and parking issues.

Garces added the master plan has been supported by the city commission.

“We needed to have this plan, so that we’re able to have the roadmap for the future,” he said. “So, they are very aware of this project and how it’s needed. But they’re also aware that we need to listen to the community about the things that need to happen downtown.”

Garces said his expectation for when the plan is completed is to have a “thriving downtown.”

“We wanna make sure that downtown is inviting and it is friendly and that it’s easy for even those that are outside of here to come visit and invest,” he

said.

Ana Lucio, a UTRGV biomedical science sophomore, said she frequents downtown three or four times a month and added there is “not much” to complain about issues downtown.

“I’ve seen a lot has been resolved,” Lucio said. “My only complaint right now would be that there are still few roads closed.”

She said she thinks it is “great” to have a master plan that seeks to improve downtown.

“I think it’s good that they’re trying to preserve history and make sure that downtown isn’t forgotten just into the history of Brownsville, and it can still keep part of our history,” Lucio said.

LOCAL

‘A new era in Edinburg starts now’

MARIAH ESCOBAR
THE RIDER

On Wednesday, a swearing in ceremony for newly elected government officials was held in the Edinburg Arts, Culture, and Events Center, located at 315 W. McIntyre St.

The event highlighted the induction of Omar Ochoa, former city attorney, as mayor and the re-election of councilmember Daniel Diaz, bringing together the community of Edinburg as city officials and the public.

Ochoa garnered 62% of votes over his three opposing

candidates Richard Molina, Johnny Garcia and Jonathan Salinas.

In attendance was now-former mayor Ramiro Garza Jr. who did not seek reelection due to a cancer diagnosis and Ochoa’s father Joe Ochoa, who served as mayor of Edinburg from 1993 to 2003.

“Not in my wildest dreams did I think that 32 years later, after I was elected to be your mayor in 1993 that I would have the honor of calling my son mayor,” Joe Ochoa said.

As Omar Ochoa took the oath as the new mayor of Edinburg,

the crowd went silent, taking in the moment and, then, bursting into applause as Ochoa took the stage to begin his first official speech as mayor.

“Edinburg, you voted to move our city forward to launch our community into the future and to ensure that our best days are always ahead of us,” Omar Ochoa said. “I am proud, humbled, honored to stand here today and announce that a new era in Edinburg starts now.”

Ochoa said he is chomping at the bit to roll up his sleeves and dive into the details to tackle the issues of the community.



MARIAH ESCOBAR/THE RIDER

Edinburg Mayor Omar Ochoa points to someone in the audience after they squealed in support during his swearing in Wednesday in the Edinburg Arts, Culture, and Events Center, located at 315 W. McIntyre St.

Visit the full photo essay at www.utrgvrider.com

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THE RIDER

The Rider is the official, award-winning student newspaper of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The newspaper is widely distributed on and off campus in Brownsville and Edinburg, Texas. Views presented are those of the writers and do not reflect those of the newspaper or university.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today

MONDAY TABLING

Christians at RGV will host a tabling event from 9:45 to 11:45 a.m. on the University Library lawn on the Brownsville campus.

WRITING FOR YOUR SOUL

The **Baptist Student Ministry** will host a writing event from 11 a.m. to noon in the Health Affairs Building West gazebo on the Edinburg campus.

FINANCIAL LITERACY MEETING

The **Association of Latino Professionals For America** will meet from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. in Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship Room 120 on the Edinburg campus.

COFFEE AND REFRESHER

MEDLIFE Edinburg will host coffee and refreshers from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the front lawn of the Mathematics and General Classrooms Building on the Edinburg campus.

K.I.S.S MEETING

The **Korean International Student Society** will meet from 3:15 to 4:45 p.m. and at the same time through Thursday in the Student Academic Center on the Edinburg campus.

RGV GERMAN CLUB MEETING

The **RGV German Club** will meet from 3:30 to 4:45 p.m. in Interdisciplinary Academic Building Room 1.204 on the Brownsville campus. Attendees can discuss **important topics** about the club.

DELTA ZETA GENERAL MEETING

Delta Zeta will meet from 6 to

10 p.m. in the Bronc Room on the Edinburg campus.

Tuesday

TAIT TABLING BROWNSVILLE

Talk About It UTRGV will host a tabling event from 10 a.m. to noon on the University Library lawn on the Brownsville campus.

ACCESS FOR SEX-ED WEEKLY TABLING

Access for Sex-Education will host a tabling event from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 1 to 3 p.m. Thursday in the Student Union on the Edinburg campus.

ACTIVE MINDS: A.S.K. & REFER WORKSHOP

Active Minds at UTRGV will host a workshop from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Student Union Palmetto Room on the Edinburg campus. Attendees can learn how to become better mental health advocates.

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

University Recreation will host a student focus group from noon to 1 p.m. in the Student Union Salón Jacaranda on the Brownsville campus. **Free snacks and gifts** will be provided to participants.

EAC GENERAL MEETING

The **Environmental Awareness Club** will meet from 4:45 to 6 p.m. in the Student Union Salón Jacaranda on the Brownsville campus. **Free food** will be provided.

RUN CLUB MEETING PRACTICE

Club Running-Vaquero Runners will meet from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. and at the same time Thursday outside the Life and Health Science Building on the

Brownsville campus. Attendees can enjoy a **20-minute run**.

Wednesday

ENACTUS

Enactus will meet from 12:30 to 1:45 p.m. in Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship Room 121 on the Edinburg campus. Attendees can enjoy **free food**. **BETA ALPHA PSI GENERAL MEETING** **Beta Alpha Psi-Xi Phi Chapter** will meet from 12:30 to 1:45 p.m. in Health Affairs Building West Room 1.406 on the Edinburg campus.

ASME IAM3D GENERAL MEETING

The **American Society of Mechanical Engineers** will meet from 5 to 6 p.m. in Engineering Building Room 1.268 on the Edinburg campus.

BAA MEETING

The **Brownsville Accounting Association** will meet from 5 to 6 p.m. in Music, Science and Learning Center Room 1.111 on the Brownsville campus.

BIBLE STUDY

Christians at RGV will host a Bible study from noon to 1:45 p.m. in Music, Science and Learning Center Room 1.217 on the Brownsville campus. **Free food** will be provided.

Thursday

HOLY MASS

The **Catholic Student Association** will host a Holy Mass from 12:30 to 2 p.m. in the Chapel on the Edinburg campus.

DSAA WEEKLY MEETING

Data Structures and Algorithms Architects will meet from 5 to 6 p.m. in

Interdisciplinary Engineering and Academic Building Room 1.206 on the Edinburg campus.

CARDS FOR HOSPITALIZED KIDS

Sigma Lambda Gamma National Sorority, Inc. will host cards for hospitalized kids from 5:30 to 8 p.m. in the Bronc Room on the Edinburg campus. **Free food** will be provided.

YDSA GENERAL MEETING

The **Rio Grande Valley Youth Democratic Socialists of America** will meet from 6 to 8 p.m. in Liberal Arts Building South Room 254 on the Edinburg campus.

ACJA GENERAL MEETING

The **American Criminal Justice Association (Iota Kappa Chi)** will meet from 3 to 5 p.m. in Music, Science and Learning Center Room 1.105 on the Brownsville campus.

SOCIAL STUDY NIGHTS

The **Filipino Student Association** will host a **Study Night** from 7:45 to 8:45 p.m. in Science Building Room 2.102 on the Edinburg campus.

Friday

KNOTTED TOGETHER GENERAL MEETING

Knotted Together will meet from 5 to 6 p.m. in Interdisciplinary Engineering and Academic Building Room 1.208 on the Edinburg campus.

MOCK TRIAL PRACTICE

The **Mock Trial Competition Team** will meet from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. in Student Academic Center Room 1.102 on the Edinburg campus.

--Compiled by Mariah Escobar



POLICE REPORTS

The following are among the incidents reported to University Police between Nov. 3 and 9.

Nov. 3

8:58 a.m.: An employee reported her personal laptop was taken from a faculty desk in a classroom on the Edinburg campus. The case is under investigation.

6:35 p.m.: An officer and Environmental Health, Safety & Risk Management staff responded to an active fire alarm in the Health & Physical Education I Building on the Edinburg campus. An employee said popcorn had burned in the concession stand. There was no fire, and the panel was reset.

Nov. 4

11:47 a.m.: An officer responded to a report of property damage to a vehicle in Lot E-25 on the Edinburg campus. After investigation, it was determined a duty upon striking an unattended vehicle had occurred.

10:04 p.m.: Officers responded to an active fire alarm in Troxel Hall on the Edinburg campus. The panel showed an active smoke detector on the second floor. No smoke or fire was found, and Environmental Health, Safety & Risk Management personnel reset the panel.

Nov. 5

9:18 a.m.: A student reported being followed by a female driver in Brownsville. The woman said she was following because the student was speeding, and she wanted to report it. No crime occurred, and both left the area.

5:42 p.m.: A student was observed on CCTV camera footage pulling the fire alarm on the fourth floor of the Science Building on the Edinburg campus. The case is under investigation.

Nov. 6

10:01 a.m.: A student reported his vehicle was struck while

parked in Lot E-16 on the Edinburg campus. The driver left the scene and parked in Lot E-26. The officer attempted contact with the suspect and left a business card on the vehicle. The case is under investigation.

12:57 p.m.: A student reported the theft of his scooter from the University Recreation center on the Edinburg campus. The case is under investigation.

Nov. 7

7:28 p.m.: A student reported a theft of some painting supplies in Rusteberg Hall on the Brownsville campus. The case is under investigation.

7:30 p.m.: Officers responded to a student trapped in elevator #2 in the Medical Education Building on the Edinburg campus. The elevator was manually opened, and the student declined emergency medical services. It was taken out of service, and a work order was submitted.

8:48 p.m.: A student reported

his wallet and keys were stolen from his gym bag in the University Recreation center on the Edinburg campus. The case is under investigation.

Nov. 8

9:21 p.m.: An officer responded to an injured person at the Robert and Janet Vackar Stadium in Edinburg. The non-affiliated man said he tripped and fell on a trailer ramp near the bridge area. He sustained minor injuries but refused medical services.

Nov. 9

12:33 a.m.: An emergency alert was issued after Edinburg Police informed university officers of an aggravated assault that occurred near the Edinburg campus. The suspect was last seen in the vicinity. After searching the area, it was deemed clear, and an all-clear message was sent. Neither the victim nor the suspect was affiliated with the university.

--Compiled by Dayra Gonzalez

wacky web poll

Now that Midterms are over, how are You feeling?

50%
I'm fine

30.6%
Confident

20.4%
Not good

Thanksgiving season is upon us. What're You thankful for?

scan to answer!

A safety guide for the season

SOPHIA CORTEZ
THE RIDER

As common safety issues tend to increase during the holiday season, according to a UTRGV Police Department officer, students listened to tips on staying safe during the Holiday Safety Mini Fair.

The event, hosted by the Office for Advocacy and Violence Prevention, UT Health RGV Student Health, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the UTRGV Police Department, took place Wednesday in the Music, Science and Learning Center on the Brownsville campus and Nov. 5 on the north patio of the Student Union on the Edinburg campus.

Marco Huerta, officer and part of the Community Engagement Division for UTRGV PD, said safety should be among the top priorities when traveling, adding that its participation in the fair intends to prepare students.

"Monitor your alcohol intake and just be safe, and that's basically what we try to push at our events," Huerta said.

He also provided other recommendations for traveling, such as preparing your car for the winter climates with an emergency kit, if driving a long distance. A good night's sleep is also encouraged.

"The most important one is make sure everyone is buckled up, whoever's traveling in

that car, even if it's short or long distance," Huerta said. "... Another important one is put that cell phone away when driving. Don't be distracted."

Maura Torres, program specialist for MADD, explained to The Rider what her organization entails and its purpose.

"It's a nonprofit organization that got started by a mother who lost her daughter," Torres said. "... She decided to take action and make something of it. ... The purpose is to bring prevention, bring awareness and to make a movement."

When asked by The Rider why it is important to bring awareness during this time of the year, the program specialist

replied that, as of today, there are several options on getting home such as a taxi, Uber or a designated driver without putting any individual at risk.

Torres added the community can provide support to the organization.

"They can support us by having us over to community events," she said. "We can do presentations and give our information. ... We want

everybody to take a stand and say, 'OK, if I'm going to drink or make a plan, we have this plan in action, and this is what we can do.'"

According to the program specialist, the organization provides support through a specialist that helps advocate for the victims and provides guidance to individuals on the proper steps to follow.

Guest speaker COMMunicates to students

EMMA CASTILLO
THE RIDER

UTRGV students gathered Tuesday for COMMversation, an event to introduce interested students to explore career paths and opportunities within the department. The event was held in Health Affairs Building East Room 1.114 on the Edinburg campus.

Guest speaker Ray Villarreal, in-arena host for the University of Texas Longhorns, San Antonio Spurs and Monster Jam, spoke about his journey in the communications field and offered advice to students preparing to enter the media industry.

Villarreal emphasized the importance of adaptability and making the most out of opportunities presented.

"I always say success comes from failure and a whole bunch of no's," he said. "My career has always been kind of built around failure. I would say I'm not a very eloquent speaker, but what I do have is a way to create genuine moments instead."

Villarreal said his own career experiences detail

how his interest in the field of communication allowed him to move across different professional roles, from news and broadcasting to a future of teaching and mentoring others.

He described how social anxiety on the job held him back and how he overcame those barriers.

"I realized that [improv in front of a crowd] was my worst fear, and I had lived through it," Villarreal said. "I wasn't scared to be in front of the crowd ... and that I could actually do this."

After trial and error throughout many aspects in the communication field, Villarreal confidently found his place in broadcasting and performing voice-overs, recently having his voice featured in a Bass Pro Shops commercial.

Students said the event gave them a chance to hear firsthand how skills and effort translate into professional success. Mia Salinas, a mass communication major, said she enjoyed listening to Villarreal's insights and appreciated the encouragement to keep pursuing her goals.

"As communication majors, we often face fears of rejection, but also fears of maybe not

reaching our ultimate goals," Salinas said. "I think his story was a very great example of working toward it, no matter the fate of your spirit."

Dario Nava, a mass communication senior, said the event made him feel more confident about his choice of major.

"I think having guest speakers, especially those who reinforce our major, helps with [developing] our skills," Nava said. "They help navigate a new perspective into what we want in our career and possibly other opportunities."

The event also highlighted the department's efforts to create a stronger sense of community among students. Villarreal's talk was followed by informal discussions that allowed students to ask questions and receive more personal advice.

"It's OK not to know what you want to do and just know that that's very real, because society kind of says you have to have it all figured out," he said. "Just realize most people don't know, and the important thing is to put yourself in positions to build opportunities."



JOSE RODRIGUEZ/THE RIDER PHOTOS

Ray Villarreal, an in-arena host at the University of Texas Longhorns, Monster Jam and the San Antonio Spurs, addresses a full audience Tuesday in the Health Affairs Building East on the Edinburg campus.



Ray Villarreal (right), an in-arena host at Texas Longhorns, Monster Jam and the San Antonio Spurs, speaks to The Rider reporter Emma Castillo Tuesday in the Health Affairs Building East on the Edinburg campus.

LEGACY

Continued from Page 1

when she helped lead the organization through a fully virtual banquet.

He added she has consistently supported local nonprofits, moderated public affairs events and strengthened relationships between UTRGV and local, state and national officials.

"She's always gone above and beyond to help the needs of others," Larralde said.

Within UTRGV, colleagues describe her as a prepared, dependable and respected leader.

Richard Sanchez, associate

vice president for Governmental Relations, said he has known Gonzales since her time as a state representative for District 41 from 2005 to 2012.

"She is a great leader," Sanchez said. "She's competent, hard working."

He added community service and selfless service are "two of the big reasons" why Gonzales deserved the recognition.

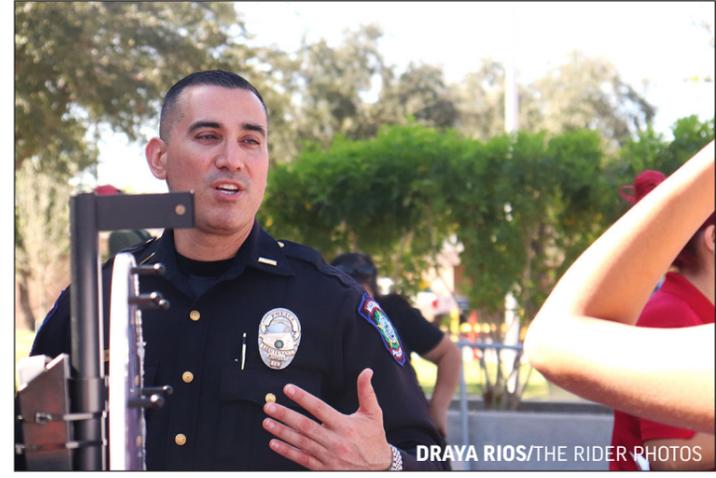
Gonzales credits her team, mentors and upbringing for shaping her leadership. She said her priorities include expanding academic programs, supporting growing industries in the Rio Grande Valley and

making higher education more accessible.

The senior vice president also encourages young people to stay informed and involved within their communities by volunteering and voting.

"I always encourage for young people to get informed and then to go out and vote because young people can make the difference," Gonzales added.

The recognition was given at the Annual Installation & Awards Banquet along with the Man of the Year award, which was granted to now-former Edinburg Mayor Ramiro Garza Jr.



DRAYA RIOS/THE RIDER PHOTOS

Mission Police Department Lt. Marco Ramirez explains student safety tips during the Holiday Safety Mini Fair Nov. 5 on the north patio of the Student Union on the Edinburg campus.



Ingrid Castro, a political science senior, tries out the vision impairment goggles while driving a go-kart during the Holiday Safety Mini Fair Nov. 5 on the north patio of the Student Union on the Edinburg campus.



KARLA HERNANDEZ/THE RIDER

Maura Torres (left), program specialist of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, gives information about the organization to theatre senior Lorraine Pedraza during the Holiday Safety Mini Fair Wednesday in the Music, Science and Learning Center on the Brownsville campus.

LEARNING

Continued from Page 1

Gonzalez added, when he was a tutor in financial accounting, he was tutoring six students at once and added tutors prepare for their sessions by going over the student's needs.

"They're not 100% sure on," he said. "They go ahead and take a refresher on it. ... Once you tutor it over and over ... it just never leaves your mind."

Students prepare for finals differently as some may prefer to study alone or in a group, said Anthony Moreno, an electrical engineering junior.

"For me, personally, I do like studying ... by myself," Moreno said. "It does help me focus and stay on track."

Sergio Cordero, a computer engineering sophomore, said he gains a better understanding studying in groups because his peers may know answers he does not and vice versa as well

as using artificial intelligence.

"I don't use ChatGPT; I use Gemini 'cause it tends to be a bit more accurate answer, and it tends to explain more," Cordero added. "... You try to, like, simplify stuff, and it'll simplify it [to your] understanding."

Isaiah Torres, a mechanical engineering sophomore, said there are other resources students may use to help them study for exams, such as creating practice problems and solving them.

It is important to take breaks, such as going out for walks, so that students do not overwhelm themselves, Torres added.

Cordero said it is a problem trying focusing with a phone and recommends students to leave it for an hour or two to be able to do schoolwork.

"Don't get that distracted or too overconfident in things 'cause it does come back to you eventually," he said.

COLUMN OF THE WEEK

'The Scoop on Heaven'



ETHAN MALDONADO
REPORTER

Death has been circling really close lately. Recently, I had a funeral of a loved one happen. I had one before the semester started and, realistically, there's another one soon. All of it has put death in the back of my mind more than usual.

I personally take dying lightly. I almost shuffled off this mortal coil back when I was 15. It wasn't fun. It wasn't even memorable. There was no fade to black, no big dramatic moment. I only remember coming back, feeling like everything in my body needed a jump start.

Ever since then, death hasn't felt like a distant idea. I can't say I'm terrified of the concept. It's just something I recognize now: like somebody you used to know, passing by in a crowd—not close enough

to touch, but close enough to notice.

And lately, I've been noticing it more, not in a way that scares me but in a way that makes me think. A crash on the highway, a name in a headline, a sudden phone call in the middle of the week—

"They make me look at my own life and the people around me a little differently."

none of these moments are dramatic on their own, but they're reminders. They make me look at my own life and the people around me a little differently,

especially with everything happening to my stepdad's dad right now.

He told us about a dream he had in the hospital: a long line in heaven, someone checking people in. When it was his turn, there was no test, no questions—just a gesture forward to keep it moving. He woke up sad he didn't get to see his mom yet. Even in that imagined place, he still missed someone. That stuck with me.

I can't say what heaven looks like. My step-grandpa saw something when he was close, but I saw nothing when I was. He's older, someone who's lived enough life to be ready for whatever comes next. I'm young, and somehow have already been touched by death before. I know now it's not something to be scared of; that's the scoop on heaven.

SUDOKU

6			7		5	9		
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VAQUERO VOICE

How do you feel about tariffs and the possibility of President Trump giving citizens a \$2,000 check from tariff revenue?

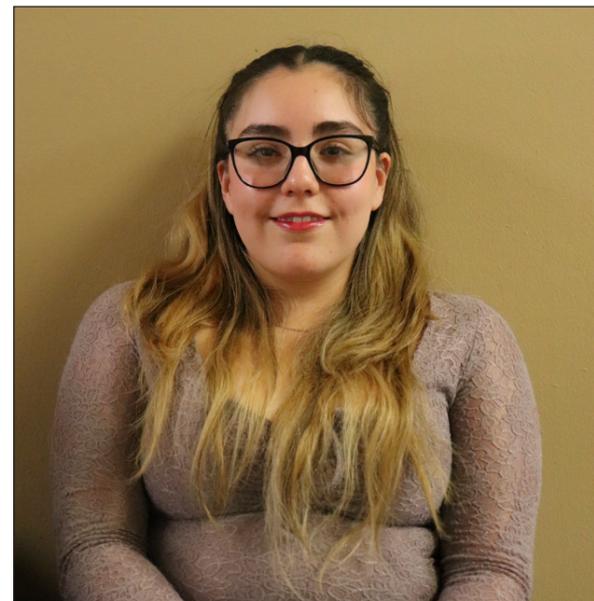
--Compiled and photos by Venisha Colón, Karla Hernandez and Jose Rodriguez



Sophia Scheffler
civil engineering freshman

"I feel that tariffs are just a way for American companies to make more money because they don't want us benefiting from the convenience of foreign companies' money, if that makes sense. I don't know what kind of effects it would have afterwards, but I think that'd be good, especially with what's going on right now with people's financial status."

EDITORIAL CARTOON



Emily Guerra
psychology sophomore

"Well, I don't really think I have, like, a very large opinion, but I know that it is affecting the economy. ... I wouldn't believe [the stimulus] until it actually happened because I think that there's been a lot of false promises."

Estudiantes traen primer lugar al Valle

SOFÍA CANTÚ SAUCEDA
THE RIDER

El capítulo de CEO de UTRGV fue nombrado Capítulo Global del Año por primera vez en la historia de la universidad en la 42da Conferencia Global y Competencia de Presentación de Proyectos de la Collegiate Entrepreneurs' Organization.

La conferencia tuvo lugar del 30 de octubre al 1 de noviembre en Tampa, Florida.

La organización es una organización benéfica sin fines de lucro fundada en 1983 y apoya el crecimiento y desarrollo de una red global de más de 250 capítulos universitarios con estudiantes que buscan ser emprendedores, según su sitio web.

Skyler Howell, un estudiante de último año de emprendimiento e innovación y presidente de CEO-UTRGV, dijo que anteriormente había dos capítulos en la universidad antes de unirlos en el 2020.

“De ese modo, podemos compartir nuestros recursos no solo en términos de fondos sino en términos de nuestro asombroso talento que tenemos en los dos campus”, Howell dijo.

En el 2024, el capítulo ganó el premio de excelencia en redes sociales. El presidente del capítulo dijo que, este año, quería mostrar el impacto que ha tenido en la universidad y en la comunidad.

Andrea Gaytan, una estudiante de último año de administración y vicepresidenta de relaciones internacionales de CEO-UTRGV, dijo que el capítulo brinda a los estudiantes experiencias prácticas con emprendedores.

“Traemos a invitados especiales”, Gaytan dijo. “[...] Tenemos nuestras juntas generales cada semana. Pueden practicar sus habilidades financieras,

talleres de LinkedIn y poder establecer contactos con otros estudiantes que también quieren volver realidad sus propias ideas”.

Dijo que el capítulo no solo lleva a oficiales sino también a miembros a la conferencia, dándoles oportunidad a los estudiantes de conectar con

y compartir por qué debería de ser premiado el Capítulo del Año.

“Nuestra aplicación fue lo suficientemente fuerte para ser considerados el capítulo más destacado”, Howell dijo.

Agregó que CEO-UTRGV es la primera organización estudiantil en UTRGV que

en Harlingen”.

CEO-UTRGV le da a sus miembros la oportunidad de ver cómo se manejan los negocios en el Valle del Río Grande y también ser voluntarios con la comunidad, de acuerdo al presidente del capítulo.

Gaytan dijo que enterarse de que el capítulo había ganado fue sorprendente pero no impactante.

“Tengo mucha confianza en nuestro capítulo y en todo lo que hemos hecho por la universidad y la comunidad en general”, dijo. “Siendo este nuestro último año como estudiantes de UTRGV, creo que esta fue la manera perfecta de cerrar el semestre”.

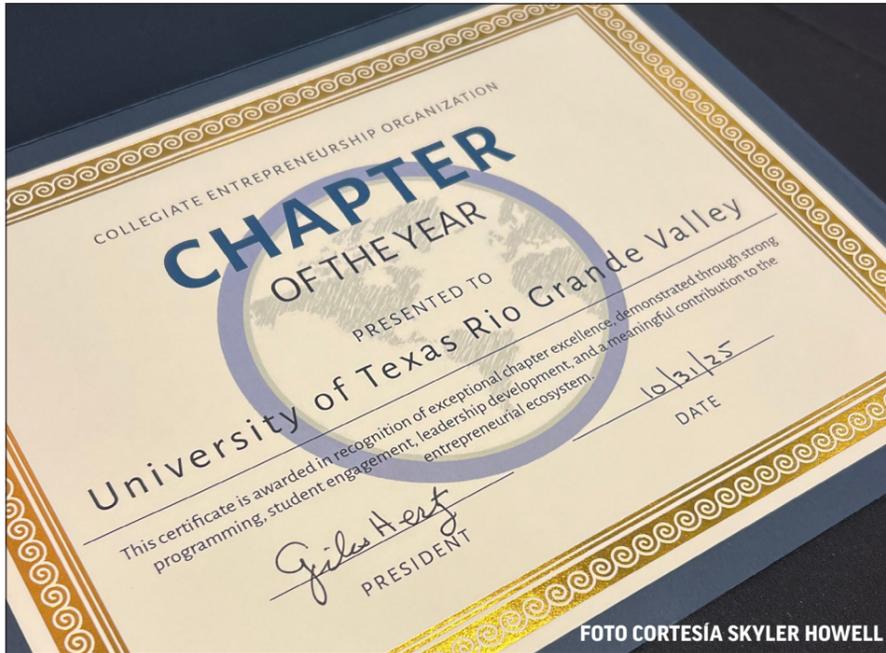
Howell dijo que se sorprendió cuando escuchó sus nombres siendo nombrados pero confiaba en el trabajo que habían hecho.

“No lo hago por los premios [...] pero es bueno saber que el trabajo duro que hacemos durante el año fue reconocido y que podamos traer esto a nuestra universidad en nuestro décimo aniversario”, dijo.

Gaytan comentó que la organización la ha ayudado a desarrollar habilidades prácticas para el mundo laboral.

“Y eso es algo que creo que, especialmente en esta generación, los estudiantes buscan”, dijo. “[...] Tenemos todo lo que se imparte en las aulas pero, después de clase, pueden asistir a las juntas generales y aprender en nuestras reuniones”.

Howell indicó que los planes futuros del capítulo incluyen mantener la colaboración con la Cámara de Comercio Hispana del Valle del Río Grande, realizar más visitas a negocios fuera de la región y continuar con sus reuniones semanales



El capítulo Collegiate Entrepreneurs' Organization de UTRGV recibió el premio al Capítulo del Año del 2025 durante la conferencia global del 30 de octubre al 1 de noviembre en Tampa, Florida.

profesionales.

Howell agregó que la conferencia sucede anualmente y los capítulos de todo el país se reúnen.

“Si tienes una idea de negocios, puedes presentarla y, con suerte, ganar algo de dinero para tu proyecto, pero también dan premios a los capítulos”, dijo.

Durante el proceso de nominación, cualquier capítulo de CEO puede aplicar

se unió a la Cámara de Comercio Hispana del Valle del Río Grande.

“Esto te brinda todos los beneficios que obtienes al unirse a una cámara de comercio, tales como establecer contactos, eventos exclusivos, promoción para tu negocio y muchas otras cosas”, Howell dijo. “Hemos tenido tours con SpaceX, con L&F Distributors. [...] Nuestro más reciente fue con Sam's Club

VALLEY SPOTLIGHT

Alexa Peralta: Local y naturalmente hecho

SOFÍA CANTÚ SAUCEDA
THE RIDER

Todo comenzó por su mejor amiga, Jade, una mezcla de pitbull que adoptó Alexa Peralta, dueña y fundadora de Jade Candle Co., en San Antonio antes de volver al Valle del Río Grande después de salirse de la universidad.

El negocio de velas le proporciona a la comunidad productos ecológicos para el hogar, baño y otros artículos personales.

Peralta dijo que su interés en comenzar este negocio fue gracias a su perro pero que, cuando era pequeña, siempre pensó en tener algo propio.

“Ella tenía muchos problemas en su piel”, dijo. “[...] Cuando empezó a vivir conmigo, empecé a hacer una búsqueda profunda de lo que podía hacer para ayudarla”.

Peralta dijo que le cambió su comida, lo que usaba para bañarla y las lociones. Aún así, Jade seguía teniendo brotes en su piel.

“Ahí fue cuando su veterinario señaló diferentes cosas que le podrían estar provocando los brotes, y ahí fue cuando descubrí las velas”, dijo.

Peralta explicó que las velas pueden tener toxinas y no hay regulaciones estrictas en hacer velas o productos con fragancias. Por eso, el enfoque principal de Jade Candle Co. es tener ingredientes de origen ético, sustentables y no-tóxicos.



Se muestra la tienda Jade Candle Co., ubicada en 1818 W. Tyler Ave. Suite C en Harlingen.

“Empecé yendo a mercados [y] decidí que quería hacer esto completamente y dejé mi trabajo corporativo”, dijo. “[...] Me di cuenta que mucha gente entiende la necesidad y también tiene problemas con sus animales”.

En 2024, abrió su primera ubicación permanente.

Peralta dijo que, a principios de este año, se mudó a una ubicación más grande en 1818 W. Tyler Ave. Suite C

en Harlingen, donde podía expandirse para que el cliente pudiera rellenar sus contenedores con producto.

“Al principio solo tenía velas y ceras pero, ahora, tengo shampoo, acondicionador, detergente y jabón para platos”, dijo. “[...] Cualquier cosa que se te ocurra para tu hogar”.

Su mayor reto, según ella, fue que no hay mucha ayuda de la ciudad o cerca de su ubicación que ayude a atraer más clientes.

“Es realmente solo de boca en boca”, Peralta dijo. “Son los clientes leales y las redes sociales que atraen clientes que entienden el propósito”.

Lo mejor de abrir Jade Candle Co. es saber que las personas usan sus productos, añadió.

“Cuando alguien me dice que estas son las primeras velas que pueden usar alrededor de sus bebés, mascotas o ‘conmigo mismo y no me enfermo’, me hace muy feliz saber que las personas lo entienden y le están contando a sus familias sobre esto”, Peralta dijo.

Peralta dijo que creció por debajo de la clase media y pensó que tener su propio negocio no era algo que pareciera posible.

“Pensé que necesitaba ir a la universidad, tener un trabajo en una compañía, ahorrar mucho dinero y sacar un préstamo”, dijo. “[...] Literalmente hice lo opuesto”.

Peralta compartió que es mejor

arriesgarse, encontrar soluciones, adaptarse y seguir adelante. Ella empezó con \$4,000 cuando decidió abrir su tienda.

“Pero al final, creo que si lo llevas en el corazón, pase lo que pase, si tienes ese espíritu emprendedor, lo lograrás”, dijo. “Así que no te cuestiones las cosas pequeñas. Simplemente lánzate”.



Alexa Peralta, dueña de Jade Candle Co., junto a su mascota Jade.

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Photography in an ever-changing world

EDUARDO ESCAMILLA
A&E EDITOR

In the age of pervasive digital culture, where artificial intelligence increasingly blurs the line between genuine and generated imagery, a recent roundtable discussion brought three photographers together to explore how a photograph can still reveal the human condition.

The Center for Latin American Arts hosted Photography As Catalyst Wednesday in the University Library on the Edinburg campus.

The conversation featured Mexican American visual storyteller and award-winning, internationally published photographer Penny De Los Santos.

In addition, associate professor DM Witman and assistant professor Romeo Di Loreto, for the School of Art and Design, each offered a distinct perspective on reclaiming authenticity in their practices.

The main takeaway was clear, the future of photography lies in the intentionality of the artist and the undeniable power of the physical object.

For De Los Santos, a Brooklyn-based photographer with an established commercial practice, authenticity is rooted in a decade spent working with National Geographic and documenting culture.

De Los Santos shared her life's work has been an obsession with the "American hyphenated" experience, and she spoke of the rigorous process required to honor a subject's story by gaining access, earning trust and securing consent.

The dedication to narrative truth, she argued, is more essential than ever.

"I do think original photography is still going to be very important," De Los Santos said, noting the growing "hunger for authenticity" in a world where AI-generated images are already prevalent in commercial campaigns.

Her goal, she explained, is to find the "sweet spot" where a personal passion, like documenting nuanced moments shared within Mexican American communities, can intersect with a sustainable commercial career.

While De Los Santos said she finds her truth in narrative and place, Di Loreto, a native of Italy now based in Brownsville, searches for it through "silence."

His projects, including "On Silence, (Silenzio)," center on the idea of the border not merely as a physical line, but

as an emotional, pedagogical and social threshold.

Di Loreto said he draws inspiration from Roland Barthes' concept of the punctum—the personal, emotional wound that pierces the viewer—and uses visual subtraction in the landscape to achieve what he calls a sense of "fullness."

He said his photographs seek not to erase the border, but to "reveal it, to show what it holds, where it hurts, and where it might finally open."

In this space of silence, Di Loreto said he finds the anima, or soul, of his work sometimes printing images extremely small to force a close, emotional connection with the viewer.

During the discussion Witman said she merges the meticulous practice of a scientist with the expressive language of an artist, frequently addressing environmental crises and the concept of ecologies and transitions and creating unique objects that serve as both "memories and data."

Witman emphasized the importance of the handmade object as a bulwark against the digital tide.

For her project "Melt," which documents historic Winter Olympics sites at risk of disappearance due to climate change, she used the 19th-century process of salted paper photography as a method of communicating the ephemerality and fragility of our environment.

Recent work has utilized salt crystals as a metaphor for both mourning and healing, according to the artist.

Her pieces, which are often large and object-like, are unique records that she has used to encourage community engagement, such as through interactive walls where museum visitors share their feelings about the challenging topics addressed, according to Witman.

The three artists, diverse in their approaches—from documentary to minimal to interdisciplinary science—are united by a singular focus: The artist's perspective, rooted in authentic engagement and physical creation, is the last and most critical differentiator in an image-saturated world.

They advocate for a path in art that favors "the marathon over the sprint," as Witman described, where the personal background and deep interests of the artist are what ultimately propels the work forward.



JOSE RODRIGUEZ/THE RIDER PHOTOS

Photographer and director Penny De Los Santos presents her work involving commercial and cultural visuals she has taken over the years Wednesday in the University Library on the Edinburg campus.



Photographer and director Penny De Los Santos presents one of her photos, taken in Mexico, and speaks about consent and patience with her photography subjects as it is a key part of her process in getting the right photo Wednesday in the University Library on the Edinburg campus.



Romeo Di Loreto (center), UTRGV assistant professor of photography, speaks on his photo series "On Silence (Silenzio)" Wednesday in the University Library on the Edinburg campus.

From stewardship to storytelling

EDUARDO ESCAMILLA
A&E EDITOR

From the intimate setting of a regional nonprofit to the high-stakes world of a commercial New York gallery, curator and artist Frances Jakubek has approached the exhibition process not just as a logistical task, but as an act of empathetic stewardship.

Jakubek has spent her career immersed in the delicate but demanding mechanics of bringing art into public view and, in the presentation Crafting your Exhibition Proposal Tuesday in the Visual Arts Building on the Edinburg campus, she offered a distillation of her experience to students.

The presentation included advice on how a project is framed, its presentation, language and organization, profoundly shapes how an audience will ultimately perceive it.

She anchored her philosophy in a line from John Berger's "Ways of Seeing": "The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe."

"How we frame and communicate a project shapes how others will see it," Jakubek said.

She added the physical presentation of art work is far from a mere logistical decision, it is a conceptual choice.

The artist used the installations of Wolfgang Tillmans as an example, whose rejection of traditional framing, using pins and tape for prints of varying sizes, transforms the gallery into an extension



EDUARDO ESCAMILLA/THE RIDER

Frances Jakubek, artist and curator, shares advice to students over Zoom on crafting exhibition proposals Tuesday as part of The School of Art and Design Business of Art Speaker series in the Visual Arts Building on the Edinburg campus.

of the studio.

"His installations remind us that presentation is not just logistical, it's very conceptual," Jakubek said.

The work's scale, density and rhythm become integral to the message, according to the speaker.

She presented several approaches to visual storytelling, including the linear, sequential rhythm of uniform framing, like the work of Rudy Burckhardt; the overwhelming, relational power of large grids, as seen in the work of Rosalind Fox

Solomon; and the site-specific flexibility of durable vinyl banners in children's museums, which allowed Nancy Richards Farese's work to be accessible to young viewers.

Drawing from artists such as Sophie Calle and Laia Abril, Jakubek stressed the importance of integrating text and image.

The written narrative, she said, can function as an "extension of the gaze" or create a moment for quiet reflection, transforming a purely visual encounter

into sustained engagement.

The practical core of Jakubek's presentation focused on how to translate creative intention into a concrete, professional proposal.

She advises artists to think of their proposal as a comprehensive "package" that anticipates every institutional need.

Jakubek said the statement of intent is an accessible summary of the exhibition's concept, materials and overall goal: the what and how of the physical show.

The artist's statement, conversely, allows for more personal voice and emotional context, explaining the why of the practice.

She encouraged the need for rigorous tracking, a "checklist of works," including size, year, materials and insurance value, often organized in a sortable format such as Google Sheets.

The transparency, Jakubek added, makes it easier for institutions to commit.

She said when submitting to a venue, artists should research the space using online resources and create detailed mock-ups.

This step ensures the proposal conveys the visual intention and physical reality of the show within the gallery's unique architecture.

Jakubek offered advice to aspiring curators, "Start doing it."

Taking initiative to organize an independent show, building a reputation through action and a clear voice is the essential first step to establishing oneself in the field.

UTRGV braces for NCAA betting rule changes

ALI HALLOUM
THE RIDER

Athletics staff and student athletes, including those at UTRGV, will now be able to place bets on professional sports for the first time effective Saturday.

Prior to this, they were not allowed to place any kind of bets, including friendly wagers and fantasy leagues with buy-ins. The change arrives at a time where sports betting is now more accessible than ever.

Bets on collegiate athletics such as regular-season games, conference championships and major tournaments, including the College Football Playoff and March Madness, are still against NCAA rules.

Gregory Selber, longtime sportswriter and UTRGV communication professor, said although point shaving and betting scandals are nothing new in athletics, the expansion of betting to the NCAA can be a slippery slope to further issues that could “kill the cash cow.”

“If too many cases like this pop up, people will start doubting whether it’s like pro wrestling, faked and rigged,” Selber said. “You have to find out what the rule is, and then balance autonomy against the health of the program and of sports itself.”

Molly Castner, UTRGV deputy athletic director and senior woman administrator, said the department has been preparing for this change for a while, and they are “still digesting what it means.”

“We want to be educated so that we can educate our student athletes,” Castner said. “We’ve known this was coming down possibly for a while, so we’re exploring how we can educate our students.”

She said the Southland Conference, of which UTRGV is a member, communicates with the NCAA regarding rule changes, passing information to athletic directors and senior women administrators.

As of press time Friday, multiple requests for comment submitted by The Rider have not been answered by the SLC.

Prior to the change, UTRGV stressed abstinence from gambling, as any violation of the rules could result in a loss of NCAA eligibility.

The department also sends out reminders around major events, such as the Super Bowl, the World Series and March Madness, and connects with student athletes to provide help and mental-health resources.

Additionally, student athletes take courses on life skills and the NCAA has partnered with EPIC Global Solutions to educate them on gambling harm. It also uses Sportradar to monitor competitive integrity.

Sports betting rules are considered “common” legislation, meaning they must be unilateral across all three divisions of NCAA competition. In other words, the DI, DII and DIII councils must all vote to adopt the rule.

In a statement sent to The Rider, the



MARIAJOSE GARZA/THE RIDER GRAPHIC

NCAA said the delay in the adoption of the rule was for “strictly procedural reasons,” adding this was to ensure that the rule change was not rescinded after.

Though gambling and sports betting remain illegal in Texas, UTRGV’s athletic programs consist of athletes from across the country and abroad who travel out of state.

All this comes amid increased scrutiny in the integrity of sports following several betting and money laundering arrests, including Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier and Portland Trail Blazers head coach Chauncey Billups, as well as a betting scandal involving three former Eastern Michigan University basketball players during the 2024-25 season.

In light of this, the House Energy and Commerce Committee in Washington sent a letter to the NCAA, demanding a briefing from the organization by Thursday ahead of the implementation of the rule.

As of press time Friday, the committee

has yet to disclose publicly whether such a briefing occurred.

“Given recent events, the NCAA’s statements and the reality that many student athletes become professional athletes, it is concerning that the NCAA is changing its policy on sports betting,” the letter states.

The NCAA sent in a statement to The Rider it has “the most aggressive approach of any U.S. league in taking sports betting head on,” emphasizing the threat of states allowing what they call “risky prop bets” and emerging prediction trading markets such as Polymarket and Kalshi.

“For the last two years, the NCAA has been urging regulators to push for adoption of stronger protections for college athletes and for stronger integrity measures and, while several states have made changes, more work remains,” said Tim Buckley, NCAA senior vice president of external affairs, in a Nov. 4 statement.

Coach Lord, ‘winningest’ in program history

ALI HALLOUM
THE RIDER

To open his eighth season as the head coach of the UTRGV Women’s Basketball program, Lane Lord made history by becoming the coach with the most wins in its history.

Lord accomplished this feat on Nov. 3 with a 64-46 win against St. Mary’s University, winning his 86th game and cementing his name at the top of the list. As of press time, he now stands at 87 wins.

During the first game of the year, Lord had not realized that he had broken the record until he saw the tribute on the scoreboard after the win, thanking the administration for sticking with him for eight seasons.

“We’ve had some good years,” Lord said. “We’ve had some great wins. We’ve had some bad years through COVID, and [I have] just been very fortunate to be here as long as I have.”

Hired by UTRGV in 2018 after coaching for 11 years at Division II Pittsburg State University in Kansas, Lord has led the Vaqueros to seven tournament appearances, including last year in UTRGV’s first year in the Southland Conference.

Since Nov. 3, Lord has heard

from many people, including old coaches and friends from the Midwest. He also heard from Abilene Christian University head coach Julie Goodenough, ahead of UTRGV’s game against her team.

“All the old coaching buddies from high school, junior college, Division II, the [Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association] league that we used to play in [reached out],” he said. “[Goodenough] sent out a nice text, even though we were playing her this week. So, it’s just been fun to have that coaching fraternity reach out and say, ‘Keep it going.’”

Associate head coach Kevin Hackerott has worked alongside Lord since his hire in 2020 and has seen the program grow in that span.

Speaking with The Rider, Hackerott said Lord’s generally positive attitude influences everybody around him, adding his energy is “contagious.”

“Lane is very positive, very upbeat, half-glass-full kind of guy,” he said. “That’s probably why we like each other so much. His belief in people is what attracts those to like him. And we’re just glad he’s our coach and excited to get to work with him.”

Vaqueros senior forward



PHOTO COURTESY UTRGV ATHLETICS

Coach Lane Lord celebrates postgame with the UTRGV Women’s Basketball Team after its win against St. Mary’s University 64-46 Nov. 3 in the Fieldhouse on the Edinburg campus.

Charlotte O’Keefe, who has become one of the best rebounders in the country during her time at UTRGV, told The Rider the team is “so happy” for Lord’s achievement.

“No one’s more deserving than him,” O’Keefe said. “He’s put a lot into not only our program, but this whole

university and community. He’s the reason I’ve been down here four years, so I’m forever indebted to him.”

Hackerott said as much, adding the team’s job is now “to stack as many numbers on that as we can and make that the highest number we can get for him.”

The Vaqueros have a good chance to do just that with a 3-1 start to the season.

“We’ve got some really nice pieces returning-wise and, then, our newcomers are coming long,” Lord said.

UTRGV returns to action tonight, taking on the Texas State University Bobcats at 7 p.m. away.

THIS WEEK IN SPORTS

MEN’S BASKETBALL 6:30 p.m. Today vs. Southwestern Adventist University @UTRGV FIELDHOUSE	WOMEN’S BASKETBALL 6:30 p.m. Thursday vs. University of Houston @UTRGV FIELDHOUSE	FOOTBALL 5 p.m. Saturday vs. East Texas A&M University @ROBERT AND JANET VACKAR STADIUM
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HOLIDAY HUSTLE

Student workers juggle jobs, finals and holiday stress

ETHAN MALDONADO
THE RIDER

As the holiday season begins, some UTRGV students are trading study breaks for longer shifts and crowded workplaces. Between retail, restaurants and coffee shops, the rush to serve customers often overlaps with the race to finish final exams.

The weeks leading up to Thanksgiving and Christmas are some of the busiest of the year for employees in the Rio Grande Valley. Allison Murray, an early childhood studies junior, said her team at Warbler Coffee in Brownsville starts preparing as early as October.

Murray said the extra hours help cover

travel and expenses, but they also add to the stress of balancing schoolwork and holiday costs.

"We always anticipate the rushes when it comes into the holiday seasons," she said. "We know people from out of town come back home to Brownsville. ... It gets really busy, and we just kind of mentally prepare ourselves."

Murray said she usually works more than 30 hours a week at the café on top of her job with UTRGV's College of Education and relies on time management and open communication with her supervisors to keep everything balanced.

"I'm just a person that loves to be busy," Murray added. "But I also am a person

that prioritizes time management—communication with both of my bosses and just having a good support system."

For Michelle Zapata, a mass communication junior who works at a Chick-fil-A in Donna, the holiday rush means longer shifts and heavier workloads as customers crowd in for seasonal events and high school football games.

"There's much more of a stress level in the workspace because everyone's trying to get all the orders out," Zapata said. "Even with more people on staff, there's way more customers, so it gets difficult to keep up."

Zapata said she tries to use her limited free time for rest,

even though coursework often falls behind.

"I try my best, but it's hard," she said. "I have video assignments to edit and, when my shifts are longer than usual, I come home tired and just want to relax."

Both students said they look forward to the calm that follows once the semester ends and the rush fades.

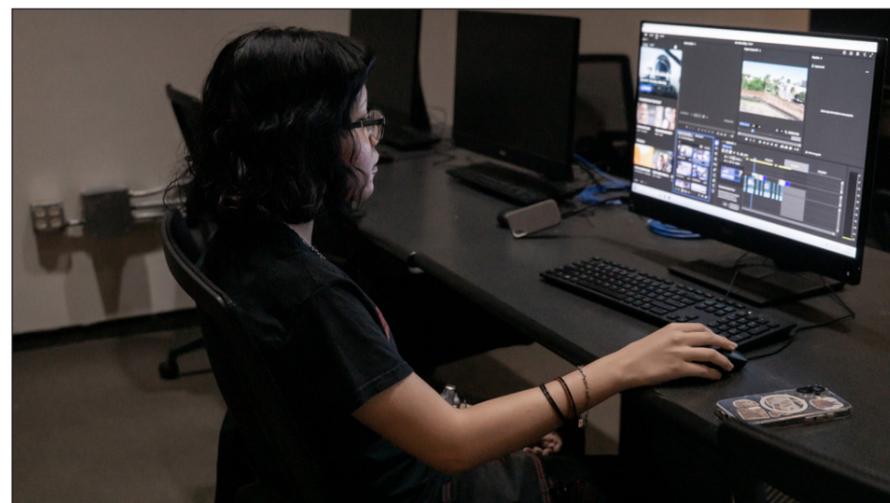
"Things get clouded during the holidays but, once the calmness comes after the storm, you realize, 'Wow, we made it through another one,'" Murray said. "There's always a light at the end of the tunnel."

--Mykel Del Angel contributed to the story.



JOSE RODRIGUEZ/THE RIDER PHOTOS

Michelle Zapata (left), a mass communication junior, and Jose Perez, a mass communication senior, visit Wednesday outside the University Library on the Edinburg campus. Zapata and Perez have a video editing class together and said they often help each other with assignments.



Michelle Zapata, a mass communication junior, edits a documentary assignment for video & film editing II Wednesday inside the University Library computer lab on the Edinburg campus. Zapata works part-time at Chick-fil-A and balances video and audio production assignments from her classes.