

# THE RIDER

THE STUDENT VOICE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

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## TEXAS JUSTICES HEAR ORAL ARGUMENTS ON CAMPUS

**MYKEL DEL ANGEL**  
ONLINE EDITOR

The Supreme Court of Texas heard oral arguments regarding a lawsuit challenging a Texas law Thursday in the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex on the Edinburg campus.

The cases, consolidated for one oral argument (SaveRGV v. Texas General Land Office, SaveRGV v. Cameron County and Ken Paxton v. SaveRGV), challenged House Bill 2623, which amended Texas Natural Resources Code § 61.132 to allow temporary beach closures for spaceflight activities.

The SaveRGV, Sierra Club and the Carrizo/Comecrudo Nation of Texas argue the law violates Article I, Section

33 of the Texas Constitution, which guarantees public access to beaches, while state officials contend the closures are a lawful public-safety measure.

After the Cameron County District Court dismissed the lawsuit, the dispute reached the Texas Thirteenth Court of Appeals, which allowed the lawsuit to move forward, prompting Ken Paxton to appeal to the Supreme Court of Texas.

During Thursday's hearing, attorneys for the petitioners and the respondents presented arguments about whether the lawsuit should be allowed to proceed and their interpretations of precedents and Texas law relevant to the cases.

See **SUPREME**, Page 3



PHOTO COURTESY UTRGV NEWSROOM

Members of the Supreme Court of Texas hear oral arguments Thursday in the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex on the Edinburg campus.

## VOTES ARE IN



AARYKAH NAVARRO /THE RIDER

Primary election ballots are transported Tuesday outside the Hidalgo County Elections Department building in Edinburg.

## A LOOK INTO THE TEXAS 2026 PRIMARIES

**PETE MENDOZA, ETHAN MALDONADO AND MARIAH ESCOBAR**  
THE RIDER

Cameron County and Hidalgo County voters made their choices on the ballot for candidates they want to see in the upcoming November elections, with most leaning toward incumbents in the primary.

Official results for the Texas U.S. Senate primaries showed incumbent John Cornyn (Republican) garnered 6,292 votes in Cameron County and 8,746 votes in Hidalgo County. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton obtained 4,692 votes in Cameron County and 7,363 votes in Hidalgo County. With no candidate obtaining more than 50% of the votes, a runoff election will take place May 26 between Cornyn and Paxton.

State Rep. James Talarico (Democrat) led the U.S. Senate Democratic primary

race, collecting 20,336 votes in Cameron County and 41,081 in Hidalgo County. His closest contender U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett obtained 11,079 votes in Cameron County and 18,746 votes in Hidalgo County.

In the race for Texas governor, incumbent Greg Abbott (Republican) garnered 12,347 votes in Cameron County and 15,290 votes in Hidalgo County. Abbott will face state Rep. Gina Hinojosa (Democrat), who collected 23,176 votes in Cameron County and 41,608 votes in Hidalgo County.

Mark Kaswan, a UTRGV political science professor, said one of the most notable outcomes from Tuesday's primaries was higher Democratic turnout compared

with Republicans statewide.

"More Democrats voted in the primaries than Republicans," Kaswan said. "That's the first time that's happened since 2004."

Although the election was only a primary, he said the turnout could signal stronger Democratic engagement heading into the general election.

According to the Texas Secretary of State elections website, there was a cumulative of 1,647,213 Democratic in-person and mail voters and 1,481,787 Republican voters in Texas.

See **PRIMARIES**, Page 3

## LET THEM COOK: DINING SERVICES STAFF EXPRESSES GRATITUDE



KARLA HERNANDEZ /THE RIDER

Melisa Hernandez, supervisor of UTRGV Dining Services, speaks during an interview March 2 outside El Comedor on the Brownsville campus.

**SOPHIA CORTEZ**  
THE RIDER

The student community can enjoy home-cooked style meals within their busy schedule and be part of the creative process behind the menu offered by the Dining Services department on the Brownsville campus.

Alejandra Garcia, chef manager at El Comedor on the Brownsville campus, started working for UTRGV in 2023.

Garcia said the Dining Services' purpose is to serve students with distinct food options from chicken tenders, a quesadilla station to fast food-like options.

"We change our guisos every day and, on Tuesday, we do taquiza because we know tacos are a big thing here in the [Rio Grande Valley]," she said. "And we want to give students also that experience in the university."

Garcia said the team prepares everything a day in advance, so they can start each day with a lineup of food ready for anyone who comes in. El Comedor, composed of 10 personnel, works seven to eight hours a day and up to 37 hours a week, happy to provide food to their regular clients.

The chef manager added she believes another of her department's purposes is to help students away from home to find, in their food, a piece of home on campus.

"It's mostly based on the season," Garcia said about the process behind every weekly menu. "Right now because it's Lent, we use fish. ... We really just get creative. We plan the menu two weeks or a week ahead and try to get as creative as we can. I have really good cooks that know how to cook and have really good seasoning, and they also have suggestions."

She added her team members take into consideration students' interests and suggestions for food

See **DINING**, Page 2

**LOCAL:**

A new facility is on the way

Page 3

**OPINION:**

People change

Page 4

**ESPAÑOL:**

Empieza tu jardín

Página 5

**SPORTS:**

She's a sprinter, she's a track star

Page 7

## 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

The **Christians at RGV** will host a tabling event from 10 to 11:30 a.m. on the Student Union lawn on the Edinburg campus.

#### CAB Tabling Brownsville

The **Campus Activities Board** will host a K-pop style tabling from 10 a.m. to noon on the Main Building courtyard on the Brownsville campus.

#### IMA General Meeting

The **Association of Accountants and Financial Professionals in Business** will meet from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. in Liberal Arts Building North Room 117 on the Edinburg campus.

#### Delta Zeta General Meeting

**Delta Zeta** will meet from 6 to 7 p.m. in Student Academic Center Room 1.101 on the Edinburg campus.

#### Lawtina Guest Leah Wise

The **Lawtina Student Network** will host guest speaker Leah Wise from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. in Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship Room 110 on the Edinburg campus.

### Tuesday

#### Access for Sex-Ed Weekly Tabling

**Access for Sex-Education** will host a tabling event from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in the Student Union on the Edinburg campus.

#### ACJA General Meeting

The **American Criminal Justice Association Sigma Kappa Chi** will meet from 1:45 to 3:15 p.m. in Liberal Arts North Room 109 on the Edinburg campus.

#### BAA Meeting

The **Brownsville Accounting Association** will meet from 5 to 6 p.m. in Life and Health Science Building Room 1.316 on the Edinburg campus.

#### Beta Alpha Psi-Xi Phi Chapter General Meeting

The **Beta Alpha Psi-Xi Phi Chapter** will meet from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. in Health Affairs Building East Room 1.114 on the Edinburg campus.

### Wednesday

#### ENACTUS

**ENACTUS** will meet from 2 to 3 p.m. in Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship Room 119 on the Edinburg campus.

#### Mario Kart Deluxe Tournament

The **Student Union** will host a Mario Kart Deluxe Tournament

from 11 a.m. to noon in the Game Room on the Edinburg campus and from 1 to 2 p.m. Thursday in the Game Room on the Brownsville campus.

#### Github Workshop

The **Girls Who Code** will host a workshop from 3:30 to 5 p.m. in Health Affairs Building West Room 1.122 on the Edinburg campus.

#### Bookshelves & Bookworms

The **Center for Student Involvement** will host bookshelves and bookworms from 1 to 2:30 p.m. in the Music, Science and Learning Center Room 1.105 on the Brownsville campus.

#### Creative Writing Club Meeting

The **Creative Writing Club** will meet from 5 to 6 p.m. in Liberal Arts Building South Room 180 on the Edinburg campus.

#### Game Development Night

The **Valle Game Devs** will host a game development night from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. in Interdisciplinary Engineering and Academic Building Room 1.206 on the Edinburg campus.

### Thursday

#### Psi Chi General Meeting

The **Psi Chi Honor Society**

will meet from 2 to 3 p.m. in Liberal Arts Building North Room 106 on the Edinburg campus.

#### ASL Club Meeting

The **American Sign Language Club** will meet from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. in Health Affairs Building East Room 1.114 on the Edinburg campus.

#### RGV German Club Meeting

The **RGV German Club** will meet from 2 to 3:15 p.m. in Interdisciplinary Academic Building Room 2.204 on the Brownsville campus. Attendees can discuss **important topics** about the club.

#### ACJA IKC General Meeting

The **American Criminal Justice Association (Iota Kappa Chi)** will meet from 3:15 to 4:45 p.m. in Sabal Hall Room 2.102 on the Brownsville campus.

### Friday

#### IEEE ESB General Meeting

The **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers** will meet from 4 to 6 p.m. in Engineering building Room 1.268 on the Edinburg campus.

-- Complied by Mariah Escobar

**SUBMIT A STORY IDEA TO  
THERIDER@UTRGV.EDU**



## POLICE REPORTS

The following are among the incidents reported to University Police between Feb. 24 and March 2.

### Feb. 24

**7:21 p.m.:** An employee reported finding graffiti in the men's restroom in The Learning Center on the Edinburg campus. Officers photographed the writings and gathered additional information from the employee. The case is under investigation.

### Feb. 25

**9:35 a.m.:** Officers were dispatched regarding a two-vehicle collision in Lot E-12 on the Edinburg campus. No injuries were reported.

**6:31 p.m.:** Officers responded to an active fire alarm in Troxel Hall on the Edinburg campus. Upon arrival, Environmental Health, Safety and Risk Management checked the fire panel, which showed the alarm was triggered by a smoke detector in a dorm. After inspecting the building, which was free of smoke and fire, it was determined safe for re-entry. Environmental Health and Safety was notified and advised to reset the panel.

### Feb. 26

**1:36 p.m.:** A student reported finding damage to his vehicle while it was parked and unattended in Lot E-16 on the Edinburg campus. The case is

under investigation.

**3:30 p.m.:** An officer was dispatched regarding a two-vehicle collision involving a university-owned vehicle in Lot B-2 on the Brownsville campus. No injuries were reported.

### Feb. 27

**11:57 a.m.:** An individual reported finding a bullet in a parking lot at an off campus UTRGV-sponsored sporting event. A second bullet was later found by an officer in the same parking lot. The case is under investigation.

### Feb. 28

**4:51 p.m.:** An officer was dispatched regarding two non-affiliated individuals stuck in an elevator in the Performing Arts Complex on the Edinburg campus. The elevator was opened without incident.

### March 2

**4:34 p.m.:** An officer was dispatched regarding a student who broke his ankle while playing basketball in the University Recreation center on the Edinburg campus. Emergency Medical Services arrived on scene and transported the student to a hospital for further treatment.

--Complied by Narda Serna

### DINING

*Continued from Page 1*

adding some of the options are outside their comfort zone, but the staff chooses to learn.

Dining Services likes to provide students with fresh, good quality food options, working expectations and observing what works best for the students and even faculty.

Alejandra Leal, a cashier for El Comedor on the Brownsville campus with over 10 years of experience, said she started working at UTRGV six years ago.

"Aside from being a cashier, I arrange the merchandise, take Pizza Hut and Pepsi orders, and help in anything I can ... as we all multitask," Leal said.

She added she enjoys

interacting with students and getting to know them every day. Although stressful, she said she will continue to enjoy doing her job every day.

The cashier said the staff likes to do everything with love and encouraged students to share any ideas they might have to improve the menu.

Melissa Hernandez, supervisor at El Comedor for five years, oversees all there is to do during the day, multitasking throughout her shift.

"I enjoy orientation days," Hernandez said. "The day goes by fast, and I enjoy talking with the students."

She added she would like for students to come by more often, even if it's the end of semester, and enjoy the food.

### The Student Fee Advisory Committee (SFAC)

advises the university president on the allocation of the student services fee in accordance with Texas Education Code Sec. 54.5043.

SFAC will begin review of Fiscal Year 2027 budget proposals.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS 2026

Subject to change.

Date	Time
Friday, March 13	1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Friday, March 27	1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Friday, April 10	1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

All meetings will be in EUCTR 323

For more information, visit:



Please contact the Office of the Dean of Students at dos@utrgv.edu or (956) 665-2260 to RSVP and/or request accommodations.

# WFN IN LIMBO AFTER DISSOLUTION OF FACULTY SENATE PUSHES CHANGES

SOFÍA CANTÚ SAUCEDA  
SPANISH EDITOR

The Women's Faculty Network at UTRGV continues its mission since 2012 of supporting faculty and staff by creating a space where women can connect and advance their careers, according to Edna Orozco, the network's past chair and a lecturer in the College of Engineering and Computer Science.

The network has the goal of promoting the development of faculty at UTRGV with activities, workshops and discussion groups, giving them the space to connect, collaborate, and support each other's growth in leadership and scholarship, according to its website.

The WFN started through a National Science Foundation Advance grant of \$3.1 million awarded to legacy institution the University of Texas–Pan American, according to Orozco.

However, the network's future may be uncertain following the recent dissolution of the university's faculty senate, a change that could affect the structure and support systems tied to the network, according to Margaret Rubí, chair of Women's Faculty Network and a clinical assistant professor in the School of Nursing.

Rubí added that because of the dissolution, the WFN has had to change the format of the network.

"We have to revamp our whole format ... you know, what we really stand for," she said. "Every time, we just get closer and closer to getting transitioned out."

Rubí said she has met with legal counsel and Faculty Affairs, who are reviewing the rules of the network.

Ruth Crutchfield, Edinburg member at Large and a professor in the College



PHOTO COURTESY WOMEN'S FACULTY NETWORK

Shown are the Women's Faculty Network's executive team. Ruth Crutchfield (from top left), Edinburg member at Large and a professor in the College of Health Professions; Margaret Rubí, chair of the WFN and a clinical assistant professor in the School of Nursing; Leticia Rangel-Chavez, chair-elect and a lecturer in the University College; Naomie Jean, Harlingen member at Large and an assistant professor in the School of Podiatric Medicine; Edna Orozco, past chair and a lecturer in the College of Engineering and Computer Science; and Luz Maria Silva, a Brownsville member at Large and a clinical associate professor in the School of Nursing.

of Health Professions, said the main purpose is to connect women faculty across different programs at the

university. "Prior to WFN, there weren't a lot of opportunities where people from

different programs could connect," Crutchfield said. "... We got to meet with people across different things, people that I probably would never ever connect with."

She added the network provides "natural avenues" for faculty to connect and find mentors.

Rubí said the network is currently in a limbo and is trying to determine how to keep on going.

"We went from something super viable, very instrumental and impactful to the university and to the faculty, to not being so important anymore," she said.

Luz Maria Silva, Brownsville member at Large and a clinical associate professor in the School of Nursing, said several faculty members have asked about meetings starting again.

"People see me on calls and tell me, 'When are you having the next meeting?' and, you know, 'What's going on with the events?'" Silva said. "So, people are waiting to hear."

Crutchfield said the faculty in the network is willing to continue serving.

"We do this because we believe in the vision and the purpose of the Women's Faculty Network," she said. "We have seen all the benefits of what it does, the support it gives just by simply existing."

Crutchfield added members will continue forward if the opportunity is given with new guidelines the university administration decides.

The WFN reported its largest membership last year, with more than 400 faculty and staff members, Orozco said.

"We had a lot of outreach from previous years ... but what we did was to promote," she said.

READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

# UTRGV TO REPAIR OT AND PT FACILITY



AARYKAH NAVARRO / THE RIDER

Shown is the UTRGV Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy Building, located at 2222 S. 77 Sunshine Strip in Harlingen. The building is set to be renovated. Construction in the area is set to begin this summer, so classes will not be significantly disrupted as workers will make noise, according to Mark Lester, professor and chair of the Physical Therapy department.

MARIAH ESCOBAR  
THE RIDER

UTRGV will renovate the physical and occupational therapy programs with a projected \$42 million cost, including previous funds and \$26.3 million in debt funding to expand the facility in Harlingen, according to the University of Texas System Board of Regents.

Mark Lester, professor and chair of the Physical Therapy Department, said the renovations will be used to carry

out their goal of improving health care across the Rio Grande Valley.

"The purpose of this renovation, essentially, is to provide us with the teaching space and research space, so that we can execute our mission," Lester said.

The building currently comprises 15,000 square feet, two laboratories, a classroom and office space for faculty and about 30 students. The rest of the building is not utilized and functional, so there are

temporary walls between the occupied and unoccupied spaces, according to the department chair.

He added the renovations plan to include two large teaching laboratories for each cohort, 33 research labs, a therapeutic exercise lab for students to have hands-on learning experience, student study areas, gross anatomy capabilities and anatomy dry lab capabilities.

READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

## PRIMARIES Continued from Page 1

Kaswan said the results could also shape one of the most closely watched races in the country this year: the U.S. Senate contest in Texas. The race is expected to draw significant national attention and funding from both parties.

"Whoever the Republican and Democratic nominees are for the senate in November, this is going to be one of the biggest races in the country," he said.

Kaswan added that competitive statewide races can influence other elections further down the ballot.

"If there's a really tight senate race, that could have downstream impacts boosting Democrats for other offices," the professor said.

## Texas' 34th congressional district

Incumbent Vicente Gonzalez (Democrat) led with 19,984 votes, while Eric Flores led in the Republican ballot with 7,137 votes.

Ten Republican candidates ran: Flores, Mayra Flores, Luis Buentello, Scott Mandel, Fred Hinojosa, Keith Allen, Gregory Scott Kunkle Jr. and Jay Nagy.

During his speech at his watch party, Eric Flores thanked his family and supporters present.

"Thank you guys for holding the line with me," he said. "Thank you for your trust; thank you for your hope. And my promise to you tonight is to

never let you all down." Flores also thanked the president for trusting him.

"Thank you for placing your trust in me," he said. "... As I stood on the stage with President Donald J. Trump on [Feb. 27], I made it very clear as to what I would be taking to D.C.: leadership that is focused and determined on delivering results."

Flores promised the residents to stay grounded, listen and deliver for the South of Texas.

Two candidates ran in the Democratic primary: Gonzalez and Etienne Rosas, who garnered 12,112 votes.

Gonzalez has previously served in the House for five terms: Three for Texas' 15th congressional district and two for Texas' 34th.

## Texas' 15th congressional district

Tuesday night's results showed incumbent Monica De La Cruz, who ran uncontested, led the Republican ballot, while Democrats selected their nominee.

Tejano singer Bobby Pulido led with 27,845 votes against Dr. Ada Cuellar, who garnered 14,353 votes. Pulido will face De La Cruz in the general election.

Pulido said, during his watch party in Pharr, his victory is not the end of his journey.

"[It] is the beginning of everything," he said. "The people of South Texas have spoken, and I'm honored to accept your nomination

to be your next Democratic congressman."

He added he respects Cuellar and wishes her well on all future endeavors and hopes his supporters join him in beating De La Cruz in November.

Pulido said he believes the region still lacks a clear political identity.

"I think that's been the biggest issue," he said. "Nobody's really defined what it is to be a South Texas Democrat, and I look forward to doing that."

De La Cruz posted a news release on Facebook Tuesday following the Democratic primary results in the district.

She criticized national Democratic spending in the race and contrasted her record with that of the now-Democratic nominee Pulido.

"I want to congratulate Dr. Ada Cuellar for the race she ran," De La Cruz wrote. "She was cheated by an establishment that spent over a million dollars to push her aside."

She added she plans to contrast her record in Congress with that of her opponent during her campaign leading to the general election.

"South Texas is my home," De La Cruz wrote. "I'm raising my kids here. I feel many of the same pressures local families face — and I show up for them every single day."

--Sofía Cantú Saucedá contributed to this report.

## SUPREME Continued from Page 1

"The open beaches amendment to the Texas Constitution does not guarantee every person access to every Gulf Coast beach at all times," said Beth Klusmann, an attorney representing the petitioners, during her opening statement.

Klusmann continued her argument by challenging if the petitioner's claim held merit.

"If the claim was going to fail as a matter of law, then it is facially invalid," she said. "If the claim is going to fail, there is no reason to waste additional resources defending it."

After Klusmann's arguments, James P. Allison, an attorney also representing the petitioners, came up to the stage to interpret Section 33, Subsection D of Article I of the Texas Constitution.

"[The open beaches amendment] does not create a private right of enforcement," Allison said. "Therefore, they reserved the right of enforcement to public entities."

Marisa Perales, an attorney for the respondents, argued the closures violate the constitutional guarantee of public beach access.

"When the government closes the beach under its HB 2623 authority, it does so at the request of SpaceX, so that SpaceX can take possession of the beach, exclude the public from it, and use it as its

blast zone for its spaceflight activities," Perales said.

Much of the discussion focused on whether the plaintiffs have legal standing to bring the lawsuit and whether the Open Beaches Amendment allows private individuals or organizations to challenge beach closures in court.

Justin Katusak, a part-time lecturer in political science, said oral arguments allow the justices to question attorneys directly about the legal issues raised in a case.

"This is the highest court of last resort in Texas, and the justices will hear arguments about whether the case should move forward," Katusak said.

He said the justice's decision will come at a later date.

"There will be a written opinion that comes after," Katusak said.

The lecturer said if the court rules the plaintiffs do have standing, the case can return to the Cameron County district court for further proceedings. If the court rules otherwise, the case can be dismissed.

A student attending the hearing said the event provided a rare opportunity to see the state's highest court in action.

"I think it's amazing, not only for [UTRGV] but for students in general," said Ian Alfaro, vice president of external affairs for the UTRGV Student Government Association.

--Stephen Gutierrez contributed to this story.

COLUMN OF THE WEEK

# CONVERSATION WITH A NOW STRANGER



**NARDA SERINA**  
COPY EDITOR

I ran into someone from high school on the shuttle last week. I almost didn't say hello. I had already sat down in a different seat, but I waved anyway. She told me to come sit next to her

and, suddenly, I was back in a version of my life I don't live in anymore.

The questions started exactly how I expected, "Do you still hang out with them?" She meant the group of friends I had in high school: core group of friends that, at 17, I always assumed would always be a part of my life.

I don't know if I hesitated before answering. Maybe I did. There's something about admitting you don't talk to the same people anymore that feels uncomfortable, like you're confessing to a failure. Like, there must have been drama, a fight or there is some kind of story. But there wasn't. We

just grew apart—different cities, schedules and priorities.

She looked shocked. Like, she really can't believe we don't

"You can change, you can grow up, become someone new."

really hang out anymore, and that I'm not really one of those people who does tons of stuff on the weekends. I felt a tiny bit embarrassed for some reason. Like, my life had somehow downgraded.

For a moment there, I

thought I'd rather just be quiet and read my book instead. Maybe even jump off the bus. But here's the truth: I don't miss that version of my life. Not because it was terrible, and not because I'm more capable or better than anyone but because I'm different now.

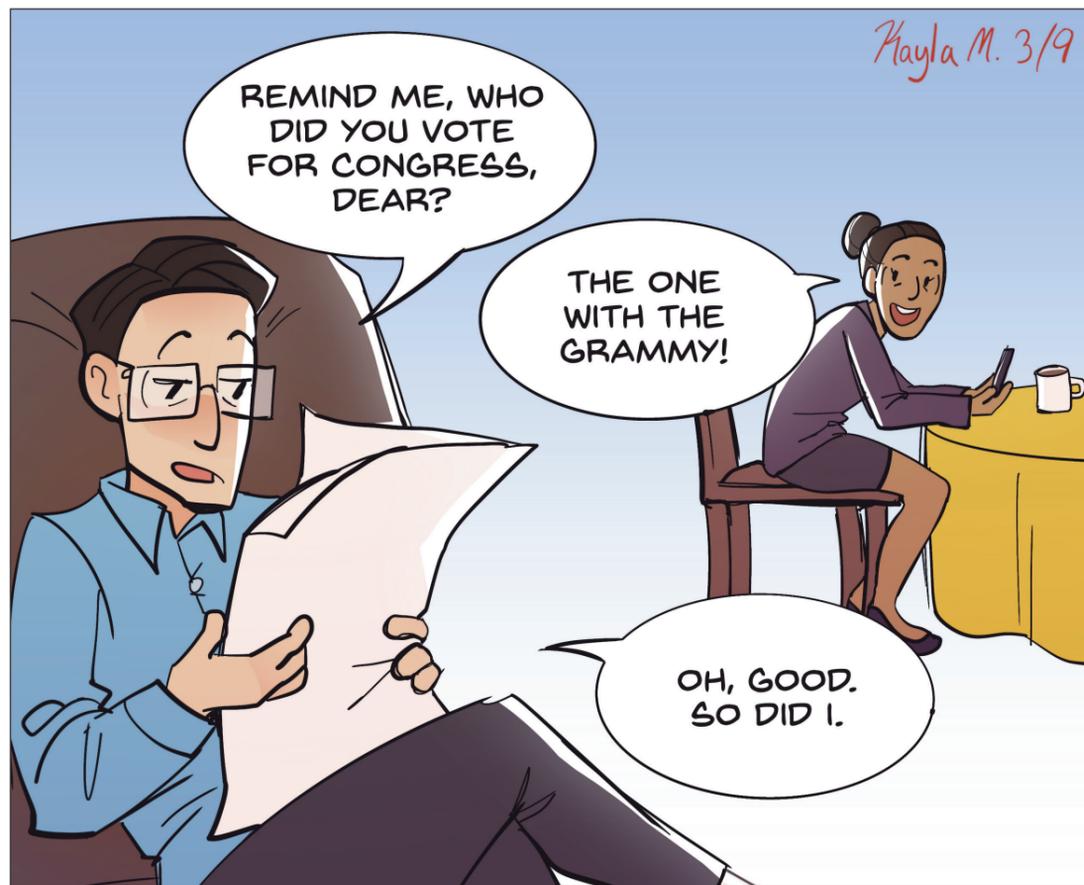
College didn't exactly make me louder. It made me more content with my surroundings. Now, my days consist of classes, work and home. My weekends typically consist of watching TV shows and movies, listening to music, reading and going to get coffee with my sister. We love going to the movie theater for a fun day. Life is peaceful, grounded and safe.

I don't think it was her response that shocked me as much as the realization that we all assume that our high school friendships will remain the same. High school friendships can feel very permanent, and we assume they'll always be there as we grow into adulthood, but growth doesn't always move in groups.

You can change, you can grow up, become someone new. Someone who no longer fits into the life you built when you were 17 years old, that doesn't make anyone the villain. It just means you're growing.

EDITORIAL CARTOON

## WHAT A QUALIFICATION



VAQUERO VOICE

## WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON COLLEGE HAS TAUGHT YOU SO FAR?

--Compiled and photos by Jocelyn Garcia Serina and Mariah Escobar

**Jasmine Garza**  
integrated health science senior

"My fear is the future. To overcome it, I'd say to look at the bright side of the world and see that everybody has their part in and see if we can make the world a better place."



**Ashly Gomez**  
American sign language and interpretation senior

"My fear is performing in front of people and, as an ASL interpreting major, I am pushing myself to go out and interpret in front of strangers to overcome this anxiety."

**Jade Rodriguez**  
American sign language and interpretation senior

"I am afraid of new environments, and I am trying to overcome this by putting myself more out there in the deaf community with my major."



**Gaby Alvarez**  
integrated health science freshman

"I am most scared of failure, and I am overcoming that ... little by little, knowing that not every little thing matters. ... You can be adaptable and change plans. Nothing has to be set."

**Soren Lopez**  
biology sophomore

"A fear that I have is embarrassing myself in front of people. So, what I am doing is just bringing my guitar and playing live. If I mess up, it's whatever."

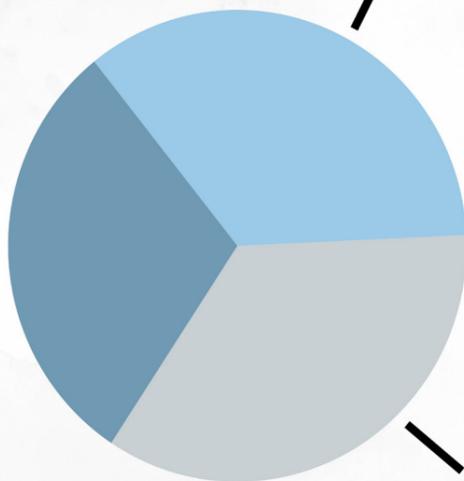


## WACKY WEB POLL

**LAST WEEK'S RESULTS:**  
IF UTRGV HAD A MASCOT ROYALE, WHO WOULD WIN?

30%  
Victory Vaquero

35%  
Campus squirrels



35%  
Chick-fil-A line

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THE POLL ON OUR SOCIALS!  
@UTRGVRIDER

# UN BROWNSVILLE MÁS VERDE

HUGO A. SEPÚLVEDA  
THE RIDER

Funcionarios de la ciudad hablan sobre programas de jardinería que Brownsville tiene para la comunidad interesada en crear sus propios jardines o en aprender sobre la vegetación local, desde talleres y clases a kits para el hogar disponibles para residentes.

Sean De Palma, director del departamento de Parques y Recreación, dijo que el Club de Restauración de Plantas Nativas y Jardinería se enfoca en la regeneración de plantas nativas y reemplazar plantas exóticas y nativas en el Antonio Gonzalez Park, ubicado en 34 Tony Gonzalez Drive.

“Nosotros [...] cuidamos de [ellas] porque queremos mejorar la estructura de las plantas aquí en Brownsville”, De Palma dijo.

Aunque el programa fue pausado el 13 de febrero, el jardín del Gonzalez Park sigue abierto de 8 a.m. a 6 p.m. de lunes a viernes para el público.

Dijo que el programa es una buena experiencia para que los asistentes puedan estar expuestos a la naturaleza y, cuando las clases regresen, podrán aprender sobre las plantas nativas de Brownsville y cómo cuidar de ellas en casa.

“No proveemos esas plantas todo el tiempo”, De Palma dijo. “Hay ciertos tiempos del año donde tenemos la oportunidad de compartir las semillas y cultivos más pequeños, para que se los puedan llevar a casa, pero no todo el



Una planta de lechuga crece en uno de los maceteros exteriores el 19 de febrero en el parque Antonio González, ubicado en 34 Tony González Drive en Brownsville.

tiempo”.

Agregó que durante las semanas antes de que el programa fuera pausado, había un promedio de 20 a 25 personas cada clase. El regreso está programado para mitad de marzo.

“Eran clases muy populares, y por eso vamos a reanudarlas en las próximas semanas”, De Palma dijo.

Agregó que también habrá regreso de la observación de aves y espera que las personas lo disfruten.

“Somos una ciudad de aves”, De

Palma dijo. “[...] Tenemos algunas de las poblaciones de aves más diversas aquí en Brownsville. Entonces, además del programa [...] también observamos aves [...] como identificar los diferentes tipos de aves”.

Jose A. Gonzalez, bibliotecario de la Brownsville Public Library, dijo que el programa de jardinería que la biblioteca ofrece empezó en septiembre del 2025 con la meta de que la comunidad se involucre en la jardinería.

“De hecho ofrecemos semillas a la

comunidad para que se las lleven”, Gonzalez dijo. “También ofrecemos kits de jardinería que pueden obtener con una tarjeta de biblioteca”.

Agregó que el kit tiene todo para empezar un pequeño jardín en casa con plantas y semillas compradas y obtenidas por donaciones de la comunidad.

“También tenemos [un] libro que las personas pueden retirar de la jardinería [...] en inglés y español, y ha sido un gran éxito”, Gonzalez dijo.

Dijo que en las dos bibliotecas, Southmost y en la ubicación principal, cuentan con un invernadero y pequeñas semilleras.

“Este mes, nuestras plantas del mes [son] cilantro, perejil y orégano”, Gonzalez dijo. “Entonces, tenemos esos tres kits [...] por orden de llegada. Las personas pueden [usar] esos pequeños kits”.

Dijo que la participación y el apoyo de la comunidad para el programa ha sido “fenomenal”.

“Al ser la primera vez que la biblioteca tiene un programa [...] ha sido un gran éxito”, Gonzalez dijo. “Cada mes, hacemos estadísticas y, aquí en Southmost, son más de 40 personas las que participan”.

Diego Troncoso, un estudiante de tercer año de historia en UTRGV, dijo que no conocía del programa de jardinería pero piensa que es interesante porque le gusta la agricultura.

“A mí me gustaría hacer eso en el futuro, jardinería [...] porque sería de beneficio para mí, especialmente porque planeo hacer eso”, Troncoso dijo.

--Traducido por Sofía Cantú Saucedo

## VALLEY SPOTLIGHT

# RGV Women's Chamber of Commerce: Impulsando a las mujeres

SOFÍA CANTÚ SAUCEDA  
SPANISH EDITOR

En una región donde el emprendimiento continúa creciendo, el RGV Women's Chamber of Commerce ofrece recursos, capacitación y conexiones estratégicas que fortalecen tanto sus negocios como su liderazgo en la comunidad.

La cámara de comercio es una comunidad de emprendedoras, profesionales y líderes comprometidas con el avance del éxito de las mujeres, de acuerdo a su página web.

Las mujeres que son parte de esta organización son todas voluntarias. Carolina Lupercio, presidenta de la

“El primer paso es soñarlo y tener una visión.”

- Carolina Lupercio,  
presidenta



FOTO CORTESÍA DE RGV WOMEN'S CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Se muestran Mirian Arenas (de izquierda), directora de finanzas; Stefania Alonzo, tesorera y COO; Carolina Lupercio, presidenta y CEO; Aly Lopez, vicepresidenta de relaciones estratégicas; y Krystal Valdez, vicepresidenta de defensa, la mesa directiva de RGV Women's Chamber of Commerce, en un evento de la cámara por el año nuevo lunar en febrero en McAllen.

Lupercio dijo que, antes de unirse a la organización, buscaba un lugar donde pudiera ayudar a la comunidad.

“Es mejor ver acciones”, dijo. “[...] Fui a uno de los eventos y vi las interacciones que tenían con las mujeres y eso es lo más que me gusto”.

Lupercio compartió que una de las mayores satisfacciones de ser parte de la organización es el poder escuchar las historias de las mujeres y ayudarlas a confiar más en sí mismas.

Desde su apertura, la organización ha crecido en números y estructuración dentro de la junta directiva. Actualmente,

tienen más de 30 miembros activos.

“La organización no es perfecta”, Lupercio dijo. “Cuando se abrió la organización, entraron sin el conocimiento de lo que implicaba. Hemos crecido. Ahora, ya tenemos una base, directrices y reglas. [...] Ahora, ya tenemos una idea de cómo deben ser las cosas”.

El Women's Chamber of Commerce tiene distintos eventos a lo largo del año, especialmente en marzo por ser el mes de la historia de la mujer. Tienen un evento en Toloa Rooftop, ubicado en 1200 Auburn Ave. Suite 360 en McAllen.

Alonzo agregó que, durante el evento, habrá una clase de pilates para los asistentes.

“En muchos de nuestros eventos, recibimos donaciones y las devolvemos a la comunidad”, dijo.

Alonzo también dijo que estos eventos ayudan a las mujeres a conocer más sobre otros negocios y promocionar el propio.

“Se trata del empoderamiento femenino, de mujeres que buscan conectar y unirse”, dijo. “Y si buscas trabajo, puedes encontrar a una buena persona que definitivamente te ayude a conseguirlo”.

Lupercio compartió que todos los fondos recaudados en los eventos ayudan a la comunidad y a las mujeres de la organización.

“Con los fondos, ayudamos a la comunidad y, también, ayudamos a las mujeres con algo que necesiten”, dijo. “Hemos tenido mujeres que tienen entrevistas y necesitan ropa para eso; entonces, nosotras las ayudamos a conseguirla”.

Para el futuro, Lupercio dijo que la organización estará más activa, buscará incorporar más voluntarias y comenzará una fundación para dar becas.

“Como somos voluntarias, no recibimos compensaciones”, dijo. “Muchas de nuestras voluntarias trabajan y no pueden estar presentes”, dijo. “Ahora, tendremos a personas en la directiva que hagan prioridad a la organización”.

Lupercio agregó que las becas podrán ser para estudiantes, mujeres que quieren aprender y mujeres con discapacidad.

Cualquier persona que desee unirse, puede ponerse en contacto por medio de su página web o redes sociales.

“El primer paso es soñarlo y tener una visión”, Lupercio dijo. “Todo seguirá después. [...] Cree en ti, pero también es bueno tener dudas”.

¿Tienes una historia que contar?  
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# UNITED THROUGH THE MUSIC

**EDUARDO ESCAMILLA**  
A&E EDITOR

Channel4Cause officially launched “Stand Together,” a song created to raise awareness and funds for the more than 50 million refugee children worldwide, Feb. 2 at the Performing Arts Complex on the Edinburg campus.

Channel4Cause is a “social enterprise that amplifies humanitarian causes by fusing media, art, and technology to drive campaigns that resonate and deliver real results,” according to its website.

The song, written by Michael Orland from American Idol and songwriters Judy Winger Quay and Brian Seth Hurst, features singers Bella Stine and biology sophomore Lea Jade García, along with a youth chorus from UTRGV and 12 students from Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Southwest High School.

The project also brought together a diverse crew of UTRGV theatre students to create something larger than life.

For García, the song became a bridge between her musical

roots and a global cause.

She said she began singing when she was 4 years old and was recruited for the project by Francisco Loera, director of the UTRGV Mariachi Program.

The recording process was a solitary but emotional journey, García added.

She learned the lyrics on her own, never meeting her California-based duet partner, Stine, in person.

When she finally heard the finished track, García said the impact was immediate.

“It brought tears to my eyes because I’m so proud to be a part of something like this,” she said. “I just felt pride, rather than judging myself. ... I loved everything I saw.”

While the song provides the emotional heartbeat, the visual story was crafted by a dedicated crew of UTRGV theatre students and alumni.

For many, like alumni Christopher Marmolejo, who served as a director of photography and lighting assistant, the project was a professional turning point.

The crew worked alongside industry professionals, including directors from New

York, who provided what alumnus Ange Gonzalez, who served on the film as costume and makeup designer and script supervisor, described as a “culture shock.”

“A lot of our previous films ... the norm, I guess, is kind of like, ‘Use your iPhone and here’s like, a Google Doc script,’” Gonzalez said. “And then, we get here, and I’m like, ‘Oh, we’re for real, for real. This is like, whoa, OK, I gotta lock in low-key.’”

The production took the students to various locations, including Sal Del Rey and the border wall itself.

Linda Chapman, a graduate student who served as an assistant director and cinematographer, noted the significance of collaboration.

“We’re using not just our voices, but our art to create the voice – show, don’t tell,” Chapman said.

The Rider asked how the group would describe the film for the song they worked on to be released in a few weeks.

“I would describe it as unification through song and through goal without opposing conflict,” Marmolejo replied. “



EDUARDO ESCAMILLA/ THE RIDER

Christopher Marmolejo (from right), UTRGV alumnus; Ange Gonzalez, UTRGV alumnus; and Linda Chapman, graduate student, share anecdotes and memories from their experience working on “Stand Together,” a song created to raise awareness and funds for the more than 50 million refugee children worldwide, Feb. 2 in the Performing Arts Complex on the Edinburg campus.

... This is a conversation and a project that’s about the people. It’s about the individuals, and it’s about humans.”

For the students involved, “Stand with Children” is more than a line on a resume; it is a declaration of pride in their community and their capabilities as artists.

“I genuinely feel that, like, if one of us makes it from

the Valley, then, all of us do,” Gonzalez said. “I want to bring what I learned back down and help my community out... because I feel like, you know, this place is small, but that doesn’t mean it’s bad. It’s home.”

To learn more about the project, visit [channel4cause.com](http://channel4cause.com).

# A VERY ENGLISH MARATHON

**EDUARDO ESCAMILLA**  
A&E EDITOR

For more than 10,000 lines, English poet John Milton’s “Paradise Lost” explores the heights of heaven and the depths of hell. Beginning at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday, those words will fill the Charles and Dorothy Clark Art Gallery in the Liberal Arts Building South on the Edinburg campus as students gather for a “Milton Marathon.”

The event, expected to span roughly 10 to 11 hours, invites the community to immerse themselves in some of the most influential poetry in the English language, according to a UTRGV professor.

The reading of the 17th-century epic poem is organized by Andrew Fleck, literature and cultural studies professor,

who has carried this tradition across multiple universities for a quarter-century.

“The concept behind it is ... to take a poem which sounds beautiful and which can be kind of daunting if you kind of just read it on the page and put it out there for the public to enjoy,” the professor said.

While many encounter Milton through silent study, Fleck argues the poem was designed for the ear. Milton, who lost his sight later in life, dictated the epic to aides, the professor said.

“He clearly was hearing it out loud and kind of composing it on some level, also out loud,” Fleck said. “It’s a poem that I think really repays hearing.”

The marathon is designed to be interactive rather than a formal

performance.

Participants can listen to the “beautiful words” or, if they feel “brave,” step up to the podium to read a section themselves, Fleck said.

For those unable to commit to the full 10-hour session, the event features a flexible “drop-in” format.

Guests are welcome to stay for the duration or simply stop by for a few minutes to experience the atmosphere.

The event aims to foster a sense of belonging. In past marathons, Fleck watched as the shared struggle of navigating Milton’s complex syntax brought strangers together.

“I’ve always enjoyed watching,” he said. “... They’ll be sitting there and they’re looking to try to figure out where they’re supposed to be in

the poem.”

“And the person sitting next to them will be like, ‘Oh, it’s on this page, and it’s on that line,’ and help them kind of find where they go.”

This year’s reading is scheduled intentionally to coincide with the midterm for Fleck’s students, providing them a chance to hear the work in its entirety after weeks of close study.

To complement the auditory experience, the event will feature poster-sized images of famous artistic responses to the poem, including engravings by William Blake, an English poet and painter, and Gustave Doré, a French graphic artist and illustrator.

Fleck said these visuals highlight the poem’s dramatic narrative of rebellion.

Milton, a staunch



PHOTO COURTESY ANDREW FLECK

Andrew Fleck, a literature and cultural studies professor, brings the first annual Milton Marathon to UTRGV. The event begins at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday at the Charles and Dorothy Clark Art Gallery in the Liberal Arts Building South on the Edinburg campus.

anti-monarchist, wrote “Paradise Lost” in blank verse—unrhymed iambic pentameter—which he viewed as a rejection of the “chains” of rhyme and an embrace of “English liberty,” according to the professor. “Homer doesn’t write in rhyme, and Virgil doesn’t write in rhyme,” Fleck said. “Why should the great English poets be writing in rhyme, either?”

# CADAVER CONVERSATIONS #7



# 'BEYOND EXCEPTIONAL IN THIS SPORT'

STEPHEN GUTIERREZ  
THE RIDER

Nayla Harris, a senior sprinter for the UTRGV Women's Track & Field, has emerged as one of the top sprinters in the nation, helping lead the program to the 2026 Southland Conference Indoor Track & Field Championships while earning a spot in the NCAA Indoor Track & Field Championships.

"Just because they don't know my name yet, doesn't mean that I'm an underdog," Harris said. "I'm still there to take everything that they thought they had."

According to an Athletics March 3 news release, she has had a "stellar" regular season, going undefeated and earning three SLC Women's Track Athlete of the Week awards.

Harris competed in the SLC Indoor Championships on Feb. 26 and defended her women's 60-meter dash title while also earning two bronze medals in the 200-meter dash and long jump at the Birmingham CrossPlex in Birmingham, Alabama.

Head coach Shareese Hicks said the conference is "so competitive," and her success is huge.

"To walk away with a championship title, for the second time ... is amazing," Hicks said.

Her success also helped the women's track and field team earn its first conference title in indoor program history, according to the news release.

Harris said she "knew the gold was going to happen," and was grateful to help her team take home the championship title.

Hicks credits Harris' leadership and dedication as a "contributing factor" to winning the conference championships. "Her work ethic is through the roof,"



PHOTO COURTESY UTRGV ATHLETICS

Ivy Brown (left), Vaqueros junior forward, looks to pass while defended by Carla Celaya, Lady Demons senior guard, during Thursday's game against Northwestern State University in the Fieldhouse on the Edinburg campus.

she said. "She trains at a high intensity. She's pushing herself very much in the weight room, and I've seen that change in dynamic going throughout our women's team."

Hicks also credits Harris' mentality for her accomplishments this season.

"Her mindset this year has been unstoppable," the head coach said. "You have to be mentally tough and mentally strong to have an undefeated season in the state of Texas."

Harris is not only among the top in

the state, but in the nation as a whole. Currently, she is tied for 11th in the nation with her personal program and SLC record time of 7.18 in the 60-meter dash, according to the news release.

"I'm just glad to know that I'm up there and close enough to get what I want," she said. "And I feel like the times are not really that far apart, so it could really be anybody's game. It's just who wants it more."

The record secured her spot in the women's 60-meter dash at the NCAA

Indoor Championships, where only the top 16 Division I athletes are able to compete, according to Hicks.

Harris said being able to compete in the championship is "very special" to her.

"This is the hardest thing to get qualified for," she said. "It's such a small group of people who are good enough to be in it. So, I'm excited to go run and spread the word on UTRGV."

According to Harris, the "little things" are what allowed her to get where she is today, adding they can make a big difference.

"Watching film over and over to see how I can get better and fix what there is to fix," she said. "Then, asking questions to make sure I can get every bit of information I need to get better."

The sprinter said she has gained more confidence throughout her career, not just in herself but also in her training, in her coach, in her well-being and in God.

Even with her confidence, Harris said, "there's always some nerves" when lining up. However, one thing gets her back on track.

"I pray every single time," she said. "After I pray, I don't think about it anymore because I know it's in God's hands. That gives me all the confidence I need."

While Harris prepares for the NCAA Indoor Championship, Hicks said she will leave an impact extending far beyond her accomplishments as she lays the foundation of the program.

"Nayla Harris is going to be remembered as the first," she said. "A lot of people go to visit the Eiffel Tower, [the] Great Wall of China or the pyramids, but who built it?"

The NCAA Indoor Track & Field Championships will take place Friday and Saturday at the Randal Tyson Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

## ATHLETE OF THE WEEK EFE LATHAM



PHOTO COURTESY UTRGV ATHLETICS

Efe Latham, a graduate student from Lasalle, Quebec, Canada, is a thrower for the UTRGV Women's Track & Field Team.

Efe Latham, a graduate student from Lasalle, Quebec, Canada, is a thrower for the UTRGV Women's Track & Field Team. Latham qualified for the NCAA West First Round in shot put, finishing 36th with a mark of 14.84 meters.

**Q: What is a fun fact about yourself?**

**A:** "I guess a fun fact would be that I speak French. Most people know that."

**Q: Who or what got you into track and field?**

**A:** "I think getting into track and field was kind of like an accident. We had, like, sport day back in high school and, then, I guess it was like an opportunity to miss class. So then, I went to the track meet, and ... I finished first, like, over the first time. And I was like, 'Oh, like, I kind of like this.'"

**Q: Who has been your biggest inspiration or role model?**

**A:** "I think my biggest role model would be, like, Sarah Minton, which is our Canadian shot footer.... Growing up, I thought, like, I was too small to be throwing shot foot, but like, seeing that we're the same height, and she's [gone] to the Olympics twice, won world

championship medals."

**Q: What shows or movies do you like to watch?**

**A:** "I love thrillers, so anything that's mystery with action all together."

**Q: Are there any sports that you like to play other than running?**

**A:** "I think my favorite sport outside of track would have been rugby. I played rugby for a year, so that would be, like, my No. 2."

**Q: What do you like most about UTRGV?**

**A:** "I like the community here. I really like the team. Everybody's, like, supportive. They have your back no matter what. So, that's what I really love about here."

**Q: What are your biggest goals?**

**A:** "My biggest goals would be I would love to make the Olympic team for Team Canada one day. And then outside of sports, I want to be a sports psychologist and, like, help athletes overcome, like, mental barriers because that's something I have to do at once. I want to be that person for somebody else."

--Compiled by Valeria Tokun Haga

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