

**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE HEARING ENTITLED:**

**“ENGINES OF ECONOMIC MOBILITY: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES, HISTORICALLY  
BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, AND MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS IN PREPARING  
STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS”**

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**The University of Texas**  
**Rio Grande Valley**<sup>™</sup>

Good morning Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Member Smucker, and honorable Committee Members. I am Patricia Alvarez McHatton, Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs, Students Success, and P-16 Integration at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and I am grateful for the invitation to address you today. I want to especially thank you for seeking the input of stakeholders as you gather important information regarding the contributions of community colleges, HBCUs, and minority serving institutions in preparing students for success.

## **Setting the Context**

UTRGV was created by the Texas Legislature in 2013 as the first major public university of the 21st century in Texas. This transformative initiative provided the opportunity to expand educational opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley, including a new School of Medicine, and made it possible for residents of the region to benefit from the Permanent University Fund – a public endowment contributing support to the University of Texas System and other institutions.

UTRGV has campuses and off-campus research and teaching sites throughout the Rio Grande Valley. Our service area spans four counties stretching across approximately 150 miles along the U.S./Mexico border. UTRGV was recently elevated to the second-highest classification of the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education and is now classified as a Doctoral University – High Research Activity (R2). To be classified as an R2 institution, UTRGV awarded at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees last year and had at least \$5 million in total research expenditures as reported through the National Science Foundation (NSF) Higher Education Research & Development Survey (HERD).

The Rio Grande Valley is one of the fastest growing areas in the state and nation. Our Fall 2018 enrollment was 28,644 with 87.9% of our students self-identifying as Hispanic. Almost 93% of our students are from the Rio Grande Valley; 59% of our students are first generation in college; 75.8% of all undergraduate students receive some form of financial aid; 81% of undergraduate students receiving financial aid are Pell Grant eligible; and 79% of Pell Grant eligible students have zero Expected Family Contribution.

But that is not the sum of our students, as 100% of our students:

- Are committed to family,
- Persevere in their educational endeavors,
- Understand responsibility, and
- Want to give back to their community.

And 100% of our families:

- Understand the value of an education,

- Support their child’s pursuit of an education, and
- Want to be included in their child’s progression in higher education.

In fiscal year 2018, we graduated 5,346 students and in spring 2019 we graduated our largest class ever—over 3,400 students. Our current enrollment makes us the 10<sup>th</sup> largest 4-year public university in Texas and the 5<sup>th</sup> largest within the UT System.

In addition, per *Washington Monthly Rankings* and *BestColleges*, we rank:

- 1<sup>st</sup> in Texas and 1<sup>st</sup> nationally in affordability;
- 1<sup>st</sup> in Texas and 23<sup>rd</sup> nationally in social mobility;
- 1<sup>st</sup> in Texas and 9<sup>th</sup> nationally in the performance of students who are first generation;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> in Texas and 15<sup>th</sup> nationally in performance of students who are Pell recipients;
- 79<sup>th</sup> among national universities and 4<sup>th</sup> best in Texas behind UT Austin, Rice University, and Texas A&M University;
- 1<sup>st</sup> in Texas, 2<sup>nd</sup> nationally for awarding the most undergraduate 4-year degrees to Hispanics;
- 1<sup>st</sup> in Texas, 4<sup>th</sup> nationally for awarding the most graduate degrees to Hispanics;
- 1<sup>st</sup> in Texas and 2<sup>nd</sup> nationally for awarding the most biology and biomedical sciences bachelor’s degrees to Hispanics;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> among national institutions for awarding mathematics bachelor’s degrees to Hispanics;
- And are one of the top 10 producers of Hispanic physicists and engineers in the U.S.

We also are the national champions in Chess for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row, and a team of three UTRGV undergraduate business students recently beat out more than 500 teams from 37 countries to capture their first championship win in the 15th annual CME Group Trading Challenge. The UTRGV team finished the international competition with a total of \$706,585, handily beating out second-place competitor Kansas State University with just \$533,910, followed by The University of Malaya in Malaysia, the Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano in Colombia, and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

### **What we *do* as an HSI**

The work we do is guided by five priorities. At the core is student success. We ensure student success by providing educational opportunities; engaging in research that impacts the Rio Grande Valley and beyond; expanding health and medical education, which is essential given that we are a medically underserved community with some of the highest diabetes rates in the nation; and collaborating with our community as true partners in our work.

This work is guided in large part by four pillars, which consist of an ethic of care, an ethic of community, an ethic of inquiry, and an ethic of agency. We understand and value the strengths, assets, and beauty within our community, and the commitment and contributions of all our key stakeholder in ensuring student success.

### **Attending to the Affective Domain**

We are committed to providing an environment that is conducive to student learning and provides role models for our students. Thus, ensuring that our faculty and staff are representative of our student population is of utmost importance because our students need to see people who look like them, sound like them, and talk like them in a variety of roles. We do this through outreach efforts to recruit under-represented faculty. As a result of federal funding including NSF ADVANCE, INCLUDES, and Title V, we have developed programs to support under-represented faculty within the academy and specific disciplines.

We recognize the value our key stakeholders place on family and community; thus, we have several initiatives that facilitate development of strong partnerships with our community. For example, the Office of Community Engagement and Economic Development and the Bilingual, Bicultural, and Biliterate Institute (B3) provide professional development to College of Science STEM faculty and others in culturally relevant pedagogy and community engaged scholarship and learning. The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) and B3 provide professional development workshops for faculty and staff that address culturally relevant relationship building with community organizations; culturally relevant pedagogy; institutional resources, content, and assessment; and community engaged scholarship, curriculum, and syllabus. This work is supported through an NSF grant. We also benefit from a U.S. Department of Education American History and Civics Education-National Activities Grants, supporting history and citizenship in the RGV through place-based education.

The Office of Community Engagement and Economic Development has formalized its commitment to creating systems to foster the development of authentic, culturally relevant, and reciprocal partnerships between UTRGV and the larger community through the *Community Learning Exchange* (CLE). The CLE brings key stakeholders together to share cultural perspectives, talents, gifts, challenges, and opportunities. Through this process, traditional power structures are dismantled, and communities are empowered to provide input into university policies, curriculum, research, and initiatives.

Another important aspect of this work is transforming the institution into a family friendly space—a space in which all feel welcomed and valued. The **College of Education and P-15 Integration (CEP)** took the lead in this by working collaboratively with community organization on various initiatives including a photovoice project entitled: *El Lenguaje Universal: Las fotos*, which asked families what we needed to know about them, their community, and their child, to

teach him or her effectively. In addition, faculty and leaders in CEP are conducting research on the integration of translanguaging pedagogies in teacher preparation and provided professional development to faculty from across the institution on the integration of translanguaging pedagogies in their specific disciplines aimed at leveraging students' linguistic repertoires for learning. Translanguaging legitimizes the fluid language practices within which bilinguals operate. The CEP also has sponsored Special Interest Research Interest Groups (SIRGS) to support faculty research on what it means to be a Hispanic Service College of Education. This work is being expanded to the institutional level through a partnership with Academic Affairs to support research on what we **do** as an HSI in response to our student population.

In addition, we have several initiatives to ensure our students progress through their programs of study in a timely manner. For example, our tuition is capped at 12 credit hours. This means students do not pay tuition for any course above 12 credit hours; thus, students who graduate in four years end up with one free semester—not only are they graduating in a timely manner, they are doing so with less debt.

We also have recently implemented our PROMISE Programs. These are discipline specific and represent our promise to our students that if they progress through their program as stipulated in their PROMISE Program, they will graduate in four years. Specifically, if students participate in targeted career development opportunities, meet with mentors per the designated timelines, adhere to their program course sequence, maintain a 2.75 GPA, and complete 15 credit hours per semester or 30 credit hours per calendar year, they will be assured access to the classes necessary to complete their program of study within four years.

### **Meeting Business and Industry Needs through Degree Programs and Partnerships**

We recognize that employers, educators, and workforce systems must work in tandem if our current and future workforce needs are to be met. This alignment is made possible in a variety of ways, as each of our colleges is engaged in outreach.

#### *College of Engineering and Computer Science (COECS)*

The COECS sponsors a series of K-12 summer camps and competitions to inspire our K-12 learner to enter STEM fields and high-tech jobs. An important emphasis of this work is ensuring our females take part in these initiatives. This work is undertaken in collaboration with economic development and workforce solutions. The college also works with regional economic development centers to recruit companies to the Rio Grande Valley by offering Research and Development support and enhanced internship opportunities for our students.

#### *College of Science (COS)*

The Department of Physics and Astronomy conducts systematic outreach to K-12 learners through a variety of activities designed to foster an understanding of physics and an interest in entering the profession. The Center for Advanced Radio Astronomy (CARA) has been successful in recruiting retaining and placing students into STEM careers in academia and industry. The vision of CARA is to advance scientific knowledge through innovative discoveries, develop sustainable solutions to local and global grand challenges through community engaged scholarship and learning, and train future scientists and professionals who are academically competent, socially aware, globally engaged, career ready, and ethical leaders.

STARGATE aims to deliver education for local talent for the commercial space industry, focusing on student and faculty research translation and commercialization of technologies with NewSpace applications. Students have gone on to develop optical telescopes, robotics curriculum for STEM education, participate in space settlement design competitions, and space settlement design entrepreneur tournament.

#### *College of Fine Arts (COFA)*

The COFA is collaborating with the Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship (VCOBE), College of Engineering and Computer Science, and the School of Medicine respectively to establish different interdisciplinary areas with the aim of creating new jobs and new possibilities for creative arts students. The COFA already has a relationship in place with the Rio Grande State Center in Harlingen whereby Art students are working directly with patients as part of the rehabilitation of such patients.

#### *College of Liberal Arts (COLA)*

The COLA has been working diligently to hire more bilingual faculty. It has also been focused on launching the Ph.D. program in Clinical Psychology with its' focus on Hispanic mental health. Half of the program faculty are English-Spanish bilinguals who will be operating a clinic with the capacity to serve both Spanish and English-speaking clients.

#### *Robert C. Vackar College of Business & Entrepreneurship (VCOBE)*

The VCOBE engages students in a variety of world assignments and projects helping the local community. Many of our student organizations provide charitable work for the local community empowering low-income communities to develop their entrepreneurial endeavors. Cybersecurity bootcamps are provided to local high school students during the summer. Our new Weslaco Regional Commercialization & Innovation Center made possible through an Economic Development Administration grant provides a venue for entrepreneurial activity, including teaching, learning, research and service for students, faculty, staff, non-profits, governmental support organizations, and the upcoming business community. The VCOBE increasingly grows student internship opportunities through engagement with regional

business enterprises. Through participation in the National Science Foundation I-Corps program, we have undergraduate and graduate students successfully competing on the national level in developing innovative products and services into viable business ventures.

*School of Medicine and College of Health Affairs (SOM and COHA)*

In addition to the efforts listed above, our School of Medicine is working to build pathways, so students interested in the health professions have a seamless transition into higher education. The School of Medicine continues its mission to close gaps in health care and expand educational opportunities for its students with its Area Health Education Centers, which run primary healthcare clinics operated by professional healthcare staff, faculty, and students of the School of Medicine and the College of Health Affairs. Additionally, a new collaboration with Valley Grande Institute is establishing a pipeline from vocational nursing certification to a bachelors/master's degree in nursing in order to address the nursing shortage.

**Why Hispanic Serving Institutions are important**

Hispanics are becoming an increasingly important part of our labor force. Between 2000 and 2010 Hispanics accounted for 54% of the labor growth. It is projected between 2010 and 2020 74% of the growth of the civilian workforce will be Hispanic.

HSIs provide Hispanics the greatest access to a college education and represent over 15% of all higher ed institutions yet serve 66% of all Hispanic undergraduates. In 2016 HSIs awarded 56.4% of all degrees to Hispanic students and are at the forefront of efforts to increase educational access and success for the nation's Hispanic citizens.

**Closing**

I thank you for this opportunity to share the work being undertaken at UTRGV and stand ready to work with you in ensuring all students are ready for success.