

THE RIDER

THE STUDENT VOICE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

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LOCAL

PROSPERITY

ON CAMPUS

Optometry advances in accreditation

SOPHIA CORTEZ
THE RIDER

The UTRGV School of Optometry is moving forward in the accreditation process after receiving a Stage One designation from the Accreditation Council on Optometry Education on May 6, and university leaders are preparing to proceed to the next phase in Fall 2027.

The program aims to expand proper eye care in the Rio Grande Valley while creating new opportunities for students specializing in the field, according to Dr. William Miller, dean of the school.

According to the Texas Health and Human Services, as of 2025, Hidalgo County ranks No. 103 in the state in the number of licensed optometrists with 72, and Cameron County ranks No. 108 with 33.

Since receiving the Stage One designation, the program will focus on completing a required self-study submitted to the Accreditation Council on Optometry Education.

“The self-study encompasses what you plan to do with the school, which includes faculty and students and clinics and everything,” Miller said.

See **OPTOMETRY**, Page 2

HEALTH

Get tested: STI Awareness Week underway

MARIAH ESCOBAR
THE RIDER

April is National Sexually Transmitted Infections Awareness Month, which provides an opportunity for the public to learn how STIs affect people’s lives and promote testing, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

STI Awareness Week, a more focused effort, runs through Sunday. The CDC website states SAW’s purpose is to reduce “STI-related stigma, fear, and discrimination and ensure people have the tools and knowledge for prevention.”

The month provides an opportunity to address knowledge gaps and encourage open dialogue with students since it is a taboo subject, according to Vianca Vieyra, program coordinator for Talk About It campus conversations.

Vieyra added one common misconception about STIs is that symptoms are visible although most infections do not present any visible symptoms, as the most common symptom is no symptom at all.

“People won’t really know whether they have an STI or not until they get tested,” Vieyra said.

See **AWARENESS**, Page 2



ETHAN MALDONADO /THE RIDER

Edinburg Mayor Omar Ochoa delivers the 2026 State of the City address, highlighting economic growth and future infrastructure plans Thursday in the city’s Arts, Culture and Events Center.

UTRGV growth highlighted in State of the City

ETHAN MALDONADO
THE RIDER

UTRGV is expected to play a major role in Edinburg’s continued growth, including a planned \$160 million biomedical research expansion highlighted during the city’s 2026 State of the City Address Thursday in the Edinburg Arts, Culture, and Events Center.

Officials and university leaders emphasized the partnership between UTRGV and the city as a driving force behind economic development, job creation and long-term infrastructure planning.

“Edinburg is on the rise,” said Patrick Gonzales, senior vice president for Marketing and Communications at UTRGV. “We’re really excited to play a role in Edinburg moving forward and providing a great city for its residents. ... A city where you can raise a family, enjoy entertainment, have good jobs and really thrive.”

In his first State of the City Address, Mayor Omar Ochoa outlined a \$275 million capital improvement plan and pointed to record-breaking economic growth, declining crime rates and major infrastructure projects as signs the city is “soaring.”

“The state of our city is not just strong, it is soaring,” Ochoa said.

The mayor highlighted UTRGV’s impact on the local economy, noting the School of Medicine has created about 1,000 jobs since opening and continues

to expand its research footprint.

Gonzales said the university’s biomedical project is still in early stages and will involve renovating an existing building on the Edinburg campus to increase research capacity and address global medical challenges.

Beyond higher education, city leaders pointed to broader economic growth. Retail sales in Edinburg surpassed \$2 billion in 2025, while commercial permit valuations increased by 110%, according to Ochoa.

UTRGV IMPACT

Vaqueros Football marked a \$144 million economic impact, bringing over 87,000 attendees.

The city also reached a record \$407 million in construction valuations and added more than 1,500 jobs last year.

“In 2025 alone, Edinburg added more than 1,500 new jobs,” Ochoa said.

The mayor said the city is projected to surpass 113,000 residents by 2028, continuing its status as one of the fastest-growing cities in the Rio Grande Valley and Texas.

Infrastructure remains a key focus of future development. The city’s \$275 million capital improvement plan includes upgrades to drainage systems,

wastewater treatment and roadways.

Among the projects are a \$33 million expansion of the wastewater treatment plant and efforts to establish an independent water source through a future brackish-water desalination plant.

“By the end of this decade, Edinburg will secure an alternate independent water source,” Ochoa said.

Public safety improvements were also highlighted, with Edinburg recording zero homicides in 2025 for the first time in more than 30 years. Major crimes decreased by 16%, and violent crime has dropped 37% over the past four years, according to city officials.

Community investments included park upgrades, expanded recreational facilities and more than 350 events hosted throughout 2025.

UTRGV’s inaugural NCAA Division I football season was also cited as a major economic driver, generating an estimated \$144 million impact and drawing more than 87,000 attendees.

Despite the scale of development, Ochoa said the city will maintain its current property tax rate, which he described as the lowest since 1991.

Closing the address, he called on residents and partners, including UTRGV, to remain engaged in the city’s future.

“I need your passion,” Ochoa said. “I need your grit. I need your bold ideas. The absolute best days of Edinburg are ahead.”

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

Mortal Kombat Tournament

The **Student Union** will host a Mortal Kombat tournament from noon to 1 p.m. in the Game Room on the Edinburg campus and at the same time in the Game Room on the Brownsville campus.

ECS Tabling

The **Elliot Chemical Society** will host a tabling event from 11:30 a.m. to noon and at the same time Wednesday outside the University Library courtyard on the Edinburg campus.

Geology Club General Meeting

The **Geology Club** will meet from 2 to 3:30 p.m. in Science Building Room 1.604 on the Edinburg campus

K.I.S.S. General Meeting

The **Korean International Student Society** will meet from 3:15 to 4:45 p.m. and at the same time through Thursday in Liberal Arts Building North Room 101 on the Edinburg campus.

Delta Zeta

Delta Zeta will meet from 6 to 7 p.m. in Student Academic Center Room 1.101 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.

IFSO General Meeting

The **Intersectional Feminist Student Organization** will meet from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in Liberal Arts Building North Room 106 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 Brownsville 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.

DSAA General Meeting

The **Data Structures and Algorithms Architects** will meet from 5 to 6 p.m. in Interdisciplinary Engineering and Academic Building Room 2.203 on the Edinburg campus.

Wednesday Picnic on the Lawn

The **Center for Student Involvement, Fraternity and Sorority Life, Order of Omega-Leadership Honor Society, and Traditions Keeper** will host a picnic from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Quad on the Edinburg campus.

College Dems General Meeting

The **RGV College Democrats**

will meet from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. in Liberal Arts Building South Room 254 on the Edinburg campus.

Vaquero Cumbia Fest

The **Student Union** will host Cumbia Fest from 7 to 10 p.m. on the veranda on the Brownsville campus. Attendees can enjoy live music, food, a flower bar and a petting zoo.

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.

EAC General Meeting

The **Environmental Awareness Club** will meet from 3 to 4 p.m. in the Student Union Salón Jacaranda on the Brownsville campus.

Thursday ASL Club Meeting

The **American Sign Language Club** will meet from noon 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.

Suicide Intervention Workshop

The **Counseling Center** and **Psyc Social Circle** at

Brownsville will host a suicide intervention workshop from 3 to 5 p.m. in Music, Science and Learning Center Room 3.126 on the Brownsville campus.

Hacking Hard Times

The **Clinical Psychology Doctoral Student Organization** will host a hacking hard times event from 5 to 8 p.m. on the Chapel lawn on the Edinburg campus. Attendees can learn about coping strategies for mental health challenges with animals, arts and walks.

Friday Group Exercise

The **Exercise Science Club** will host a group exercise from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the Chapel lawn on the Edinburg campus.

Journey to Financial Freedom Workshop

The **Finance Hub** will host a journey to financial freedom workshop from 12:30 to 3 p.m. in Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship Room 110 on the Edinburg campus.

Bible Study

The **Baptist Student Ministry Brownsville** will host a Bible study from 2:45 to 3:45 p.m. on the Student Union lawn on the Brownsville campus.

--Compiled by Mariah Escobar



POLICE REPORTS

The following are among the incidents reported to University Police between April 1 and 6.

April 1

1:51 p.m.: An employee reported smelling an electrical fire odor near the front entrance in the Life and Health Science Building on the Brownsville campus. Officers and Environmental Health, Safety and Risk Management arrived and inspected the area but found no signs of smoke or fire. The building was deemed safe.

April 2

12:24 p.m.: Officers responded to a two-vehicle traffic collision in Lot E-19 on the Edinburg campus. No injuries were reported.

4:10 p.m.: A student reported receiving nine unwanted phone calls from a male subject,

identified as a former student with whom she had previously taken a class. The case is under investigation.

8:57 p.m.: Officers responded to a non-affiliated woman who fell, causing an injury to her head, in the Texas Southmost College Performing Arts Center parking lot in Brownsville. The woman was transported to a hospital for further evaluation.

9 p.m.: Officers responded to woman who fell while descending the steps in the Baseball Stadium on the Edinburg campus. The woman was evaluated by Environmental Health, Safety and Risk Management, and declined ambulance transport.

April 3

2:01 p.m.: Officers responded

to a two-vehicle traffic collision in Lot E-19 on the Edinburg campus. No injuries were reported.

7:01 p.m.: An officer responded to a non-affiliated woman who was struck by a baseball in her left wrist, causing minor injuries, in the Baseball Stadium on the Edinburg campus. An emergency medical technician bandaged her wrist and gave her an ice pack, but she declined transport to a hospital for further evaluation.

April 4

4:12 p.m.: A student reported his unsecured scooter was stolen after he had left it charging near the entrance of Troxel Hall on the Edinburg campus. The case is under investigation.

April 5

10:11 p.m.: An employee reported finding graffiti in the men's restroom in the Visual Arts Building on the Edinburg campus. Officers photographed the writing and etching and gathered additional information from the employee. The case is under investigation.

April 6

12:26 p.m.: A student reported she unintentionally left her wedding bands in the women's restroom in the Main Building on the Brownsville campus. When she returned, the rings were gone. The case is under investigation.

--Compiled by Narda Serna

OPTOMETRY

Continued from Page 1

The dean said the university is set to meet with creditors Saturday to discuss Stage Two decisions by mid-May. The next step will include a site visit, bringing the program a step closer to preliminary accreditation.

Another important component was the research collaboration with the South Texas Diabetes and Obesity Institute, consisting of faculty

and students who will focus on diabetes-related eye diseases and early detection.

Miller added optometrists play a key role in identifying diabetes before patients are diagnosed.

"Sometimes, optometrists are the first health-care providers that actually get to diagnose diabetes," he said.

The integration of optometry along with the rest of UTRGV medical departments will allow them to provide more coordinated care, capturing

"the patient and provide care from head to toe."

The School of Optometry is set to be located in the nearly 89,000-square-foot former Monitor newspaper building in McAllen, located at 1400 E. Nolana Ave., designed to serve both patients and students.

The location will include 31 exam lanes and is expected to employ more than 20 faculty members once renovations are completed.

The program also plans to

enroll about 40 students per cohort, creating a smaller and more dynamic learning environment compared to other optometry schools in Texas, according to the dean.

While the accreditation process is ongoing, Miller added the goal is to build a program that combines education, clinical care and research, addressing regional health-care needs and professional training opportunities.

CHECK OUT OUR SOCIAL MEDIA
@UTRGVRIDER

Residents voice opinions on new city projects

HUGO SEPÚLVEDA
THE RIDER



THE RIDER FILE PHOTOS

Esteban Guerra (left), chairman of the Port of Brownsville Board of Commissioners, and William Dieterich, director and CEO of the Port of Brownsville, speak about the America First Refining oil refinery project at the port on March 11.

“The regulatory bodies, at federal level, would be the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality,” he said. “For decades, both of those organizations they’ve kind of just proved to the public that they are just a rubber stamp for these very toxic industries.”

Basaldú said his organization has held information sessions to help the community stay well-informed about the risks of gas and oil projects.

From the info sessions, he said some of the concerns local residents have are that much of the material shared by these companies is not available in Spanish, and how it will affect the local environment.

“The most recent public meeting they had [was] March 24 and 25 in Port Isabel; they didn’t even have a Spanish translator,” Basaldú said. “So, that means that people showing, if people wanted to make their comments in Spanish, there was no way for those comments to be translated for the government regulators.”

In a March 25 email sent to The Rider, Jorge Montero, director of Communication for Port of Brownsville, wrote America First Refining stated the

project will create 500 direct full-time jobs, with projected annual salaries ranging from \$80,000 to \$100,000.

“Activity at the Port of Brownsville generates more than 14,000 local direct and indirect jobs across the Rio Grande Valley, primarily from Cameron County,” Montero wrote.

He added hiring commitments are driven by private companies, but the refinery should be similar to the Rio Grande LNG project, which has created about 5,000 construction jobs to date and 73% of the jobs are local hires.

“One of the missions of the Port of Brownsville is to create good-paying jobs for our local communities,” Montero wrote.

He added the Port of Brownsville does not serve as the lead regulatory authority but works closely with tenants to ensure they understand and comply with all applicable requirements.

“Environmental stewardship remains a core commitment of the Port of Brownsville,” Montero wrote. “We expect this project to not only meet but exceed the rigorous standards required to protect our natural resources and the surrounding communities.”

He added the project has obtained

America First Refinery’s necessary permits, and their expectation remains tied that they will continue to fully meet all regulatory requirements.

At the 2026 State of the City Address, Brownsville Mayor John Cowen said the new refinery, planned to break ground in April, will lead the way in sustainability, as it is designed to run on clean power to produce fuels with a lower carbon footprint.

The mayor said the refinery will create 2,000 construction jobs and, after construction, 500 jobs will remain permanently in the community, with salaries exceeding the median salary in Cameron County.

“The America First Refinery is expected to improve the U.S. trade balance by up to \$300 billion in the next 20 years,” Cowen said. “Expanding domestic refining and boosting our nation’s energy security.”

For Rio Grande LNG, the mayor said the company has delivered a “real” impact with five-plant LNG trains.

“The project through Bechtel has a workforce of about 5,500 people, 70% of whom are from our community,” Cowen said. “Once complete, Rio Grande LNG will bring about 700 permanent jobs to Brownsville with an approximate salary of \$100,000 for operational personnel.”

NextDecade’s Rio Grande LNG project is designed to meet or exceed all environmental and other regulatory requirements, which include strict standards governing impacts on air, land, water and wildlife, according to its website.

According to the NextDecade website, “they are committed to environmental stewardship, which includes minimizing emissions and mitigating impacts to wetlands and wildlife.”

In an April 9 email sent to The Rider, Susan Richardson, senior director of communication for NextDecade, wrote if residents want to address questions or concerns, they can email feedback@riograndelng.com or call (888) 209-6643.

—Sophia Cortez and Ethan Maldonado contributed to this story.



VALERIA TOKUN HAGA / THE RIDER

Construction on the Rio Grande LNG project April 4 at 48160 TX-48, Port Isabel, shows a newly planned entrance to the facility.



THE RIDER FILE PHOTOS

The entrance to the Port of Brownsville, shown on March 11, marks the site of the America First Refining oil refinery project, which had its announcement that day.

AWARENESS

Continued from Page 1

Gabriella Oliva, a social work junior, and Bryan Jimenez, a criminal justice junior, said they were not aware that April was STI Awareness Month.

“Not many people even talk about it,” Jimenez said. “I really don’t think people are educated about [STIs].”

Oliva said she was familiar with what STIs are, while Jimenez said he was unaware of STIs but knew of sexually transmitted diseases.

Both students added they do not believe students are well-educated about STIs and their effects.

Vieyra emphasized infections could be spread not only through vaginal sex, but through oral sex, blood contact such as needles and from a parent during childbirth.

According to the CDC, there were over

2.2 million reported cases of STIs in the United States in 2024.

“The three most common STIs in the [Rio Grande Valley] are chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhea, and these are the ones that we have seen an increase in,” Vieyra said.

She said all of these infections are bacterial. Hidalgo and Cameron counties have seen a significant increase in syphilis.

As of 2022, RGV Health Connect shows that the incidence rate for syphilis in Hidalgo County is reported as 7.5 cases per 100,000 population and in Cameron County as 3.8 cases per 100,000 population.

According to the CDC, young people aged 15 to 24 are at the highest risk for contracting STIs as they account for nearly half of all new STI cases in the U.S.

“It’s college; a lot of people are into that kind of stuff, but the worst thing that

you’d want to do is give someone an STI while not knowing you ... are a carrier,” Jimenez said.

Jimenez and Oliva added stigma and fear are barriers for students to getting tested.

“I really think it’s just simply down to shame ... or maybe it’s either their first time and they’re really not aware of the other person’s ... past intimacy,” Jimenez said. “We just have to accept the fact that we’re adults now and deal with the consequences. We might as well continue being adults and have [a] civil conversation about this.”

Oliva said it is important to get tested for health and hygiene reasons to ensure that you are not passing on infections to anyone.

“If you have had sex, get tested just in case,” she said.

Jimenez added he has seen tabling events around campus, handing out

contraceptive products such as Plan B and condoms to get the conversation started on safe sex and preventative measures.

“I really don’t think that is enough,” he said. “You actually have to sit down and talk to people about it.”

Oliva said she believes clinics at UTRGV could offer more resources to benefit students, so they can get tested.

Vieyra said the UTRGV Student Health Clinic offers STI testing and educational workshops for students on both campuses by appointment and walk-ins.

It is recommended to get tested at the beginning of every sexual relationship or at least every six months, according to the Talk About It program coordinator.

She added if someone does have an STI, there are things that can be done and resources available for students to feel empowered about their health.

COLUMN OF THE WEEK

Wake up, no one cares, start living



SAMANTHA CANTU
PHOTOGRAPHER

As I sit at my desk in The Rider office, I find myself wondering what others think of me. Why does that thought carry so much weight? It is easy to get caught up in worrying about how we are perceived, yet the reality is much simpler: Most people are focused on their own lives.

constant self-awareness, especially in a time when phones and social media are prevalent. We scroll, compare and repeat the same routines, often without realizing how much time and energy we are losing. It becomes a cycle, one where we measure our worth against others', question ourselves and hesitate before acting. Instead of living freely, we hold back, afraid of judgment, embarrassment or stepping outside of what feels safe and familiar.

But life is not meant to be lived on pause. Trying new things does not mean losing who one is. Growth and authenticity can coexist. It is possible to evolve while still holding on to one's defining values and principles. Stepping outside of the comfort zone is often what reveals who you truly are, not what takes you further away from yourself.

There is so much value in the saying, "You only live once." Time is limited, and youth is never coming back. Allowing fear of judgment to dictate your

"Allow yourself to fail, to learn and to grow."

choices only takes away from the experiences you could have had. Living fully means embracing both the highs and the lows, whether it's the laughter that makes your stomach hurt, the challenges that knock you down or the resilience that keeps you going. Every moment, whether good or difficult, it contributes to the story you are building.

Humans are interesting. We are emotional and constantly

changing. We feel deeply, we overthink and, sometimes, we hold ourselves back more than anyone else ever could. While it may feel like others are watching all the time, the truth is most people are navigating their own insecurities, their own goals and their own paths. The pressure we feel is created within our minds.

It is also important to recognize how much time is quietly slipping away. Hours spent scrolling, comparing and staying within the same routine can add up quickly. While there is nothing wrong with taking time to rest or disconnect, there is a difference in how it's practiced. Life happens outside of the screen. It happens in conversations, experiences, risks and moments that cannot be replayed or recreated.

So, step away from the routine. Put down the phone.

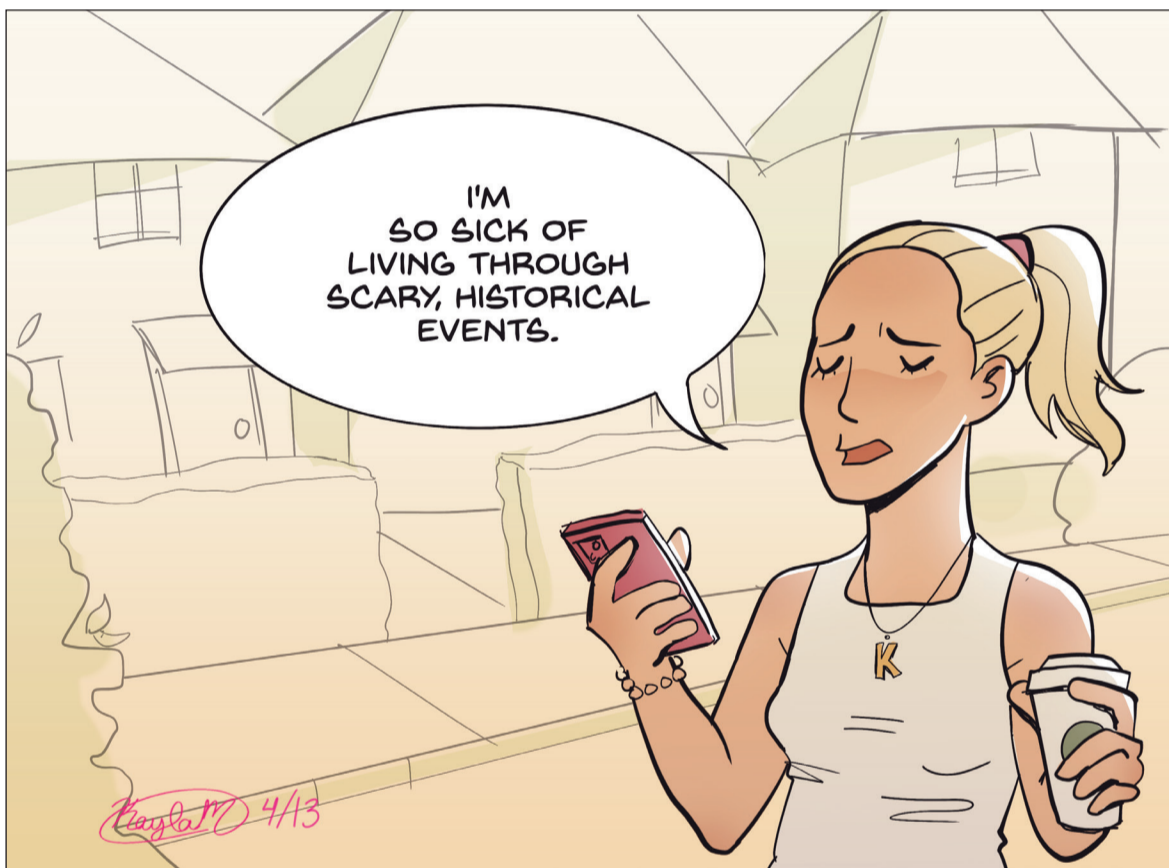
Allow yourself to experience life as it happens. Say yes to opportunities that challenge you. Allow yourself to fail, to learn and to grow. Do not let insecurity hold you back from becoming the person you are capable of being.

There will always be someone who wishes they were in your position, just as there may be moments when you wish for something different. That is part of being human. What matters is how you choose to move forward. Whether it's with intention, with confidence and with an understanding that your life is your own.

Live your life fully. Be present in the moments that matter. Stay true to yourself, even as you grow. At the end of the day, the opinions that matter most should be your own.

EDITORIAL CARTOON

Girl, you're gonna be just fine



VAQUERO VOICE

NASA sends a wake up song every morning to the Artemis II crew. What wake up song would you send?

--Compiled by Alizzaya Guel

Kristian Quiroga
entrepreneurship and innovation freshman

"I would send 'Kickstart My Heart' by Mötley Crüe."



Rene Garcia
accounting senior

"I'd probably go with 'Everlong' by the Foo Fighters; it just gives me a happy upbeat vibe. I don't know why."



Alfredo Zuani
theatre sophomore

"I think 'Mr. Blue Sky' by Electric Light Orchestra would be a perfect choice. It always gets me in a good mood."



Alessandra Jaimes
mass communication junior

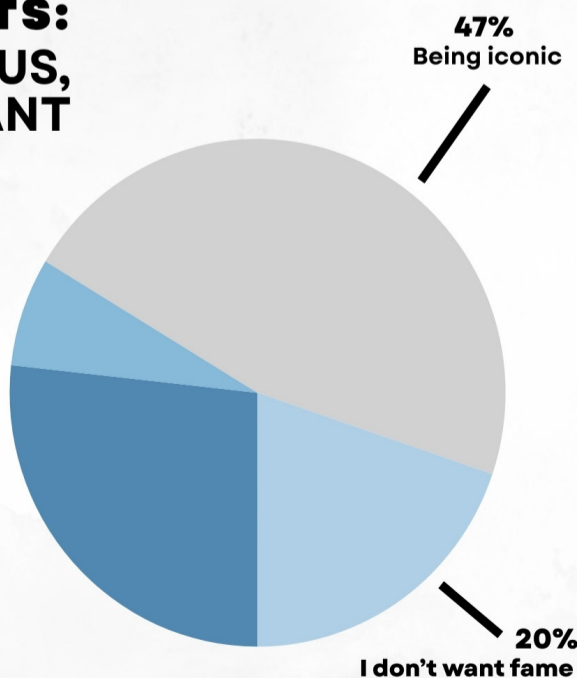
"'Cinderella' by Mac Miller, featuring Ty Dolla \$ign, [because] I really like that song. Yeah, it's a really good song. I think they'd be really happy to wake up to that."



WACKY WEB POLL

LAST WEEK'S RESULTS: IF YOU WERE FAMOUS, WHAT WOULD YOU WANT TO BE FAMOUS FOR?

- 7% Scientific discoveries
- 27% Musical/artistic abilities



KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR
THE POLL ON OUR SOCIALS!
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Hazte la prueba

Concientización sobre las ITS está en marcha

MARIAH ESCOBAR
THE RIDER

Abril es el Mes Nacional de Concientización sobre las Infecciones de Transmisión Sexual, lo que provee una oportunidad para el público de aprender sobre cómo los ITS afectan la vida de las personas y promover las pruebas, de acuerdo al Centros para el Control y la Prevención de Enfermedades, (CDC, por sus siglas en inglés).

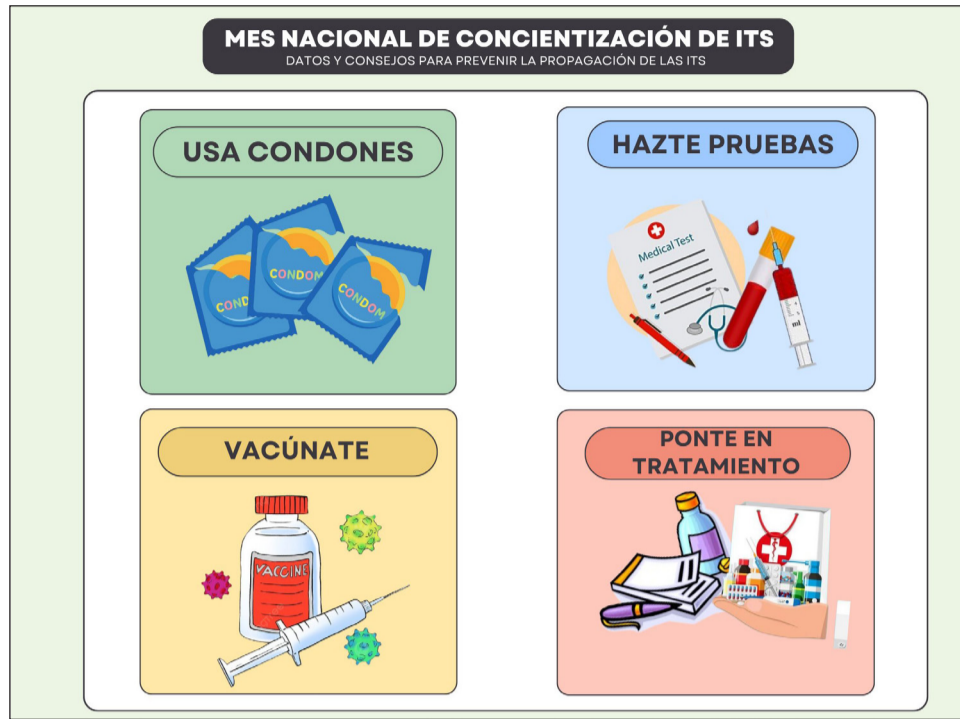
La semana de prevención de ITS (SAW, por sus siglas en inglés), un esfuerzo más focalizado, se llevará a cabo hasta el domingo. La página web de CDC dice que el propósito de SAW es reducir “el estigma, miedo y la discriminación relacionado con el STI, y asegurar que las personas tengan las herramientas y el conocimiento para prevención”.

Este mes ofrece la oportunidad de abordar las brechas de conocimiento y alentar el diálogo con estudiantes ya que es un tema tabú, de acuerdo a Vianca Vieyra, coordinadora de programa de Talk About It Campus Conversations.

Vieyra agregó que una idea errónea sobre los ITS es que los síntomas son visibles, aunque la mayoría de las infecciones no presentan síntomas visibles, y lo más común es no tener síntomas por completo.

“Las personas no sabrán realmente si tienen una ITS o no hasta que se hagan una prueba”, Vieyra dijo.

Gabriella Oliva, una estudiante de tercer año de trabajo social, y Bryan Jimenez, un estudiante de tercer año de justicia criminal, dijeron que no estaban conscientes que abril es el mes concientización sobre las ITS.



AARYKAH NAVARRO / GRÁFICA RIDER

FUENTE: CENTROS PARA EL CONTROL Y LA PREVENCIÓN DE ENFERMEDADES

“No mucha gente habla de esto”, Jimenez dijo. “Yo pienso que las personas realmente no están educadas sobre [las ITS]”.

Oliva dijo que sabía lo que las ITS eran, mientras Jimenez dijo que no sabía sobre las ITS pero sabía sobre las enfermedades de transmisión sexual.

Los dos estudiantes agregaron que no creen que los estudiantes estén muy educados sobre las ITS y sus efectos.

Vieyra enfatizó que las infecciones pueden ser propagadas no solo mediante sexo vaginal, pero también a través del sexo oral, el contacto con sangre (como por medio de agujas) y de un progenitor durante el parto.

De acuerdo al CDC, hubo más de 2.2 millones de casos reportados de ITS en los Estados Unidos en el 2024.

“Las tres ITS más comunes en el [Valle del Río Grande] son clamidia, sífilis y

gonorrea, y estas son las que hemos visto aumentar”, Vieyra dijo.

Dijo que todas estas infecciones son bacterianas. Los condados de Hidalgo y Cameron han visto un aumento significativo en sífilis.

A partir del 2022, RGV Health Connect muestra que la tasa de incidencia de la sífilis en el condado de Hidalgo se reportó 7.5 casos por cada 100,000 habitantes y en el condado de Cameron desde 3.8 casos por cada 100,000 habitantes.

De acuerdo al CDC, las personas entre 15 a 24 años son las que tienen más riesgo de contraer una ITS ya que representan casi la mitad de todos los nuevos casos de ITS en los Estados Unidos.

“Es la universidad; a mucha gente le gustan ese tipo de cosas, pero lo peor que podrías hacer es contagiarle una ITS a alguien sin saber que [...] eres portador”, Jimenez dijo.

Jimenez y Oliva agregaron que el estigma y el miedo son barreras para que los estudiantes se hagan pruebas.

“Realmente creo que, sencillamente, se trata de vergüenza [...] o tal vez es su primera vez y realmente no son conscientes [...] de la intimidad pasada de la otra persona”, Jimenez dijo. “Solo tenemos que aceptar el hecho de que somos adultos y tratar con las consecuencias. Más vale seguirnos comportando como adultos y tener una conversación civilizada sobre esto”.

Oliva dijo que es importante que las personas se hagan pruebas por razones de salud e higiene para asegurarse de que no le están dando ninguna infección a nadie.

“Si has tenido sexo, hazte una prueba por si acaso”, dijo.

Jimenez agregó que ha visto eventos con mesas informativas en campus, dando productos contraceptivos como Plan B y condones que ayudan a comenzar la conversación sobre el sexo seguro y medidas preventivas.

“Realmente no pienso que eso sea suficiente”, dijo. “Realmente te tienes que sentar y hablar con las personas sobre eso”.

Olivia dijo que cree que las clínicas en UTRGV podrían ofrecer más recursos para beneficiar a los estudiantes, para que se hagan pruebas.

Vieyra dijo que el UTRGV Student Health Clinic ofrece pruebas de ITS y pláticas educativas para los estudiantes en los dos campus por medio de citas y sin cita previa.

Es recomendado que se hagan pruebas al inicio de cada relación sexual que tengan o por lo menos cada seis meses, de acuerdo a la coordinadora de programa de Talk About It.

Agregó que si alguien tiene un ITS, hay cosas que se pueden hacer y recursos disponibles para que los estudiantes se sientan empoderados sobre su salud.

-- Traducido por Sofía Cantú Saucedo

VALLEY SPOTLIGHT

MoonBeans Coffee Roasters: ‘Es el corazón de nuestro negocio’

SOFÍA CANTÚ SAUCEDA
SPANISH EDITOR

Después de muchos años en la industria, MoonBeans Coffee Roasters se ha consolidado como uno de los referentes del café en el Valle del Río Grande, combinando su propio tueste con una conexión cultural.

Emilio Beltran, propietario activo de MoonBeans Coffee, compartió que su papá, originario de San Francisco, fundó su negocio en el Valle en 1999, después de dejar su carrera en aviación.

“En ese tiempo, él estaba viviendo con mi mamá en Seattle [...] después se mudaron al Valle”, Beltran dijo.

Agregó que su padre siempre ha tenido un amor por el café y decidió abrir su propio lugar para estar más cerca de él y de su hermano.

“En ese tiempo, no había grandes cafeterías ni cadenas de café aquí en el Valle”, Beltran dijo. “Él quería mostrarles a la gente que el café era mucho más que la taza de 99 centavos de la gasolinera u otro sitio”.

Dijo que el nombre de su café lo creó su mamá: “quería asociar nuestro café con algo fuera de este mundo”.

Además de ser una cafetería, MoonBeans tuesta su propio café.

“Es lo que nos mantiene vivos”, Beltran dijo. “[...] Los tostamos según nuestros propios perfiles; se podría decir que tostar es como una receta”.



FOTO CORTESÍA MOONBEANS COFFEE ROASTERS

Jason Jimenez y Dahyanara Torres, clientes del café, conversan mientras toman café dentro de MoonBeans Coffee Roasters, ubicado en 202 W. Schunior St. en Edinburg.

Dijo que la técnica que hacen ha pasado de generación en generación y que su papá le enseñó a tostar a su estilo.

“Así es como puedo mantenerlo como parte del negocio”, Beltran dijo. “Todo el café que todos beben es, supongo, el mismo. Las recetas de tueste de mi papá [...] son el corazón de nuestro negocio”.

Desde que MoonBeans abrió hace 27 años, dijo que ha notado un crecimiento del interés por el café en el Valle.

“Cuando empezamos, mi papá aplicó a préstamos en el banco y ellos se rieron de

él porque no pensaban que fuera posible vender un latte de \$5 o un capuchino; no pensaban que hubiera un interés”, Beltran dijo.

Agregó que su familia trabajó muy duro para construir el interés de la comunidad y demostrarles a las personas que el café es mucho más de lo que parece a simple vista.

“Ahora, hay una cultura enorme por el café”, Beltran dijo. “Creo que muchos de nuestra edad no podemos imaginar un Valle sin cafeterías”.

Agregó que hay muchas cafeterías con un toque único en el Valle y que “todos tienen el sueño de ser dueños de una”.

Antes de su nueva ubicación en 202 W. Schunior St. en Edinburg, MoonBeans se encontraba en McAllen.

“Notamos que muchos de nuestros clientes venían de Edinburg hasta McAllen para comprar su café”, Beltran dijo. “Queríamos estar donde están nuestros clientes para poderles dar un mejor servicio”.

Agregó que, además de esta razón, eligieron el nuevo lugar por su ubicación, que se siente como “la casa de la abuela”.

“Es una casa preciosa y siempre hemos tenido la idea de que no solo nuestra cafetería, sino las cafeterías en general, siempre han sido un segundo hogar para mucha gente”, Beltran dijo.

Para el futuro, dijo que está feliz de poder seguir renovando su ubicación en Edinburg.

“Queremos hacerlo lo más amigable y acogedor posible para las personas porque queremos empezar a organizar eventos con música en vivo y noches de arte, cosas como estas”, Beltran dijo.

Para quienes buscan emprender en la industria, destacó la importancia de la constancia y de la conexión con la comunidad.

“Tener un negocio no es lo más fácil [...] pero debes creer en lo que estás haciendo y ser apasionado; sé paciente”, dijo. “La comunidad siempre está atraída por la pasión detrás del negocio”.

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A tale of art, lies, legacy

EDUARDO ESCAMILLA
A&E EDITOR

Set in the quiet deserts of northern Mexico, “Mariela in the Desert” focuses on the struggle between following artistic dreams and meeting family responsibilities. Tension is at the center of the story, according to director Jennifer Ann Saxton-Rodriguez.

The production will take place at 7:30 p.m. from Thursday to Saturday and at 2 p.m. Sunday in the Albert L. Jeffers Theatre on the Edinburg campus.

The play will also feature live music by the student group Los Ecos de la Ciudad, performing a set before the house opens and transitioning through the show’s emotional shifts.

The Rider attended a rehearsal and got a firsthand look at the early stages of bringing a performance to life.

Even in sweatpants and casual clothes, the actors brought to life characters with messy, complicated lives.

Written by Karen Zacarías, an American playwright, the play

tells the story of Mariela Salvatierra and her husband, Jose Salvatierra. They were once celebrated in the Mexican art world but, now, they live in isolation.

Kiana Saldaña, a theatre senior who plays Mariela Salvatierra, deals with a web of lies that starts to come apart as Jose Salvatierra nears the end of his life. This leads her to face the sacrifices she made for love and legacy.

“I think the past haunts the present in the play, but the future also haunts it,” Saxton-Rodriguez said. “[Jose Salvatierra] is dying; he doesn’t have long to live. So then, what’s the after for her? I think she’s haunted by the future as well as the past.”

Saxton-Rodriguez said she wants to direct stories that go beyond stereotypes and highlight the joy, success and shared humanity of the Latino experience for her students.

Although she grew up in Michigan, she said her strong connection to the Rio Grande Valley inspires her to support voices like Zacarías’, making sure

the community sees its own lively language and rich, complicated family relationships on stage.

During rehearsal, Jose Salvatierra, played by theatre senior Diego Sifuentes asks Mariela Salvatierra to pose nude for his friend, the famous muralist Diego Rivera.

She objects but tries to compromise, suggesting that if she poses for him, he should also pose nude for her.

Jose Salvatierra turns down her request and tells her that, after he showed her paintings to Rivera, the muralist said he hoped she was a better lover than a painter.

After a lot of pressure, Mariela Salvatierra reluctantly agrees.

According to the director, deception is central to the plot.

To help the actors handle these layers, Saxton-Rodriguez encouraged Saldaña to create a “tell,” a physical gesture that signals lying and is kept secret from the rest of the cast.

“I told her not to tell anyone,” Saxton-Rodriguez said. “Don’t tell me. Don’t tell your



SAMANTHA CANTU / THE RIDER PHOTOS

Theatre seniors Diego Sifuentes (right) and Kiana Saldaña perform during a rehearsal for “Mariela in the Desert” April 1 in the Albert L. Jeffers Theatre on the Edinburg campus.

cast members. Don’t tell anyone. But there’s some things in the lines that are like, ‘Oh, I know when she’s lying now.’ Like by the time you get to the end, you’re like, ‘Oh, wow. That’s a lie!’”

The director said she enjoys how the play’s lies give the audience a chance to figure out when Mariela Salvatierra

is not being truthful.

“I think it’s exciting for the audience to try to solve the mystery as they watch,” she said.

Saxton-Rodriguez explained humor brings the play to life and described it as a “pressure valve” for the audience, helping balance some of the heavier themes, so viewers are not left feeling

only the sad or oppressive moments.

She added she does not see the play as simply sad but as a true reflection of life.

“It’s sad and happy at the same time, which is kind of my favorite thing, sad and happy together,” Saxton-Rodriguez said.

For tickets, visit showpass.com.

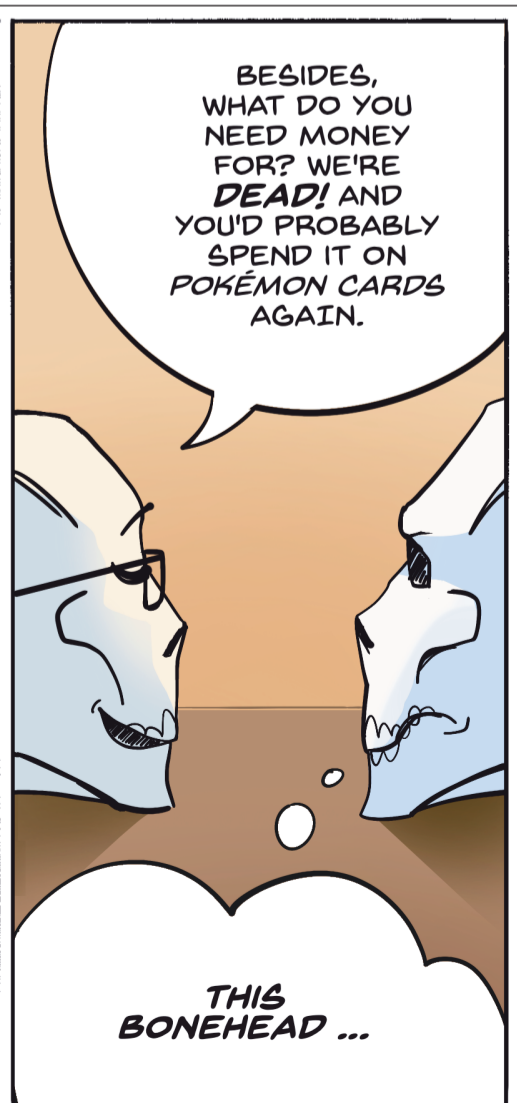
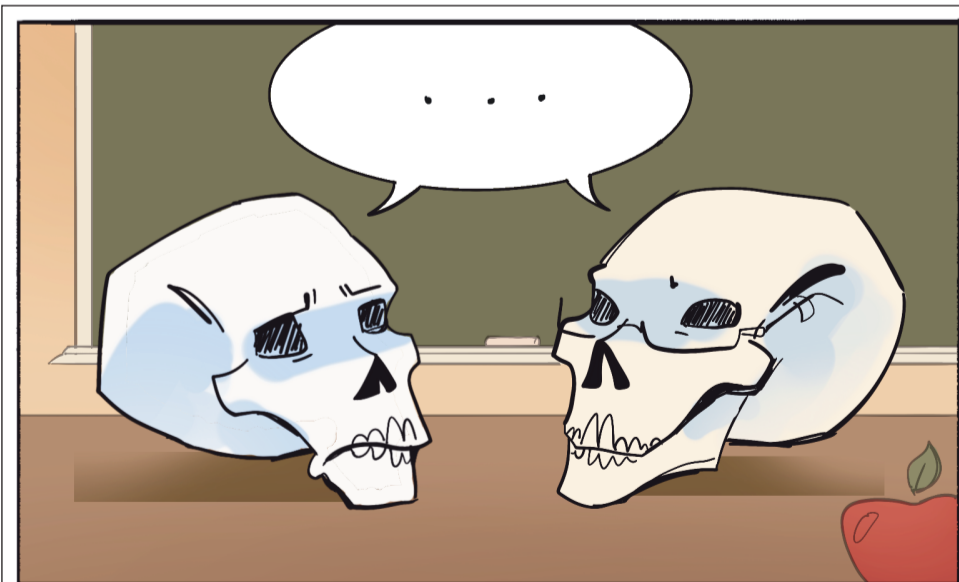


Theatre seniors Kiana Saldaña (left) and Valentina Capistran engage in an intense rehearsal for “Mariela in the Desert” April 1 in the Albert L. Jeffers Theatre on the Edinburg campus.



Alma Caballero (left), a theatre sophomore, and Kiana Saldaña, a theatre senior, rehearse a scene for “Mariela in the Desert” April 1 in the Albert L. Jeffers Theatre on the Edinburg campus.

Cadaver conversations #9



Keyla M 4/13

'They're always there'

How UTRGV helps keep athletes focused on the game

STEPHEN GUTIERREZ
THE RIDER

As travel-heavy schedules ramp up during the semester, student athletes say they sometimes find themselves having to balance academics and competitions, but Athletics staff say systems are in place to help them manage any mental strain.

Letty Hernandez, associate athletic director for Academic Services, said baseball, tennis and golf are some of the programs that travel frequently to compete.

Junior golfer Preston Saiz said trips to compete can be long and require academic preparations beforehand, such as completing her assignments ahead of time and communicating thoroughly with her professors.

"Most of our trips usually fall on Saturdays and Sundays, all the way up to Tuesday and Wednesday," Saiz said.

Despite trying her best to be prepared, she admitted she sometimes accidentally forgets a few things.

"It's a little hectic when we're on the go and, also, there's sometimes no internet to get online and do it," Saiz said. "So yeah, it's definitely stressful."

The golfer said the hours committed have an overall toll on her energy.

"It's a lot of early mornings and, then,



PHOTO COURTESY UTRGV ATHLETICS

Junior golfer Preston Saiz hits a shot in the fairway during the Lady Clerico event Sept. 15 at Hillcrest Country Club in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

getting home very late," Saiz said. "... When you get home from traveling, you don't really have any energy to do your assignments. So, I guess that also comes with doing it ahead of time and really having to be proactive about it."

She added her courses for the semester are carefully planned around her season schedule to allow for as many in-person classes as possible and believes it "helps a lot."

Hernandez said systems within the Athletics department aim to minimize

that strain.

"We meet fairly regularly, myself, sports medicine, strength and conditioning, and our behavior consultant, Dr. [Deepu] George," she said. "We discuss about students we feel need to be referred for any kind of mental health services, or just any issues that come up to sports medicine staff and advisers. We also talk about what the appropriate next step for that student would be."

The collaboration is the effort of a group known as the mental health task

force, whose goal is to monitor the well-being of student athletes, according to Hernandez. Part of its goal is to make sure students never have to navigate challenges alone.

"I feel like our students are supported 100%," she said. "We provide whatever resources they need and, sometimes, us advisers travel with them just to help make sure they stay on track with their assignments."

Saiz added she has received help from advisers and the university's Victory Center in the Vaqueros Performance Center.

"I've gone to tutoring sessions ... and that's been helpful," she said. "Then, our advisers are always checking in if you ever need help or anything. Like, they're always there."

Hernandez added student athletes also have access to multiple mental health resources and the convenience of accessing them in-person or virtually.

"We have the UTRGV Psychology Clinic that's off campus," she said.

"They're a great resource that offers counseling services ... at no cost to the student. We also have the UTRGV Counseling Center for faster appointments, and the [My Student Support Services] app that allows students to meet with a counselor through their phone at any time."

Saiz said she believes the Athletics staff does a "good job" at making athletes aware of the resources available to them.

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ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Sam Whitehead



DIEGO VITA / THE RIDER

Graduate student Sam Whitehead, a member of the UTRGV Men's Tennis Team, practices during training April 2 in the Orville I. Cox Tennis Center on the Edinburg campus.

Sam Whitehead, a 6-foot-3 graduate student from Launceston, Tasmania, Australia, was named the Southland Conference Athlete of the Week March 24 after defeating the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Islanders. During the 2025 fall season, he went 3-9 in singles.

Q: How does it feel to be named Athlete of the Week?

A: "It means a lot because it gives me a bit of recognition for all the hard work I've been putting in, so it feels good."

Q: What has been the key to your performance lately?

A: "I think it's been trying to stay consistent every day in practice, in the weight room, and with classes. Staying on top of everything has been the key."

Q: What part of your game has felt the strongest, and why?

A: "I'd say my competitiveness. I think I've been competing really well, and that's helped me play some good tennis."

Q: What adjustments have you made that are paying off right now?

A: "I've just been trying to get as much sleep as possible, and I think that's made me feel pretty good."

Q: What are your goals for the rest of the season?

A: "Just to win everything we have left and hopefully win conference."

Q: What is a fun fact that not many people know about you?

A: "I wish I was an Australian football player."

--Compiled by Diego Vita

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