MONDAY | NOV. 2, 2026

VOLUME 12 | ISSUE 11

THE RIDER

THE STUDENT VOICE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

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UTRGV develops sensor to detect cracks in bridges

MARIAH LYDIA ESCOBAR
THE RIDER

Students are developing a nanoparticle-based sensor designed to detect cracks in bridges without physical contact, potentially improving infrastructure safety and reducing risks for inspection workers.

The project, which has been in development for the past five years, uses laser technology and nanoparticles to identify structural defects. Researchers are currently testing the sensor on plastic samples and are transitioning to concrete, but it has not yet been tested on bridges.

Constantine Tarawneh, senior associate dean for research and graduate programs and mechanical engineer professor, said the project was developed through the Center for Multidisciplinary Research Excellence in Cyberphysical Infrastructure Systems, funded by UTRGV's National Science Foundation. It is part of a $5 million grant supporting research involving artificial intelligence, sensors and automation.

Amanda Rodriguez, an electrical engineering graduate student and research student, said the project focuses on developing new nondestructive testing methods to address bridge deterioration.

"I think it's just mainly finding new ways for new nondestructive testing methods, because one of the biggest concerns we have is bridge degradation," Rodriguez said.

She explained the nanoparticle-based sensors consist of two components: an emitter and a receiver. The emitter directs a laser toward a surface, while the receiver collects reflected light and converts it into an electrical signal.

According to Rodriguez, when a laser encounters a crack, the light scatters, causing a change in voltage that researchers can use to identify structural defects.

See **SENSOR**, Page 3



COURTESY PHOTO AMANDA RODRIGUEZ
UTRGV students Jorge Garcia (from left,) Sabian Cardenas, Amanda Rodriguez and Aylin Hernandez pose with an optical crack detection system. Garcia focuses on sensor optimization, Cardenas assists with 3D printing and sensor fabrication, Rodriguez leads the system's development and experimental evaluation, and Hernandez assists with testing and data collection.

SIGNING TO THE VALLEY



ADRIAN HERNANDEZ / THE RIDER PHOTOS
UTRGV students in the ASL class pair up into groups to ask each other questions about themselves during ASL class Friday at the Health Sciences and Health Affairs Building West on the Edinburg

ASL lecturers address shortage in the region

JORGE RIOS
THE RIDER

A shortage of sign language interpreters in the Rio Grande Valley is creating barriers for deaf residents seeking education, healthcare and employment, according to local American Sign Language educators and interpreters.

Eric Cardenas, a lecturer in American Sign Language & Interpreting and a Deaf professional interpreter said the Rio Grande Valley's growing deaf population and limited resources have made the shortage critical.

The shortage is particularly severe for trilingual interpreters who can interpret between American Sign Language, English and Spanish, Cardenas said.

To illustrate the shortage, he estimated there is approximately around one interpreter for every 200 to 300 members of the deaf community.

Cardenas said the shortage jeopardizes the quality of school and healthcare appointments when qualified interpreters are unavailable.

"Often with appointments or meetings, if the interpreter doesn't show up or there's not a qualified interpreter, it tends to force a rescheduling ... [with] schools ... schedules delayed ... for months," he said.

Although schools try to provide interpreters, they sometimes rely on paraprofessionals who lack the qualifications to fill the role, Cardenas said.

Elizabeth Olatunbosun, an ASLI lecturer and interpreter, said the shortage affects schools and hospitals, while deaf people also face barriers when seeking employment.

Olatunbosun said hiring can also be a challenge for deaf people, noting a family member of hers who was deaf and applied for a job where the manager said, "You're deaf? You can't hear. You won't be able to work here."

She added the discrimination may stem from misconceptions that "it's too much of a hassle to deal with a deaf worker," dismissing how capable many deaf individuals are in the workforce.

Cardenas said one factor contributing to the shortage is the limited number of people who continue their ASL education and pursue interpreter qualifications.

"I always encourage interpreters in the community ... to go back to school ... get your degree, [get] more ... training," Cardenas said.

SHORTAGE OF INTERPRETERS

According to a university lecturer, there is around one interpreter per every 200 to 300 members of the Deaf community.

UTRGV offers a bachelor's degree and a minor in ASL. Some programs, including rehabilitation and counseling and communication sciences and disorders, require students to minor in ASL, according to Rosemary Sue Linan, ASL lecturer and interpreter.

Linan said enrollment for ASL programs has increased.

However, Cardenas said an ASL minor provides more limited training than a bachelor's degree, which can better prepare students for interpreter positions. He added some students who minor in ASL do not pursue careers in the field.

Linan said ASL students can pursue careers in several fields, such as customer support, law and medicine.

The demand for interpreters also creates employment opportunities for graduates, Linan said.

"Yeah, ... the demand is incredibly high ... we have one student right now who has yet to graduate ... and she's already working ... as an interpreter," Linan said.

Cardenas estimated interpreter rates range from $30 to $40 an hour, with specialized legal and medical interpreters sometimes earning $50 or more. However, he said pay varies depending on specialization, experience and qualifications.

Olatunbosun said while job and financial prospects are desirable, a genuine interest is another crucial aspect when pursuing the field.

"Interperting does pay well. But, ... you can always tell when people are in it just for the money," she said. "It's really important we educate students on both parts."

Cardenas said many students who enroll in ASL programs have deaf family members and want to improve communication. He encouraged more students without those family connections to consider the field.

Olatunbosun said high schools could help address the shortage by informing students about ASL programs and career opportunities.

Beyond education and employment, Cardenas said the Deaf community continues to face barriers to inclusion in broader social and professional systems.

"We haven't really collaborated with the hearing world, [on] a political level ... competitive level ... job opportunities ... there [are] always barriers being put up," Cardenas said. "I've been to several, several different countries and it's been the same everywhere I go."

He said these barriers can leave deaf people isolated from the hearing community.

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

Students Against Sexual Assault
The **Intersectional Feminist Student Organization** will host Students Against Sexual Assault at noon at the flagpole on the Edinburg campus. The outreach event focuses on awareness of sexual assault and provides a space for campus discussion.

RISE & GRIND
University Recreation will host **RISE & GRIND** at 7:15 a.m. and at the same time Wednesday at the University Recreation center on the Edinburg campus. The early-morning session gives participants an opportunity to start their day with physical activity.

Touchdown for Good Volunteer Event
The **Center for Student Involvement** will host Touchdown for Good Volunteer event at 10 a.m. at the University Center lobby on the Edinburg campus. The activity gives students an opportunity to learn about volunteering and campus involvement.

Power Pump Circuit GX
University Recreation will lead a **Power Pump Circuit** group exercise class at 12:30 p.m. and at the same time Wednesday at Texas Southmost College Recreation Center Multipurpose Room 1.202 in Brownsville. Participants can complete a strength-focused workout that combines exercises in a group setting.

PharmX Study Hours
PharmX will host **PharmX Study Hours** at 5 p.m. at the Science Building Room 2.106 on the Edinburg campus. Students can use the session to review coursework and study alongside other participants.

Cycle Fit
University Recreation will offer a cycling fitness class at 7:30 p.m. at the University Recreation Center on the Edinburg campus. The class combines stationary cycling and cardio exercise in a group setting.

Tuesday

Election Day Voting on Campus
Election Day Voting on Campus opens at 7 a.m., with polling locations including the UTRGV Clinical Education Building auditorium in Harlingen, Student Academic Center lobby on the Edinburg campus and Salon Cassia in the Main Building on the Brownsville campus.

Farmers Market
The **Environmental Awareness Club** will host a **farmers market** at 9 a.m. at the Main Building courtyard on the Brownsville campus. The campus market offers a chance for students to explore a community-oriented market event.

GOTV: Tabling Event – Election Day!
College Democrats of Brownsville will host **GOTV: Tabling Event** at 11 a.m. at the East front lawn of the Main Building on the Brownsville campus. The tabling effort will focus on encouraging voter participation on Election Day.

Siempre con Nosotrxs
La Unión Chicana de Hijxs de Aztlán will host **Siempre con Nosotrxs** at 2 p.m. at the University Library auditorium on the Edinburg campus.

Boxing
University Recreation will offer a **boxing class** at 6:30 p.m. and at the same time Thursday at University Recreation on the Edinburg campus. Students can take part in boxing-inspired drills and cardio exercise.

Election Day: Watch Party
College Democrats of Brownsville will host an **election watch party** at 6:30 p.m. at Main Building Room 1.224-ITV on the Brownsville campus. Students can gather to follow Election Day developments and discuss the results.

Yoga
University Recreation will offer an evening yoga class at 7:30 p.m. and at the same time Thursday at the University Recreation Center on the Edinburg campus. The class uses gentle movements, stretching and breathing exercises to support relaxation.

Wednesday

Touchdown for Good Volunteer Event
The **Center for Student Involvement** will host **Touchdown for Good Volunteer** event at 10 a.m. at Salon Bougainvillea in the Student Union on the Brownsville campus. Students can learn about opportunities to participate in volunteering and service.

A Little Pan, A Lot of Purpose
UTeach Student Organization will host **A Little Pan, A Lot of Purpose** at 11 a.m. at the Main Building courtyard on the Brownsville campus. Students can stop by to connect with the organization and its campus activity.

Calculus I: Exploring Derivatives & the Shape of a Graph
The **Learning Center** will host **Calculus I: Exploring Derivatives & the Shape of a Graph** at 5 p.m. at the Brownsville campus. The session will review how derivatives help describe the behavior and shape of graphs.

Thursday

Alpaquita Ranch Day Trip
University Recreation will host an **Alpaquita Ranch Day Trip** at 9 a.m. at Alpaquita Ranch in Monte Alto. The trip gives participants an opportunity to visit the ranch as part of a university recreation outing.

Express Circuit 30 GX
University Recreation will host **Express Circuit 30 GX** at noon at Texas Southmost College Recreation Center Multipurpose Room 1.202 in Brownsville. The 30-minute group workout will feature circuit-style fitness exercises.

Mindfulness and Self-Compassion
Psych Social Circle at Brownsville will host **Mindfulness and Self-Compassion** at 4:45 p.m. at Sabal Hall Room 2.110 on the Brownsville campus. The session will address mindfulness and self-compassion as part of student well-being.

Friday

Sea Turtle Inc Day Trip
University Recreation will host a **Sea Turtle Inc Day Trip** at 10 a.m. at South Padre Island.

Cycle Fit
University Recreation will host **Cycle Fit** at 6 p.m. at University Recreation on the Edinburg campus. Participants can join an evening indoor-cycling fitness class.

Saturday

DPT Field Day
The **Student Doctoral Physical Therapy Association** will host **DPT Field Day** at noon at University Recreation center on the Edinburg campus. The field day offers an opportunity for physical therapy students to participate in group activities.

Volleyball Practice
The **Filipino Student Association** will host a volleyball practice at noon at the University Recreation center on the Edinburg campus. Students can gather for a recreational volleyball practice.

Sunday

STUNDay Night: Holiday Movie Under the Stars
The **Student Union** will host **STUNDay Night: Holiday Movie Under the Stars** at 6 p.m. at the Student Union on the Edinburg campus. The outdoor-themed holiday movie event will offer students an evening of entertainment.

--Compiled by Diego Vita

POLICE REPORTS

The following are among the incidents reported to University Police between Oct. 20-27.

Oct. 20

11:02 a.m.: An officer responded to a two-vehicle collision at the UT Health RGV Cancer and Surgery Center. No injuries were reported.

12:12 p.m.: A female student who felt ill at the Mathematics and General Classroom Building requested an ambulance. Emergency medical services transported her to a hospital for further evaluation.

1:25 p.m.: A student fainted aboard a charter bus traveling to the Brownsville campus. The driver pulled over, and Donna emergency medical personnel evaluated the student, who declined transport. After arriving in Brownsville, the student again declined medical services and was left in her mother's care.

6:19 p.m.: Officers responded to the Visual Arts Building on the Edinburg campus after a report of a suspicious man possibly approaching students. Police found the unaffiliated man smoking on university property, issued him a criminal trespass warning and escorted him off campus.

10:35 p.m.: During a foot patrol of the Brownsville Visual Arts Complex, an officer found drops of blood inside the building. No signs of burglary or property damage were observed.

Oct. 21

8:56 a.m.: A female student reported receiving several threatening emails from an unknown sender off campus in Hidalgo County. Police provided university and law enforcement resources. The harassment case remains under investigation.

9:55 a.m.: A student fell off a scooter in Lot B2 on the Brownsville campus and injured her ankle. Emergency medical personnel evaluated her, but she declined transportation to a hospital.

11:11 p.m.: A student reported his cellphone stolen while traveling on a charter bus from the Edinburg campus to the Brownsville campus. The theft case remains under investigation.

Oct. 22

9:55 a.m.: An officer responded to the University Library on the Edinburg campus after a male student reported falling and injuring his ankle. Emergency medical services transported him to a hospital.

12:29 p.m.: A female student reported a man entered a women's restroom in the Main Building on the Brownsville campus, used a stall and left. According to the report, the man did not speak to or otherwise interact with her. Police provided the student with campus resources.

12:34 p.m.: Officers responded to the Dining and Ballroom Complex on the Edinburg campus after an unaffiliated man reported falling and striking his head on a table. He declined medical assistance.

12:43 p.m.: An officer responded to the Health Affairs Building West on the Edinburg campus after a report a male student exposed his genitals in a men's restroom as another male student entered.

2:06 p.m.: A student reported damage to a vehicle door in Lot B1 on the Brownsville campus. Police determined the damage appeared accidental.

3:52 p.m.: A student reported being struck by a man riding a scooter in the 500 block of Sugar Road off campus in Edinburg. The student declined emergency medical services.

Oct. 23

12:33 p.m.: An officer responded to a vehicle collision in Lot E9 on the Edinburg campus. No injuries were reported.

6:54 p.m.: An officer responded to a vehicle collision involving property damage in Lot E17 on the Edinburg campus.

Oct. 24

12:02 a.m.: An officer responded to the Main Building on the Brownsville campus after a report of a suspicious person sleeping at the location. The person had left before the officer arrived.

Oct. 25

1:46 p.m.: A student accidentally drove onto a yellow parking barrier in Lot E2 on the Edinburg campus. A towing service removed the vehicle, and a work order was submitted for damage to a concrete wheel stop.

10:14 p.m.: A student at The Village Apartments on the Edinburg campus reported someone took her bedsheets and laundry detergent without permission. The theft case remains under investigation.

11:11 p.m.: An officer responded to Unity Hall on the Edinburg campus after a female student reported experiencing a seizure. The student was transported to Rio Grande Regional Hospital.

Oct. 26

7:30 a.m.: A female student reported her electric scooter stolen from a bike rack outside the Student Services Building on the Edinburg campus. The theft case remains under investigation.

10:23 a.m.: A student reported another vehicle struck her occupied vehicle in Lot E26 on the Edinburg campus and left without contacting her. She was not injured. The collision remains under investigation.

10:51 a.m.: A student reported her electric scooter stolen from outside her apartment at The Village on the Edinburg campus. The theft case remains under investigation.

12:46 p.m.: An officer responded to the Science Building on the Edinburg campus after a female student reported feeling ill. Police gave her a courtesy ride to the Student and Employee Health Center.

2:44 p.m.: An officer responded to smoke coming from a parked golf cart near the Mary Alice Shary Shivers Building on the Edinburg campus. The officer used a fire extinguisher to put out the smoke.

Oct. 27

1:14 a.m.: An officer responded to a fire alarm at the Health Affairs Building East on the Edinburg campus. Officers observed no smoke, declared the building safe for re-entry and reset the alarm panel.

--Compiled by Diego Vita

Orange Crush Homecoming week

GAEL ESPINOZA
THE RIDER

UTRGV students celebrated the start of Homecoming week Oct. 26 with free food, activities, T-shirts and personalized football trading cards during Orange Crush at the Main Building Lawn on the Brownsville campus.

Raul Leal, program coordinator for Student Activities, said the event aims to build excitement for Homecoming week and encourage students to show their school spirit.

"Orange Crush is our kickoff event, and really the goal for it is to get everybody in the spirit for Homecoming week," Leal said. "So, we had a lot of free giveaways, including the free UTRGV Homecoming shirt for our students. We also had our campus bookstore present, selling their Homecoming shirt as well for any faculty and staff that wanted to support and wear the Homecoming shirt. And the cool thing is the proceeds for that shirt purchase are actually going to the food bank."



GAEL ESPINOZA / THE RIDER

Marelin Barrales (left), nursing sophomore, and Joshuah Leos, criminal justice sophomore, take part in an inflatable axe-throwing activity Oct. 26 during Orange Crush at the Main Building Lawn on the Brownsville campus.

One attraction allowed students to receive personalized trading cards featuring themselves as UTRGV football players. Erick Ochoa, owner of ReflectMe Events, said artificial intelligence was used to create the cards.

"AI trading cards, where it's going to make everyone into a football player, and they get to take a trading card home," Ochoa said. "These trading cards are essentially limited edition. It's not every day where you can get a trading card with your face on it, with a UTRGV jersey on it."

Other activities included cowboy hat decorating, a stamping activity for pencil pouches and tote bags, inflatable axe throwing and photo opportunities with an inflatable UTRGV chair.

Jennifer Muniz, a Campus Activities board officer and integrated health science junior, said the activities gave students an opportunity to connect outside of the classroom.

"These memories, you carry them along throughout your life. This is just a little memory to remember your school experience," Muniz said.

Santiago Blackmore, a criminal justice sophomore, said the event was fun and he had a great time.

"[The] event's pretty fun, it's nice weather, I'm having fun with my friends, I'm decorating my cowboy hat enjoying the festivities," Blackmore said. "I saw that they had pictures, where if you take a picture, they customize it with AI, that was pretty fun."

Alyssa Charles, a biology freshman, said she hopes new students come by to events like Orange Crush and meet new people.

"It's definitely good to experience the college, experiencing the environment, the people, it really lets you get immersed, especially with showing your school spirit," Charles said. "Everyone here's so nice."

Orange Crush also took place Tuesday on the Edinburg Campus at the Chapel lawn.

Other Homecoming events included Boulderween Wednesday at the University Recreation in Edinburg and Vaquero Games Wednesday at the Texas Southmost College University Recreation in Brownsville.

The Brownsville campus Homecoming parade and Burning of the Letter were scheduled for Thursday at Lot B4. The Edinburg campus events were scheduled for Friday at Lot E16.

The week concluded with the Homecoming football game Saturday at Robert and Janet Vackar Stadium in Edinburg. The Royals will be announced during halftime.

Riff the stress out



ADRIAN HERNANDEZ / THE RIDER PHOTOS

And Venus vocalist and guitarist Robert "Bobby" Ruelas sings an encore song during a local band show at the Flying Walrus Oct. 24 in McAllen. "We all knew each other in high school, we would jam out, nothing serious came out till later on. We used to have Trey Valdez as our bassist, really great friend of ours, but now with Adolfo it's been great. I knew him since 5th grade, we would cover band songs." Ruelas added "Puro Pinche 956" before going backstage.

And Venus guitar player Nate Garcia plays Oct. 24 at the Flying Walrus in McAllen. Garcia is the Director of Digital Marketing for UTRGV. "I love music, it helps me unwind from stress and it's something I love to do outside of work," Garcia said.

SENSOR
Continued from Page 1

"Our main limitation is the sun," Rodriguez said.

She said the sun can interfere with the sensor's measurements, so the researchers have implemented a filter to reduce interference but continue to work to improve the sensor's accuracy.

Rodriguez said traditional bridge inspections often require workers to physically examine structures which can be dangerous.

"What we wanted to do was create a way that ... didn't need a person to go out into the field," she said.

Jinghao Yang, Roderguez's master's supervisor, said researchers are also exploring potential applications for manufacturing quality assessments and other infrastructures.

Tarawneh said the next phase is integrating the technology into a drone which could eventually conduct routine inspections and monitor whether existing cracks are expanding.

He added the university has submitted a patent application for the technology and hopes to commercialize the sensor.

Yang said the project involves collaboration among students and faculty from multiple disciplines, including electrical engineering, mechanical engineering and computer science.

Rodriguez said the technology could benefit the Rio Grande Valley by improving bridge maintenance and preventing structural failures.

"I think it'd be a great way to keep them safe, right, for the community to be able to maintain them just so that we don't have to risk any kind of failure," she said.

LOCAL

Next steps for Port Alpha project

GAEL ESPINOZA
THE RIDER

Port Alpha, a planned shipbuilding facility at the Port of Brownsville, is moving toward construction following its Sept. 30 groundbreaking ceremony, with officials projecting thousands of jobs and the first vessel expected by early 2028.

William Dietrich, Port of Brownsville director and CEO, said the project is in its early stages but could begin showing visible progress soon.

The initial site will cover 835 acres of a potential 4,200-acre development, Dietrich said. The land is currently used as a dredged material placement area, where sediment removed from the ship channel is deposited.

Port Alpha is being developed with Saronic Technologies to manufacture autonomous vessels for military and commercial purposes, according to port and city officials. The project is intended to support the U.S. Navy and commercial shipbuilding.

Brownsville Mayor John Cowen said the timeline is aggressive as the first vessel is expected to be built by the first quarter of 2028.

Port and city officials said the project could provide opportunities for students pursuing engineering and other technical careers at UTRGV and other colleges.

"Shipbuilding has a lot of different facets to it," Dietrich said.

He said potential career opportunities include welding, steel manufacturing, pipe fitting, plumbing, electrical work, mechatronics and engineering.

Cowen said the project is expected to create 10,000 direct jobs and 10,000 indirect jobs over the next decade, with average salaries exceeding $100,000 a year.

"So, you're talking about having a huge economic impact for our people here," he said.

Cowen said the project will help the Brownsville economy and give residents more opportunities to work locally rather than leave the area for employment.

"Our job is to create a diversified economy," he said. "In my opinion, I think we should have a very robust economy, everything from tourism to hospitality, but also to manufacturing, commercial development."

Cowen said Brownsville has historically relied heavily on retail and government employment and Port Alpha could expand its manufacturing sector.

"Now that we have a shipbuilder that's going to create 10,000 jobs, they're going to hire 3,000 engineers," Cowen said. "That's an enormous opportunity for our kids that want to be engineers to come and build the next-generation ship here in Brownsville. They don't have to leave. ... We need to have a very balanced economy."

Hermilio Hernandez Jr., a computer science junior, said Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley is now being a hub for big corporations to take over with little communication to the community.

"[Brownsville has] done this before with SpaceX with the 444 acres," Hernandez said about the disannexed land in the MOU between City of Brownsville and SpaceX, as reported in the Sept. 28 issue of The Rider. "Large capital companies, promises are shared and then they get their gains and they just leave. ... Like, they're usually just using us."

Dietrich said residents should not be worried about the changes associated with the project, adding the port was established to drive economic development in the region.

"I think we all get anxious in life when we see change, and [being] anxious is good, but remember the Port of Brownsville was built ... to become an economic development engine for the Rio Grande Valley," he said. Residents with questions about Port Alpha can attend the Port of Brownsville's regular board meetings, Dietrich said.

COLUMN OF THE WEEK

Pastel, velitas y ... ¿Una carrera?



MICHELLE HERNANDEZ
PHOTOGRAPHER

Siempre he pensado que los cumpleaños merecen celebrarse. Cuando alguien cercano cumple años, me emociona hacerlo sentir especial, casi como si fuera mi propio cumpleaños.

Sin embargo, cuando se trata de mí, la historia es diferente: nunca me ha gustado demasiado ser el centro de atención.

Para mis 22 años quería hacer algo especial, pero entre las responsabilidades de mi último año de universidad y la falta de tiempo, celebrar pasó a segundo plano.

Hasta que un día, mientras veía TikTok, descubrí que algunas personas organizaban carreras para festejar sus cumpleaños. Me pareció una idea divertida y diferente. Así que pensé: ¿por qué no intentarlo?

La emoción pronto se convirtió en duda. Aunque me encanta correr, sabía que no todos mis amigos compartían ese gusto.

¿Realmente se animarían a correr conmigo para celebrar mi cumpleaños? La mayoría confirmó su asistencia, pero, siendo honesta, una parte de mí pensaba que algunos terminarían cancelando o simplemente no llegarían.

Y entonces llegó el día.

Para mi sorpresa, incluso algunas de las personas que pensé que no asistirían, estuvieron ahí. Corrimos por todo el Olímpico de Matamoros. Llegamos hasta unas vías del tren y tuvimos que esperar a que los carros se detuvieran para cruzar algunas calles.

Por momentos, aquello dejó de sentirse como una simple celebración y se convirtió en una carrera de verdad.

Al llegar a la meta, todos estábamos cansados, pero las risas nunca faltaron. Entre el esfuerzo y las ocurrencias, terminamos compartiendo una experiencia que difícilmente habría imaginado de otra manera.

Organizar la carrera también tuvo sus momentos de estrés. Quería que todo saliera bien, pero al final entendí que no necesitaba que cada detalle fuera perfecto para disfrutarlo.

Cumplir 22 años de esta manera me hizo recordar que, a veces, nos preocupamos demasiado por cómo deberían salir las cosas y por si los demás responderán como esperamos.

Sin embargo, son precisamente las experiencias inesperadas las que pueden convertirse en nuestros mejores recuerdos.

Esta vez no necesité una gran fiesta, ni ser el centro de atención. Solo necesité una idea, un par de tenis y amigos dispuestos a compartirla conmigo.

Porque celebrar la vida no siempre significa hacer algo extraordinario, sino atreverse a hacer algo diferente y tener con quién vivirlo.

¿Volvería a organizar una carrera de cumpleaños? Definitivamente.

EDITORIAL CARTOON

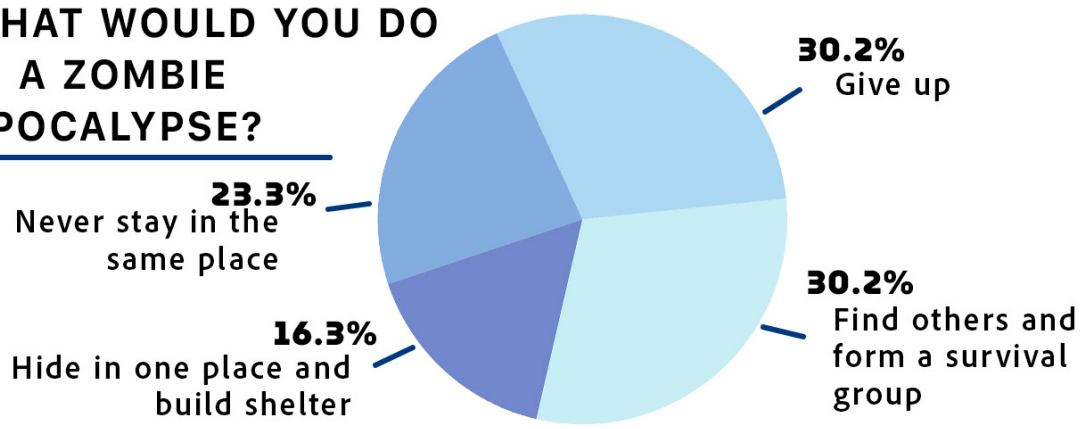
GO VOTE



WACKY WEB POLL

LAST WEEK'S RESULTS:

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN A ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE?



THIS WEEK'S QUESTION:

YOU HAVE TO EAT A PIZZA WITH ONLY ONE TOPPING; WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE?

CHECK OUT THE POLL ON OUR SOCIALS! @UTRGVRIDER



AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

The Rider encourages letters but does not guarantee publication. We reserve the right to edit letters for grammar and content. Letters for The Rider may be sent to therider@utrgv.edu. All letters must be typed and no longer than 400 words. Letters must include the name, classification and phone number of the letter's author or the letter cannot be published. Opinions expressed in The Rider are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Rider or UTRGV administrators.

Próximos pasos para el proyecto Port Alpha

GAEL ESPINOZA
THE RIDER

El Port Alpha, una instalación de construcción naval planificada en el Puerto de Brownsville, avanza hacia la construcción tras su ceremonia de inauguración de obras el 30 de septiembre. Los funcionarios proyectan miles de empleos y la entrega del primer buque a principios de 2028.

William Dietrich, director y CEO del Puerto de Brownsville, dijo que el proyecto aún está en fases tempranas, pero podría empezarse a ver progreso pronto.

La instalación inicial abarcara 835 acres de un posible desarrollo de 4,200. El terreno se utiliza actualmente como área de depósito, dijo Dietrich. El terreno se utiliza actualmente como área de depósito de material dragado, donde se deposita el sedimento extraído del canal de navegación.

Port Alpha se desarrolla junto con Saronic Technologies para fabricar embarcaciones autónomas con fines militares y comerciales, según funcionarios del puerto y de la ciudad. El proyecto busca respaldar a la Marina de EE. UU. y a la construcción.

El alcalde de Brownsville, John Cowen, dijo que el calendario es ambicioso, ya que se espera que el primer buque esté construido para el primer trimestre de 2028.

Funcionarios del puerto y de la ciudad dijeron que el proyecto podría ofrecer oportunidades a estudiantes que cursan ingeniería y otras carreras técnicas en UTRGV y otras universidades.



FOTO ARCHIVO THE RIDER

"Creo que todos nos ponemos ansiosos en la vida cuando vemos cambios, y [estar] ansioso es bueno, pero recuerden que el Puerto de Brownsville fue construido ... para convertirse en un motor de desarrollo económico para el Valle del Río Grande" dijo William Dietrich, director y CEO del Puerto de Brownsville.

"La construcción naval tiene muchas facetas distintas", dijo Dietrich.

El dijo que entre las posibles oportunidades laborales se encuentran soldadura, fabricación de acero, instalación de tuberías, plomería, trabajo eléctrico, mecatrónica e ingeniería.

Cowen dijo que el proyecto espera crear 10,000 trabajos directos y 10,000 trabajos indirectos, con salarios promedio superiores a los $100,000 al año.

"Entonces, estamos hablando de un enorme impacto económico para nuestra gente aquí", dijo.

Cowen dijo que el proyecto ayudará a la economía de Brownsville y dará a los residentes más oportunidades de trabajar localmente en lugar de irse del área para encontrar empleo.

"Nuestro trabajo es para crear una economía diversificada", dijo. "En mi opinión, creo que deberíamos tener una economía muy robusta, desde el turismo hasta la hospitalidad, pero también la manufactura y el desarrollo comercial".

Cowen dijo que Brownsville ha dependido históricamente en gran medida del empleo en el comercio minorista y del gobierno, y que Port Alpha podría ampliar su sector manufacturero.

"Ahora tenemos un constructor naval que va a crear 10,000 empleos, van a contratar a 3,000 ingenieros". Dijo Cowen. "Esa es una enorme oportunidad para nuestros jóvenes que quieren ser ingenieros y construir aquí en Brownsville los barcos de próxima generación. No tienen que irse ... Necesitamos tener una economía muy equilibrada".

Hermilio Hernandez Jr., un estudiante de tercer año de ciencias de la computación, dijo que Brownsville y el Valle del Río Grande se están convirtiendo en un centro donde grandes corporaciones toman el control con muy poca comunicación con la comunidad.

"[Brownsville] ya hizo esto antes con SpaceX y los 444 acres", dijo Hernandez. "Grandes empresas de capital, se comparten promesas y luego obtienen sus ganancias y simplemente se van ... Como que, por lo general, solo nos están usando".

Dietrich dijo que los residentes no deberían preocuparse por los cambios asociados con el proyecto, y agregó que el puerto fue establecido para impulsar el desarrollo económico de la región

"Creo que todos nos ponemos ansiosos en la vida cuando vemos cambios, y [estar] ansioso es bueno, pero recuerden que el Puerto de Brownsville fue construido ... para convertirse en un motor de desarrollo económico para el Valle del Río Grande", dijo. "Eso era esta tierra. Nuestros antepasados y antepasadas dispusieron esta tierra para esto. Para eso es. Y me enorgullece decir que eso es lo que estamos haciendo hoy. Y poder brindar prosperidad económica a nuestra comunidad es el objetivo final que tiene el Puerto de Brownsville".

Los residentes con preguntas sobre Port Alpha pueden asistir a las reuniones regulares de la junta del Puerto de Brownsville, dijo Dietrich. Las reuniones se realizan a las 5:30 p.m. el primer y tercer miércoles de cada mes en la sala de juntas ubicada en 1000 Foust Road, en Brownsville. La próxima reunión está programada para el miércoles.

--Traducido por Valeria Tokun Haga

Entre sombreros y recuerdos



MICHELLE HERNANDEZ / THE RIDER PHOTOS

Estudiantes de UTRGV decoran sombreros durante el evento Orange Crush el 26 de octubre en el jardín del Edificio Principal en el campus de Brownsville. El evento fue parte de las celebraciones de Homecoming.



Calvin Diggs, director del departamento de Recreaciones de la Universidad, participa en las actividades del evento Orange Crush el 26 de octubre en el jardín del Edificio Principal en el campus de Brownsville.



Nick Alvarez, asistente de la compañía ReflectMe, imprime retratos de los estudiantes en el evento Orange Crush el 26 de octubre en el jardín del Edificio Principal en el campus de Brownsville. El evento fue parte de las celebraciones de Homecoming.

Freakfest showcases student horror films

KAYLA MARTINEZ
THE RIDER

The Student Film Association at UTRGV hosted its third annual FreakFest horror film festival Wednesday at the Studio Theater in Liberal Arts Building South on the Edinburg campus, screening 10 student films and recognizing filmmakers with awards.

Maria Cavazos, a theatre sophomore, won Best Picture for her short film, "The Real Mummy," which she directed, starred in and edited. The film was selected from nine eligible entries.

"[Winning] means a lot to me, especially because [filmmaking] is something I've wanted to do in my whole life," Cavazos said. "It was pretty hectic and stressful filming it, and then pretty fun editing it. But overall, just overall, a great, amazing experience."

The festival featured awards for Best Picture, Best Performance, Best Technical Production and Best Screenplay.

Student Film Association President Jerry Fuentes said the organization spent several months planning the event, building on the experience of previous festivals.

"We've had [FreakFest] for two years now, so we kind of know the recipe and how to follow it," Fuentes said. "We planned it out from the very beginning, and we accounted for everything. How many films were [people] gonna submit? How many people are gonna show up? ... It was a lot of stressful planning in the last few months, and I think that it worked out at the very end."



KAYLA MARTINEZ/ THE RIDER PHOTOS

Local band Middle of Nowhere performs a mix of their original music and covers at the Student Film Association's FreakFest Wednesday in the Studio Theater in Liberal Arts Building South on the Edinburg campus. The band's members include bassist Yahir Aguirre (from left,) lead guitarist Joe Medrano and singer Nic Robles.

The event began with a mixer featuring free food and beverages before local band Middle of Nowhere punctuated the mixer with a live performance of original songs and covers.

"Last year, we started the tradition of introducing a live band to Freak Fest," Fuentes said. "I wanted to continue that tradition even now."

Lead singer Nic Robles said Fuentes invited the band to perform after another group was unable to attend. Lead guitarist Joe Medrano added, similarly to film, performing live music takes dedication and hard work.

Following the performance, the screening for the films begun. SFA received 10 films to screen, all falling under the horror genre in time for the Halloween season and theming of the event.

Cavazos said submitting a film was a simple process that required filmmakers to complete an online form and provide attributions to the cast and crew.

Fuentes said that ultimately, SFA met the goals they set for this event, and as a chapter at UTRGV.

"The purpose of FreakFest, SFA as a whole, is to teach these new people coming in that filmmaking is a viable option as a career," he said. "I just spoke with a young man, and he told me, 'Hey, how do I do this? How do I start?' And I told him what I knew ... I want people to come out of [FreakFest] thinking that, 'Hey, I can do this too.'"

Fuentes added the organization welcomes students from all majors and aims to build a filmmaking community in the Rio Grande Valley.

"You don't have to be a film major to do film," he said. "We're here to build a community because the RGV is growing. Whether it's economically, population wise, artistically ... we're undeniable."

Students interested in joining SFA can find the organization on V-Link. The organization also plans to host another film festival, "The Starries," in the spring.

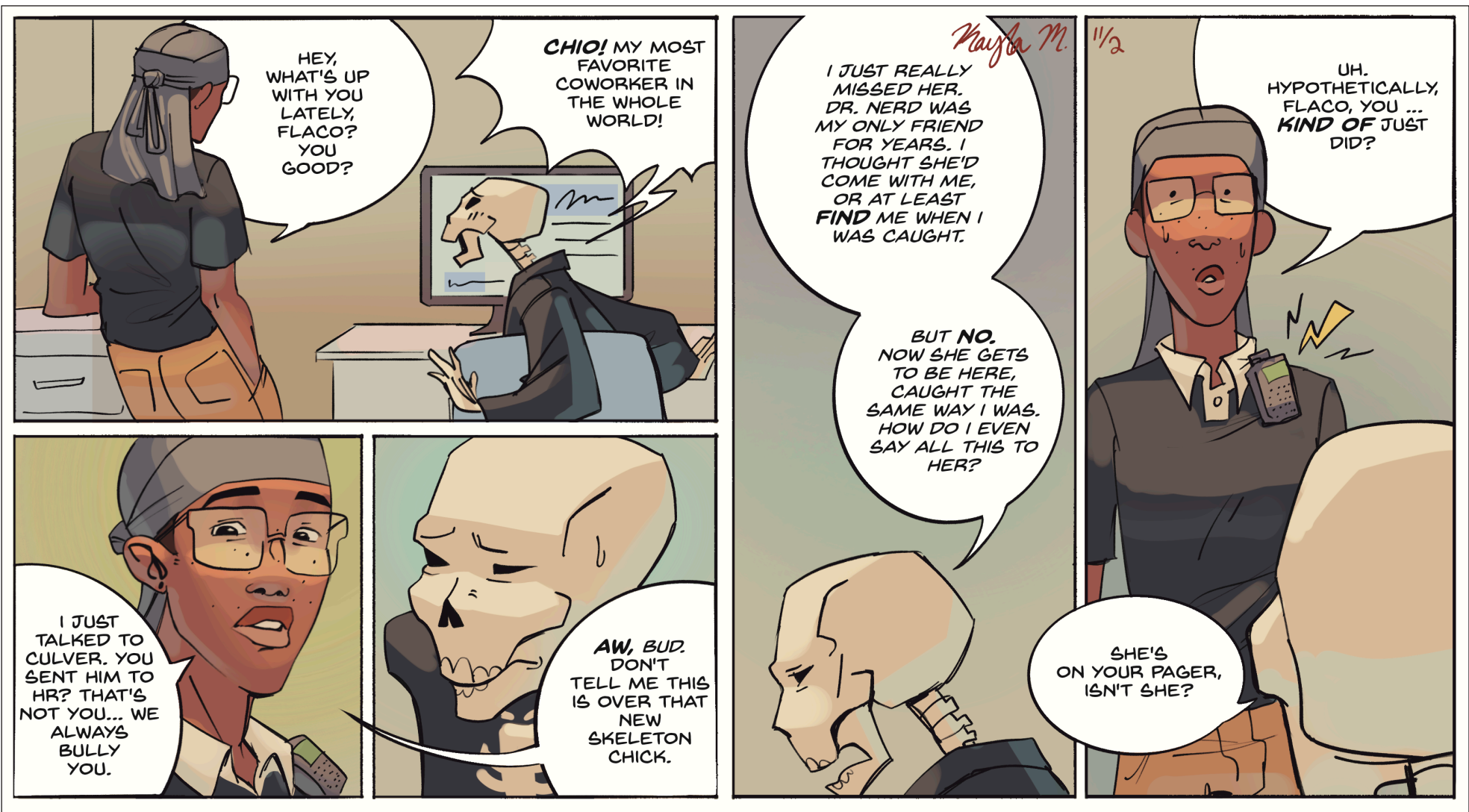


Theatre department chair Peter Mikolasky (left) and Student Film Association president Jerry Fuentes at FreakFest Wednesday in the Studio Theater in Liberal Arts Building South on the Edinburg campus.



Student Film Association historian Abbigael Rodriguez sells stickers Wednesday at the entrance of FreakFest in the Studio Theater in Liberal Arts Building South on the Edinburg campus.

Cadaver Conversations: Coworkers #8



UTRGV Football builds homecoming tradition

TIMOTHY DAVID
THE RIDER

UTRGV Football will host its second homecoming game Oct. 31 against Lamar University at the Robert & Janet Vackar Stadium, continuing a tradition that began during the team's inaugural season in 2025.

The game will also mark the Vaquero's first homecoming matchup on Halloween night, giving the team another opportunity to establish football as part of UTRGV's campus traditions.

Head coach Travis Bush said homecoming is an opportunity to build a tradition and that this is only the beginning.

"We got a couple alumni that are coming back, but you know, to be a part of the tradition now and have homecoming for football games, it'll be a tradition that will start here with these first few years, and that'll be here for a long time," Bush said.

With the game falling on Halloween, Bush said the team is looking forward to the atmosphere



UTRGV junior quarterback Aidan Jakobsohn passes the ball during practice Sept. 29 at the Vaqueros Performance Center on the Edinburg campus.



ADRIAN HERNANDEZ / THE RIDER PHOTOS
UTRGV junior linebacker Jaiden Haygood (center) waves at fans after the Oct. 10 game against Southeastern Louisiana University at the Robert and Janet Vackar Stadium in Edinburg.

surrounding the matchup and plans to wear gray uniforms. Attendees are encouraged to wear Halloween costumes and participate in trunk-or-treating at the tailgate.

"We need everything this week, but I think just Halloween night our guys are excited, you know bring out the grey uniforms and we'll have all the spirits in town, we need it all, we need all the voodoo this week," Bush said.

Mechanical engineering freshman Juan Martinez said each football game experience is different, but the activities available for the students, such as the tailgate, half time and mascot Victory Vaquero, are his favorite parts of the games.

"I've been to every single game, and the experience has been all over the place, but it's real fun, our mascot's great," Martinez said. "I love our mascot, and the little activities we have between the games are always fun. Overall, the way it is right now, it's real fun, the students also get to interact and ... going from cheering to yelling at the football player to go back home, it's been really fun."

Mechanical engineering freshman Sebastian Cruz-Ponce said he thinks the culture at UTRGV makes football games a worthwhile experience.

"I think the culture here at UTRGV is really cool, and really fun. Having the experience to go watch college football here in the Valley is amazing," Cruz-Ponce said. "Being able to go and help out our players with ... just being there with the students, and cheering them up, is my favorite part."

UTRGV held its first football homecoming game Oct. 25, 2025, against the University of the Incarnate Word at Vackar Stadium. The tradition comes as the university continues developing its football program and building a presence in the Football Championship Subdivision.

The program's development began years before its inaugural season. On Feb. 19, 2016, UTRGV President Guy Bailey selected former University of Texas at Austin coach Mack Brown to chair a feasibility study committee examining the possibility of bringing football to the Rio Grande Valley, according to a university announcement on goutrgv.com.

On Sept. 7, 2021, UTRGV's Student Government Association approved a referendum supporting increased athletics funding. The proposal included plans for football, women's swimming and diving, and a marching band serving both campuses.

A total of 5,784 students, approximately 18% of the student body, voted on the referendum. Of those who voted, 60.5 % supported the proposal, while 39.5% opposed it.

The athletics department projected the football program could generate a $13.2 million economic impact in the Valley.

Another milestone came Feb. 25 2024, when UTRGV acquired H-E-B Park. The stadium was later renamed Robert & Janet Vackar stadium on March 21, 2024.

During its inaugural 2025 season, UTRGV became the first FCS program in its inaugural season to earn six victories against Division 1 opponents, surpassing a previous record of five set by Florida International in 2002, according to records from Southland Conference on goutrgv.com.

READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE
UTRGVRIDER.COM



UTRGV fifth-year quarterback Garret Rangel passes the ball to running back junior Brennan Carroll during practice Aug. 25 at the Vaqueros Performance Center on the Edinburg campus.

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

CONRAD KNIGHT

TIANA MEZA
THE RIDER

Sophomore goalkeeper Conrad Knight from London, England has been awarded Ohio Valley Conference goalkeeper of the week for Oct. 27. Knight earned the award following a match against Houston Christian on Oct. 21 where he totaled 7 saves and a shutout victory against Western Illinois on Oct. 24.



PHOTO COURTESY UTRGV ATHLETICS

Q: What got you into soccer?
A: "My dad has been involved in sports all of his life. So, he got me and my brother into sports from an early age. We both started playing rugby and soccer when we were quite little, and then sort of just picked the preference. So, my brother currently plays rugby, and I, obviously, play soccer for the school now. So, it all sort of came from my dad."

Q: What is your pre-practice or pre-game ritual to get you hyped up?
A: "I have a couple of things. ... I wear my headphones in the locker room before games and, you know, I have my warm up routine all set, and I have the same one before every game, no matter if we're playing home or away or if we're playing, you know, an exhibition game or a conference game, it's always the same for me. And then a big superstition I have is my right cleat goes on first, and then my left, and then my right glove goes on first, and then my left. It's something just, you know, to keep the routine is important. ... So, you're as relaxed as you can be on match day and then you can go and perform the best you can."

Q: What are you currently watching?
A: "Well, I'm currently watching a series called 'I Will Find You' based [on] a book by Harlen Coben. ... [My] favorite movie is 'Prisoners,' so, if you haven't heard of that, you're going to have to watch it. It's quite long, but it's very good. It stars Jake Gyllenhaal, and yeah, it's definitely one of my favorite movies. I managed to sit through the whole three hours of it. So, you know it's pretty good."

Q: What are you looking forward to for the rest of the season and your soccer career here at UTRGV?
A: "I'm definitely looking forward to, you know, we've got a home game today and we've got our last conference game on the weekend and, you know, if results go well, and they should, then we'll have the conference tournament the week after, and sort of the sky's the limit for our team. We probably haven't been as good as we wanted to, but we're sort of peaking at the right time now. So, it would be definitely good to end the season on a high note, and then for the rest of my UTRGV career, I just want to just keep winning basically and see how many rings I can pick up. Also seeing if I can get some personal awards ... as well as getting some team awards."

READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE
UTRGVRIDER.COM

Gina Hinojosa
for Texas Governor

As we're entering the final weeks of this election, I wanted y'all, the next generation of Texas leaders, to be able to hear from me directly.

I grew up in Brownsville and went to UT Austin. What I found on campus was Texas itself. Panhandle kids and Houston kids, Valley kids and rural kids, people who had worked their way through school and people who had never worried about money. I learned just how big and complicated this state is, and how much promise it holds. I know you see it too whether you're at Texas A&M or Texas Tech or anything in between.

You are about to inherit Texas, and each of you has some idea of the life you want to build here. Maybe you will start a company, teach in a classroom, work in public service, or do something you haven't quite figured out yet. Whatever your piece of the American Dream looks like, Texas should be the place where you can make it happen.

You are doing your part but Texas is not holding up its end. State government is working for insiders and billionaire donors while public schools are starved, costs keep rising, and ordinary Texans pay the Abbott corruption tax. Follow the money and you find the answer to almost every question about why things here are harder than they should be. I have spent my career fighting that.

College students across Texas have real power in this election. You will help decide what Texas becomes and who it belongs to. Is this a Texas by and for the people, or is this the billionaires' world and we just live here?

I believe Texas belongs to all of us. That's why I'm running for governor: to secure the American Dream
by saving Texas schools and putting money in your pocket.

It's time for a change, and this election, we're going to prove it.

I'll see you at the polls,

Gina Hinojosa

Candidate for Governor
ginafortexas.com

PS. You can find your nearest polling place at IWillVote.com/Texas. Make a plan to vote early, October 19–30. Election Day is November 3.



POL. ADV. PAID BY GINA HINOJOSA CAMPAIGN