



## SOUTH TEXAS STATUS

UPDATES FROM SPECIAL ADVISOR JULIO LEON, PH.D.



### March 2014

Since the last South Texas update, we are continuing to make great progress on establishing The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and its school of medicine.

Recently, [Francisco Fernandez, M.D.](#), professor and chairman of psychiatry and neurosciences at the University of South Florida College of Medicine in Tampa, was named as the founding dean of the UTRGV Medical School. It is a pleasure to welcome Dr. Fernandez, who is an eminently qualified leader with extensive medical education experience. He was introduced to the South Texas community by UT System Chancellor Francisco G. Cigarroa, M.D., during a live broadcast from the Valley yesterday.

I invite you to read on for updates on the UTRGV working groups, task forces and committees.

### The 2015 Inaugural Class for UTRGV

The work to develop admission policies and procedures for the UTRGV freshman class and new transfer classes of 2015 has begun.

The UTRGV Inaugural Class Task Force is charged to create a target profile (ideal descriptive characteristics) of the initial first-year and new student transfer classes for UT Rio Grande Valley. Comprised of representatives from UTB, UTPA and UT System, the group will review policy, procedures and practices that will increase the likelihood of recruiting these students. In addition, the task force will consider admissions criteria and strategies for evaluating candidates for admission to optimize college access and student success. Task force members will also work with area high school officials and community college representatives to ensure that students gain the necessary skills and competencies for admission, as well as providing clear pathways to UTRGV for those students who initially do not qualify for admission. The goal is to have a number of alternatives and strategies to review by late April 2014.

### Communications and Community Engagement Committee

The UTRGV Committee on Communication and Community Engagement met in early February to discuss all issues regarding the transition of promotional and branding activities from UTB/UTPA to UTRGV and to create a comprehensive communication and marketing strategy.

Of immediate concern were the overlapping needs to promote and market to prospective UTPA and UTB students for the Fall of 2014 and to prospective UTRGV students for the Fall of 2015.

UTB and UTPA will communicate that existing degree programs will continue to exist, as teach out, for those students who are currently enrolled, particularly looking to Fall 2014 enrollment.

The first UTRGV promotional piece was developed to hand out to current high school juniors. The UTRGV promotional piece was also handed out to some 1600 high school seniors and their parents at a UTPA orientation for 2014 freshman students who have been accepted.

Other issues discussed at the meeting were the acceleration of a plan for a logo, school colors and mascot; a transitional and cohesive look and image as a UT institution; messages for top signature features of the new university; the urgent need for a significant budget to drive strategy, faculty and staff communications, and an external communication plan; and the need for a functioning UTRGV website.



Isai Ortiz, a Junior at BETA (South Texas ISD)

## **Feedback on Working Groups Recommendations**

Nine small groups are currently reviewing and evaluating the recommendations that were made by the Academic Program Working Groups. These nine groups are made up of UTPA and UTB deans, the co-chairs of the Academic Program Working Groups and additional faculty selected from UTB and UTPA who were not part of the original working groups.

Based on this evaluation and feedback, the working documents may be modified, and they will be posted on the websites of both UTB and UTPA to allow faculty, staff and students, and the external community to provide additional feedback. This will be followed by a series of Town Hall meetings in March and April at both UTB and UTPA. The primary goal of these interactions is to seek comprehensive feedback on innovative ideas and recommendations for current and new academic programs and the academic structure that has been suggested by some academic working groups. The new university's organizational structure will be eventually designed by the UT System in consultation with UTRGV's founding president, but the feedback and recommendations provided by the working groups, along with recommendations from external consultants, will become important considerations for the final design.

Similar feedback strategies are also being developed for the academic administration and the operation administration working group reports. In addition, all working group reports will be reviewed by external consultants over the next several months to help identify common themes and compare recommendations to high-impact strategies.

### **New Medical School Operations Committee**

The Operations Committee for the transition to the new UTRGV medical school held its initial meeting in Austin on Wed., Feb. 19. The committee is chaired by Michael Black, senior executive vice president and chief operating officer of The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, and its membership is comprised of leadership from the UT System, UTHSC San Antonio and representatives from the three Valley campuses.

The committee is charged with designing and implementing a plan to prepare and open the new medical school in the summer of 2016.

### **Ask a Question or Offer a Suggestion**

Remember that you can learn more about UTRGV by submitting an anonymous question to the [Ask a Question section](#) of the Project South Texas website. Every effort will be made to post a response within 24 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

#### **Julio S. Leon**

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The University of Texas System