

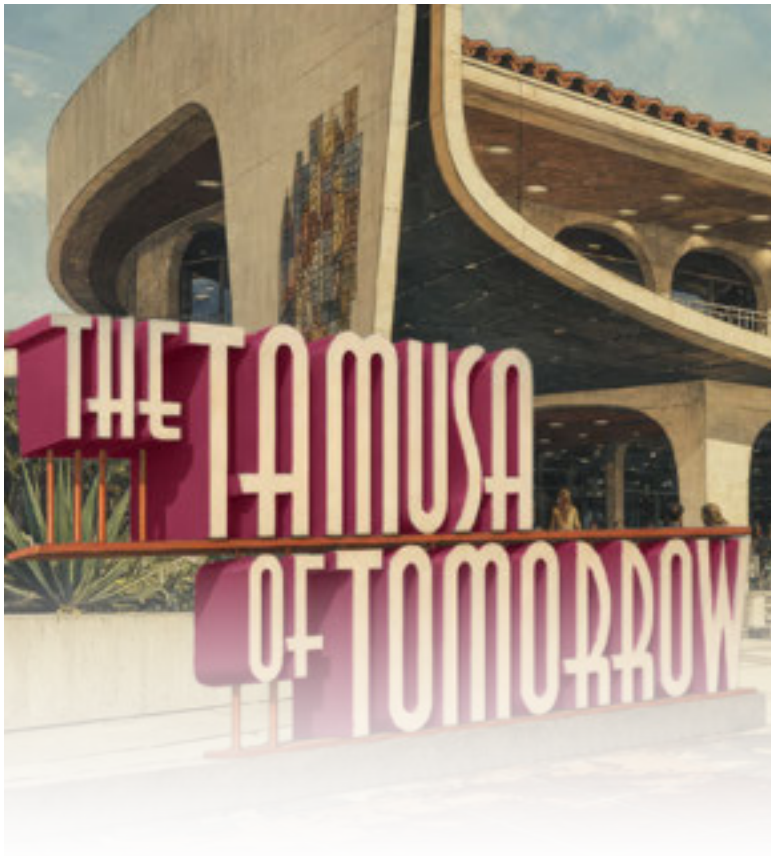
FALL 2026

iADELANTÉ!

THE MAGAZINE OF TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY—SAN ANTONIO

THE TAMU
OF TOMORROW





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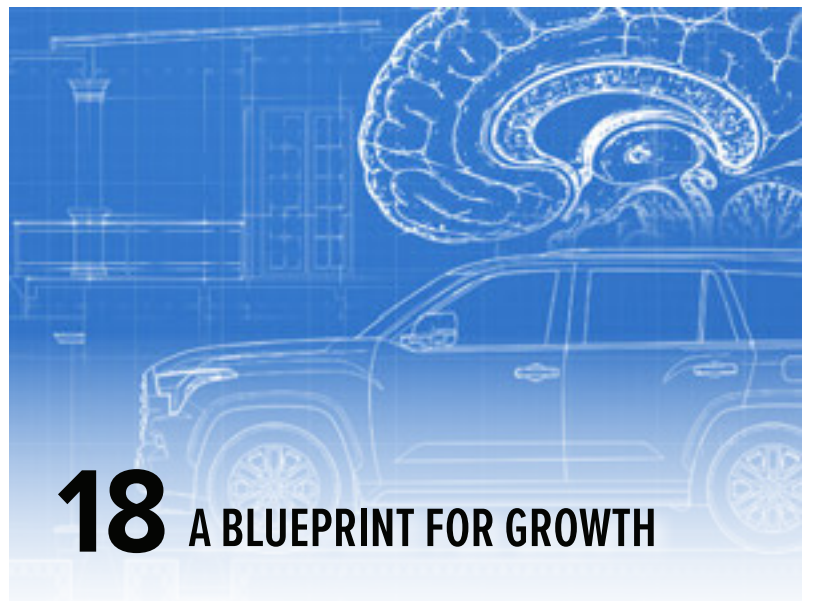
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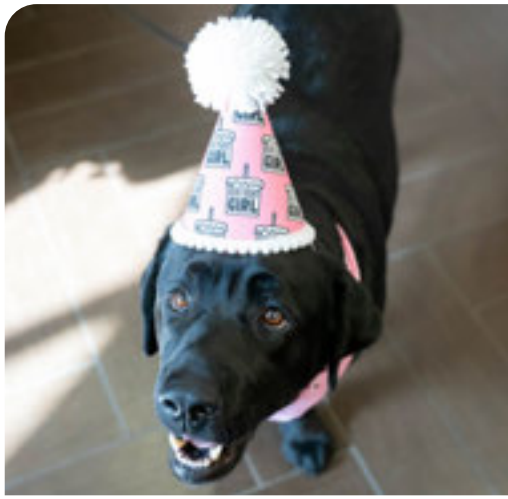
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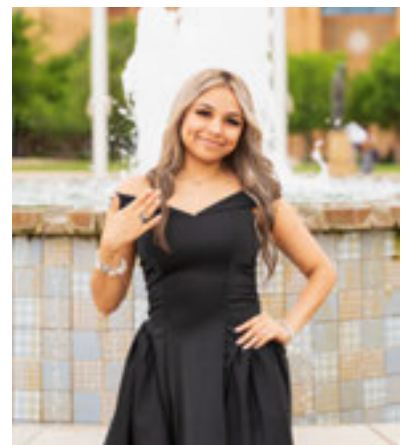
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WE ARE ALL IN

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

This edition of *¡Adelante!* holds a special place in my heart, as it focuses on the exciting future we are building at Texas A&M University-San Antonio — the future of our campus, our students and our community. I am very proud to share that our future now has a clear roadmap, which is laid out in our brand-new strategic plan, *TAMUSA 2030: All In*.

I call it “our strategic plan” because that is what it truly is. *All In* is the next chapter for our University, and it will take all of us working together to achieve our goals. It is focused around six pillars that you will see woven throughout this edition — and every future edition. You’ll get to see how our faculty, staff and students envision building a destination campus through their ideas for the TAMUSA of Tomorrow.

Our goals of connecting with the community and growing our student population are on full display as we walk you through our approach to strengthening the education pipeline, where ambition meets access at A&M-San Antonio. This starts very early in a child’s education and will soon include the opening of our new child care and teaching facility, Educare.

You’ll learn more about how we are building strong leaders from within through our employee Leadership Academy, which supports our goal of fostering employee fulfillment and excellence, and in turn is critical to our commitment to supporting student success.

Last, you’ll read a lot about the exceptional scholarly and creative work that our faculty are doing, earning national and international recognition and making valuable contributions in new and exciting fields of research that advance our goal of achieving academic distinction.

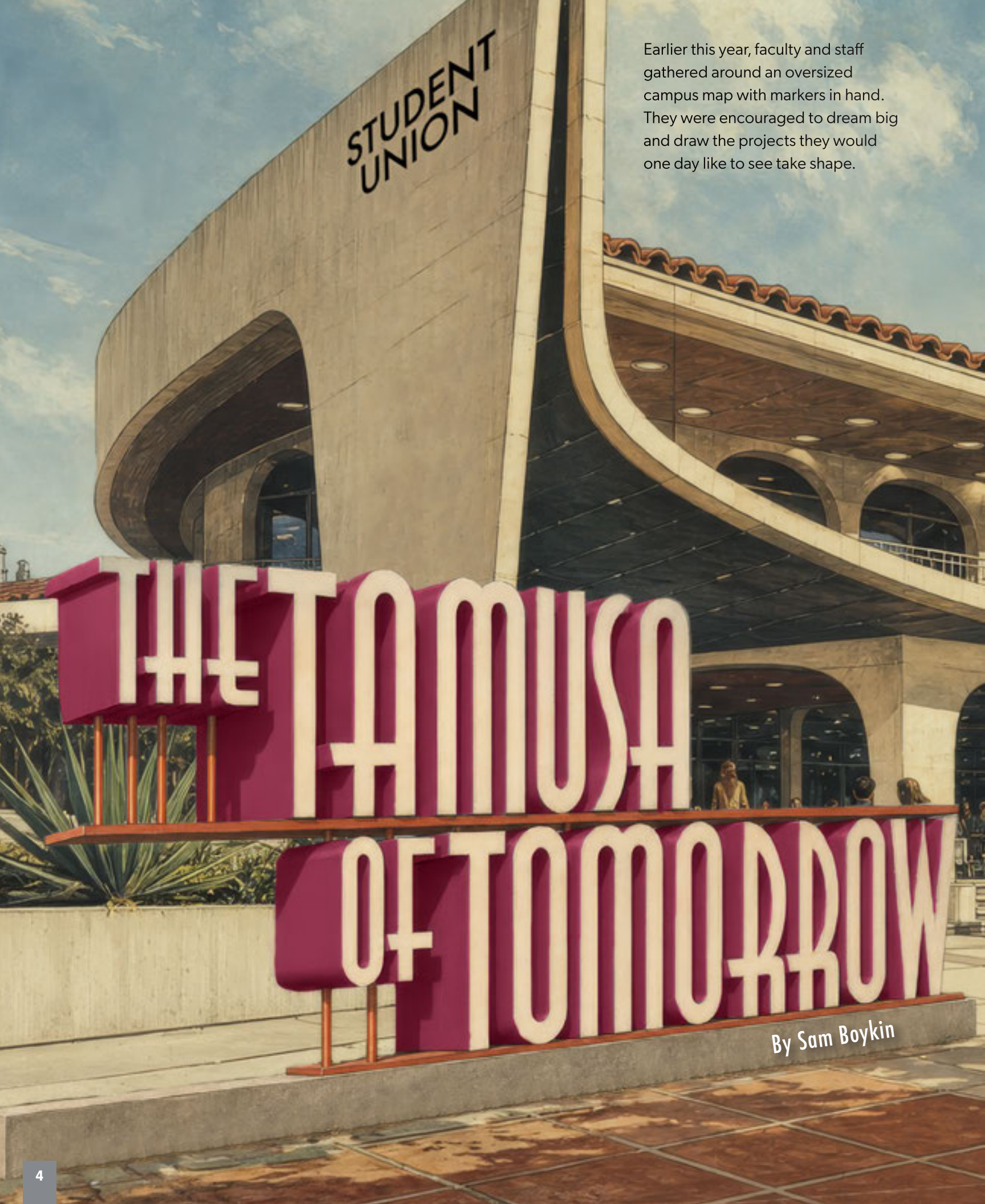
These interconnected pillars help us forge a bold path forward. This is only the first step, and as our plan continues to take shape, I look forward to sharing updates on our progress. Together, we will fulfill the promises we have made to ourselves and our community and most importantly, help our students reach their full potential.

Sincerely,



Salvador Hector Ochoa, Ph.D.





STUDENT
UNION

Earlier this year, faculty and staff gathered around an oversized campus map with markers in hand. They were encouraged to dream big and draw the projects they would one day like to see take shape.

THE TAMUSA OF TOMORROW

By Sam Boykin



Some ideas were playful — a lazy river, perhaps, or even a helipad. Others reflected the needs of a rapidly growing university. The activity was part of the official launch of *TAMUSA 2030: All In*, the University's new strategic plan. Designed around six interconnected pillars, the roadmap outlines ambitious goals for student success, academic excellence, research, community partnerships and building a destination campus that reflects the University's aspirations.

Together, the ideas drawn on that campus map became more than a wish list. They offered a glimpse into how the A&M-San Antonio community imagines what comes next.

The Heart of Campus

Every great campus has a place where people naturally come together.

It is where friendships begin, organizations meet and traditions are created. For Student Government Association President Caroleena Mancilla, that place is a student union.

To her, it represents much more than another building.

"It would serve as the heart of campus life," she said. "Students need a dedicated space where they can gather, collaborate, study, attend events and build meaningful relationships outside the classroom."

As enrollment is expected to grow in the coming years, Mancilla imagines the student union becoming the University's living room — a place where students grab coffee before class, meet friends between lectures and discover organizations that shape their college experience.

Vice President for Student Affairs Juan Guardia shares that vision.

"Bringing a student union to campus in the near future is a top priority for me," Guardia said. "It should be a true home away from home for students — the vibrant heart of campus that seamlessly connects them to life outside the classroom."

Momentum is already building. In late 2023, students approved a \$100 per-semester student center fee to help finance the construction of a student union, and The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents approved the initiative the following year.

While funding and design remain in the early stages, preliminary concepts include a theater or auditorium, ballroom, student organization offices, meeting rooms, expanded dining, a campus bookstore and outdoor gathering spaces.

A Taste of What's Ahead

A thriving campus doesn't end at its sidewalks.

The areas surrounding a university help shape the student experience just as much as the buildings within it. As A&M-San Antonio has grown, it has helped spur nearby development, including the VIDA community and University Health's hospital and medical complex.

For David Mantiply, coordinator of student rights and responsibilities, dining and retail are the next important pieces of creating a more vibrant campus environment.

"It's about creating more opportunities on and around campus," Mantiply said. "Students shouldn't have to leave just to grab a meal."

He imagines restaurants and coffee shops becoming informal gathering places where students can continue conversations after class, celebrate milestones and spend more time near campus.

"That kind of development would help create more of a sense of place and community," he said.

That vision may soon become reality.

Gretchen Howell, chief operating officer of Southstar, the developer behind VIDA, said the area's first retail development is expected to open in mid-2027 near South Zarzamora Street and Mitra Way. Several restaurants and a coffee shop have already committed to the project, pending approvals from the City of San Antonio.

Another retail development near Loop 410 and University Way is also under contract and tentatively scheduled to open in late 2027.

"These are all great brands that are excited to serve the campus community," Howell said. "I know students will be pleased."





Championship Dreams

In just five years, Jaguar Athletics has grown from a new program into one of the University's fastest-growing success stories.

The opening of the University Recreation Center in 2024 and the recent completion of the \$10 million Track and Field Complex have expanded opportunities for student-athletes. With the addition of men's and women's indoor and outdoor track and field and men's and women's cross country, the University now competes in 12 varsity sports.

Women's Basketball Head Coach Christopher Minner believes the next step in that evolution is a dedicated basketball and volleyball arena.

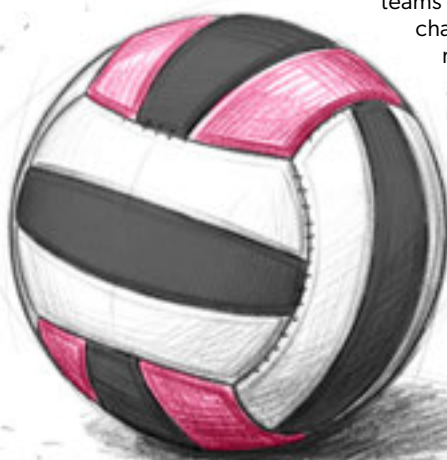
"Our current facilities are great, and they've helped launch championship programs, but future success will

require room to grow," Minner said. "As enrollment increases and athletics expands, we'll need more locker rooms, training rooms and equipment."

A new arena could provide a permanent home for Jaguar teams while creating opportunities to host conference championships, regional tournaments and, eventually, national postseason competition.

More importantly, Minner believes the facility would help strengthen campus traditions.

"As we move forward, it's going to be essential that we have more space for our athletic programs to improve and excel," he said. "It's critical for our future success."



Learning Where Nature Lives

When envisioning what she'd like to see take shape on campus, Davida Smyth, director for research development and administration and professor of biology, stresses that A&M-San Antonio has a unique opportunity to showcase the region's biodiversity through a living research and education center.

Smyth imagines a field station and nature center featuring interactive exhibits, outdoor learning spaces and preserved wildlife specimens that highlight native species such as armadillos, coyotes, roadrunners and lizards.

The facility would allow visitors to explore the area's natural environment while giving students opportunities to conduct research in the ecosystems they study.

"It would be a celebration of the biodiversity of the South Side," Smyth said.

That vision could extend beyond the main campus through the University's 380-acre Espada property along the San Antonio River. In 2022, A&M-San Antonio partnered with the San Antonio River Authority to develop the property, with long-term plans calling for an outdoor laboratory and research center.

Although additional funding and infrastructure improvements are still needed, Smyth believes the Espada property and a potential on-campus facility could work together to create a network of outdoor learning spaces.

"It would be a great way to engage and interact with the public and campus community," she said. "A place where people can explore, connect with nature and conduct research."



Creativity Takes the Stage

Just as some want to celebrate the area's natural world, others want a way to showcase local creativity.

Katherine Gillen, interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, believes future creative spaces will play an important role in shaping campus culture.

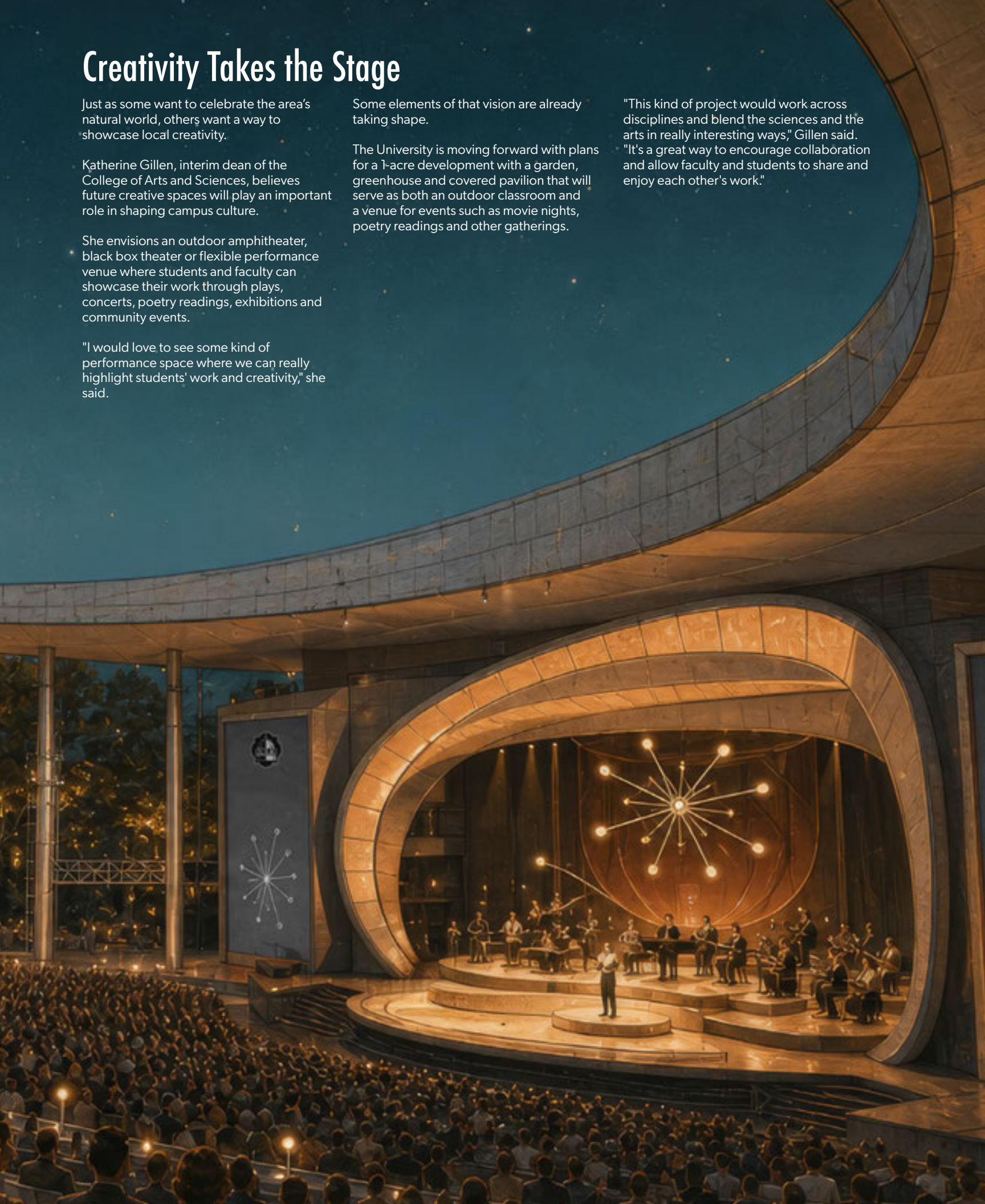
She envisions an outdoor amphitheater, black box theater or flexible performance venue where students and faculty can showcase their work through plays, concerts, poetry readings, exhibitions and community events.

"I would love to see some kind of performance space where we can really highlight students' work and creativity," she said.

Some elements of that vision are already taking shape.

The University is moving forward with plans for a 1-acre development with a garden, greenhouse and covered pavilion that will serve as both an outdoor classroom and a venue for events such as movie nights, poetry readings and other gatherings.

"This kind of project would work across disciplines and blend the sciences and the arts in really interesting ways," Gillen said. "It's a great way to encourage collaboration and allow faculty and students to share and enjoy each other's work."





Looking Beyond the Horizon

Every idea shared during the TAMUSA 2030: All In launch — from a student union to research facilities, athletic venues and gathering spaces — represents something larger than the project itself.

For Charles Watson, professor of biology, the future of A&M-San Antonio cannot be measured only in buildings.

As the University continues to evolve, he believes its greatest

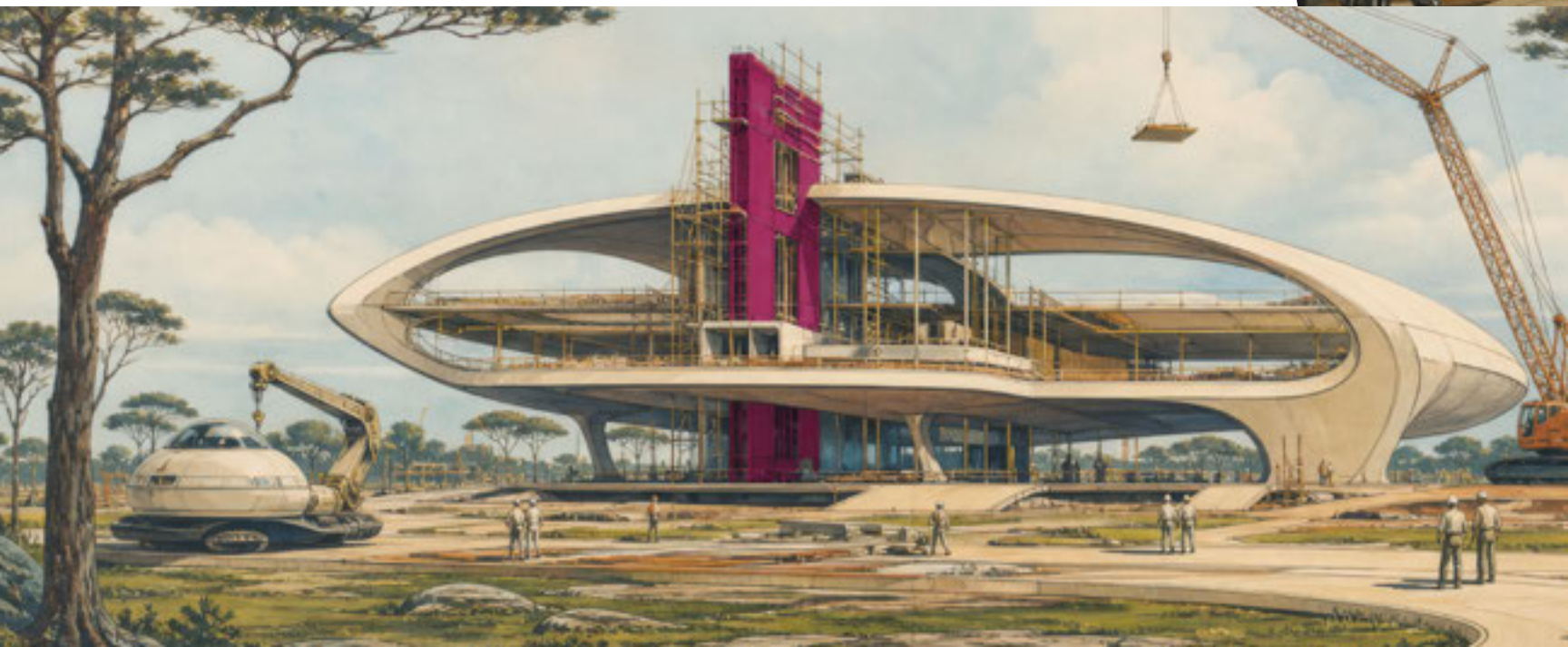
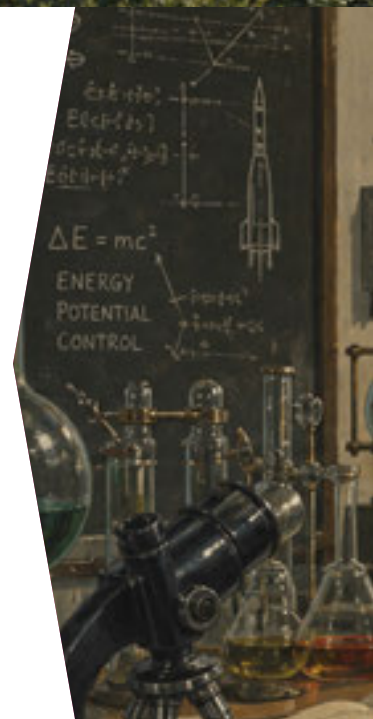
impact will come from expanding research, scholarship, creativity and community engagement.

The spaces imagined across campus matter because of what they make possible.

"We have to start amplifying our knowledge," Watson said. "We have to focus on how to connect the University to the South Side community and beyond."

When A&M-San Antonio was founded, much of its mission focused on creating opportunities for South San Antonio. That mission remains central, but the University's influence continues to expand throughout the region, state and beyond.

"It's great to take care of your own front porch," Watson said. "But if you ever want to be known for anything, you've got to leave the house."





Wellness in Every Direction

Not every meaningful campus improvement requires a major construction project.

Senior Lecturer Robert Alonzo imagines something much simpler: a shaded walking trail with outdoor exercise stations winding through campus.

Alonzo, who has been part of A&M-San Antonio since 2009 after nearly three decades of military

and federal service, including the FBI, was inspired by a similar facility at a university where he officiated NCAA soccer matches.

He envisions a path beneath mature trees with permanent fitness stations where students, faculty and staff could exercise, relax and enjoy the outdoors.

"It would be a great addition," Alonzo said. "Students could walk

and enjoy a safe workout any time of day, while faculty and staff could exercise during lunch or after work."

With hundreds of acres available, Alonzo believes the University has room to create spaces that encourage wellness and connection.

"Sometimes the most meaningful campus spaces are the ones that just invite people outside," he said.



Still Under Construction

The campus map created during the *TAMUSA 2030: All In* launch was filled with possibilities.

Some ideas may become reality within the next decade. Others may change shape along the way. A few may remain only as sketches and conversations.

As A&M-San Antonio implements *TAMUSA 2030: All In*, building the university of tomorrow means more than constructing new facilities.

It means creating spaces where students discover purpose, faculty pursue new knowledge, artists share their creativity, teams build traditions, and the community feels welcome.

A young boy with blonde hair and blue-rimmed glasses is smiling. He is wearing a black graduation cap with a gold tassel and a white graduation gown. He is holding a rolled-up diploma tied with a red ribbon. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green trees.

Ten-year-old Kooper Pope already knows what he wants to be when he grows up.

"A NASA scientist," he said without hesitation.

He has years of school ahead before he begins designing spacecraft or exploring the universe. But unlike many children his age, Kooper doesn't see college as a distant idea reserved for adults. He already sees it as part of his future.

That realization began with a small passport.

During fourth grade at Kay Franklin Elementary School, Kooper participated in Texas A&M University-San Antonio's Passport to College program. Launched in 2025, the initiative partners with local elementary schools to introduce students to college through monthly activities and interactive passport workbooks focused on careers, goal setting and what it means to attend college.

As part of the University's mission to transform lives, Passport to College represents the first step in a larger educational journey. From elementary school outreach and Early College High School partnerships to teacher preparation and alumni serving in local classrooms, A&M-San Antonio is building a multigenerational pipeline that supports students from childhood through college and into the workforce.

The Opportunity Cycle

*A&M-San Antonio's Education Pipeline:
Where Ambition Meets Access*
by Sam Boykin

Planting the Seed

Through Passport to College, Kooper learned college vocabulary, explored different careers, set personal goals, and, perhaps most importantly, began picturing himself on a university campus.

The experience culminated in an unexpected honor. Kooper was selected as one of only two students to speak during the program's graduation-style recognition ceremony at the University's Recreation Center. After the ceremony, students and their families toured the campus, visited classrooms and learned about resources that help students stay on a path toward higher education.

"This has been huge for our family," said Kooper's mother, Kourtney Pope.

Her perspective comes from experience.

Kourtney was the first person in her extended family, including 13 cousins, to earn a college degree. Looking back, she often wonders how different her own educational journey might have been if a program like Passport to College had existed when she was young.

"We didn't have leaders guiding us and really promoting college," she said. "I just knew I wanted to go because no one in my family had."

Programs like Passport to College, she said, give today's students something her generation rarely had: a roadmap.

"It opens their eyes to what's possible," she said. "It helps them set goals and gives them a path to follow."

Getting a Head Start

While Passport to College introduces elementary students to the possibilities of higher education, the University's Early College and Academic Partnerships program allows high school students to experience college firsthand.

When Tabitha De La Rosa enrolled at Harlandale STEM Early College High School, she became part of the first class to participate in the district's partnership with Texas A&M University-San Antonio. The program allows eligible students to earn high school and college credit simultaneously.

By the time she graduated from high school this spring, Tabitha had completed 60 college credit hours, the equivalent of two full years toward a bachelor's degree.

"I started taking classes my sophomore year," she said.

Each day, she and other students rode a school bus to the A&M-San Antonio campus, where they attended classes alongside traditional college students.

Her first two semesters focused on introductory courses such as composition, literature and college algebra. Before long, she was taking accounting, business law and other courses directly related to her business administration major.

"It was a lot to juggle," she said. "It was daunting. You're with actual professors and adults."

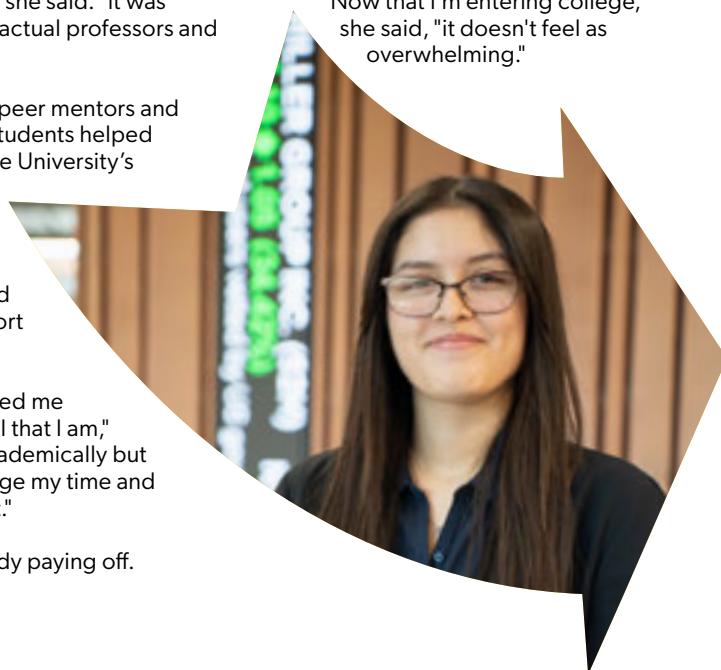
Support from faculty, peer mentors and fellow Early College students helped ease the transition. The University's first-year seminar introduced her to campus resources, including tutoring, the Writing Center and other academic support services.

"This experience helped me become the individual that I am," she said. "Not only academically but learning how to manage my time and become independent."

The benefits are already paying off.

This fall, De La Rosa will begin her junior year at A&M-San Antonio, where her tuition is fully covered through Jaguar Promise. Rather than worrying about college costs, she is already planning to earn an MBA and pursue a career in nonprofit management.

"Now that I'm entering college," she said, "it doesn't feel as overwhelming."



Building Career-Ready Graduates

The University's support doesn't end at graduation. A&M-San Antonio also prepares students to enter the workforce with the skills, knowledge and hands-on experience they need to succeed. Across every college, students apply what they learn in the classroom through internships, research, field experiences and community partnerships that mirror the challenges they'll face in their careers. By graduation, they're equipped with the tools they need to realize their professional dreams.

Life, however, took her in a different direction. Marriage and raising a family led her to build a career at H-E-B, and she eventually accepted that teaching might remain only a dream.

Everything changed after an unexpected conversation with a younger coworker.

"It doesn't matter how old you are," the coworker told her. "You can always go back to school."

and apply everything they have learned in their coursework.

For Julie, it's the moment she has been working toward.

"I'm excited to actually get into the classroom and use everything I've learned these last two years," she said.

“I want to give back to the community I came from. We need good teachers.

Julie Mello

The schedule she'll continue H-E-B while in the classroom.

won't be easy, as working part-time at spending her weekdays in

It's a demanding balance, but one she planned carefully. If Somerset ISD offers her a teaching position after graduation, she'll gladly accept.

"I want to give back to the community I came from," she said. "We need good teachers."



For Julie Mello, the dream of becoming a teacher began decades ago.

"My pre-K teacher was the one who made me want to become a teacher," she said.

Instead of attending classes on campus, she will spend each weekday completing her clinical teaching assignment in Somerset ISD.

Clinical teaching immerses education majors in the profession by placing them in classrooms full-time, where they assume the daily responsibilities of a classroom teacher

Inspired by those words, Julie earned her associate degree before transferring to A&M-San Antonio. She is now completing an interdisciplinary studies degree with EC-6 teacher certification, which qualifies her to teach students from early childhood through sixth grade.

This fall marks her final semester.



Teacher Residency program, where she completed a yearlong residency in a third-grade classroom. The experience led directly to her teaching position with North East ISD.

"I think about everything I've been through and the times I wanted to quit," Garcia said. "I

Coming Full Circle

While Julie is preparing to begin her teaching career, Alyssa Garcia has already stepped into her own classroom.

This spring, Garcia graduated from A&M-San Antonio with a degree in interdisciplinary studies. Today, the first-generation college graduate teaches third grade in North East ISD, one of the largest school districts in the San Antonio area. As a new teacher, she draws on the practical skills and classroom experience she developed at A&M-San Antonio, from designing engaging lesson plans and managing a classroom to building meaningful relationships with students and families.

A San Antonio native and the oldest of six siblings, Garcia grew up facing significant financial hardship. At times, her family experienced homelessness, moving among churches, shelters and the homes of friends.

Her path became even more challenging when she had two children while still in high

school. Continuing her education often seemed out of reach, but she remained determined to build a better future for herself and her family.

She began at San Antonio College, earned an associate degree and transferred to A&M-San Antonio in 2022 with support from financial aid and the Ready to Work program.

On campus, Garcia became a mentor for transfer students and served as president of JagsTEACH, a student organization that supports future educators through professional development and networking. She launched peer study groups and organized interview coaching sessions with a local school district to help fellow education majors prepare for the job market.

Her academic success and leadership earned her a place in the University's inaugural Enhanced



"I think about everything I've been through and now I'm ready to start my career and show my kids and my family what's possible."

Alyssa Garcia

didn't, and now I'm ready to start my career and show my kids and my family what's possible."

The stories of Kooper, Tabitha, Julie and Alyssa demonstrate that education is more than a single milestone — it's a lifelong journey.

At A&M-San Antonio, that journey begins when children first imagine themselves wearing a graduation cap. It continues as high school students earn college credit and the confidence to succeed. It grows as graduates gain experience in their professions.

And it comes full circle when graduates return to roles across South Texas, inspiring the next generation to imagine what's possible.

Hands on,



Jaguar Sports Network Gives Students Front-Row Experience in Live Sports Broadcasting By Kevin Castro

As Jaguar student-athletes compete under the lights, another team is hard at work just a few feet away.

Camera operators follow every play. Producers monitor live feeds. Commentators call the action while photographers capture the moments that define a season. Every broadcast is planned, produced and executed by students.

The Jaguar Sports Network (JSN) has become one of Texas A&M University-San Antonio's signature experiential learning opportunities, placing students in the fast-paced world of live sports production. Every home athletic contest becomes more than a game — it becomes a classroom where communication, leadership and teamwork are tested under pressure.

What started as an idea from communications alumnus Benjamin "Benji" Mendoza BA '24 has grown into a student-run operation that produces live broadcasts, photography, commentary and digital content for Jaguar Athletics. Fans can watch live broadcasts of University games, including men's and women's basketball, soccer and softball, on the official TAMUSA-JSN YouTube channel.

"The vision was always opportunities, purpose and growth," said Mendoza, who now works for the United Soccer League in Tampa, Florida, as streaming and video manager for its youth and pre-professional leagues. "We believed every voice deserved a stage and every student possessed potential."

Mendoza founded the network with a simple goal: create the kind of hands-on opportunities he wished had existed when he was preparing for a career in sports media. Today, that vision continues through the students who step behind the cameras each week.

On game days, senior Carlos Zavala isn't watching from the stands. Instead, he's tracking the action through his camera lens, searching for the split-second moments that tell the story of a game. Whether documenting a milestone victory or capturing the emotion after the final whistle, every assignment comes with the same expectation to develop a professional-level product on a deadline.

"The most rewarding part has been the opportunity to continue building my sports photography portfolio," Carlos said. "Each game allows me to gain valuable experience while creating professional-quality work that I can showcase to future employers."



Carlos said working in live athletics has challenged him to think quickly and adapt to changing situations — experiences that mirror the expectations of the sports media industry.

"The experience has taught me how to work under pressure and produce quality work in a real-world environment," he said.

Photography is only one piece of production.

Behind the scenes, students rotate through camera operation, graphics, replay, commentary, production, and social media, learning each role while relying on one another to keep every broadcast running smoothly.





As president of Jaguar Sports Network, sophomore communications major Madison Mendez helps coordinate those moving pieces.

Whether preparing equipment before tipoff, organizing student crews or stepping behind the microphone as a commentator, no two game days look the same. That variety is intentional. Students aren't confined to a single role — they learn the entire production process.



It's important to take on responsibilities and opportunities even when I'm nervous. I've learned it's OK to make mistakes because that's how you grow.

Madison Mendez

"We let everybody rotate their positions throughout JSN," Madison said. "We all help each other out, and we learn from each other."

The experience has also taught lessons that extend beyond the classroom.

"It's important to take on responsibilities and opportunities even when I'm nervous," Madison said. "I've learned it's OK to make mistakes because that's how you grow."

Those moments of growth are exactly what Jaguar Athletics hoped the network would create.

"The Jaguar Sports Network serves as both a media platform and a learning laboratory," said Darnell Smith, director of athletics.

Since its launch, the network has evolved from a small student initiative into a polished broadcast operation featuring multi-camera productions, live commentary, replay systems and storytelling that extends beyond the competition itself.

"The most rewarding part is witnessing students step into roles they never imagined for themselves," Smith said. "Many arrive with little or no production experience, and within a semester they're directing broadcasts, calling games or mentoring new crew members."

That impact reaches far beyond the broadcast booth.

Student-athletes gain greater visibility. Families can watch from anywhere in the world. Jaguar Athletics expands its reach across the region. Most importantly, students graduate with professional experience already on their resumes and the confidence that comes from doing meaningful work before entering the workforce.

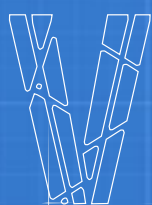
For Mendoza, that's always been the measure of success.

"It means absolutely everything to me to see students continuing to build on something I helped create," he said. "I'm excited to watch what the next generation of JSN will accomplish."



A BLUEPRINT FOR GROWTH

From Housing and Healthcare to Advanced Manufacturing, A&M-San Antonio is Driving Lasting Economic Opportunity By Sam Boykin



VIDA
SAN ANTONIO

For much of its history, the land surrounding Texas A&M University-San Antonio was known more for open ranchland than economic opportunity. Today, that same stretch of San Antonio's South Side has become an example of how a university can catalyze regional growth by bringing together education, healthcare, housing and industry.

As colleges and universities across the country grapple with financial pressures and questions about long-term relevance, A&M-San Antonio is demonstrating a different model — one built on public-private partnerships, workforce development and deep community engagement.

From the beginning, the University's mission included transforming an underserved region by creating opportunity where it was needed most. That vision is now being realized through partnerships that are reshaping South Bexar County and creating a blueprint other institutions may emulate.

The University generates nearly \$300 million in annual economic impact for Bexar County, but its influence stretches well beyond economic statistics. By serving as an anchor institution, A&M-San Antonio has given developers, employers and community organizations the confidence to invest in the South Side, creating an interconnected ecosystem where people can live, learn, work and thrive.

One of the clearest examples is VIDA, the 600-acre master-planned community adjacent to campus. Designed to support students, employees and a growing regional workforce, VIDA combines housing, parks and community gathering spaces into a neighborhood built around the University.

The community has more than 3,000 residents and includes apartments, duplexes, townhomes and single-family homes. Restaurants and retail destinations are expected to follow, creating amenities that benefit both campus and community.

Healthcare has become another cornerstone of this transformation. University Health recently opened University Health VIDA next to campus, providing urgent care, primary care, pediatrics, behavioral health and specialty services. The site also houses the Institute for Public Health, where nonprofit organizations work together to address challenges such as food insecurity, financial literacy and mental health.

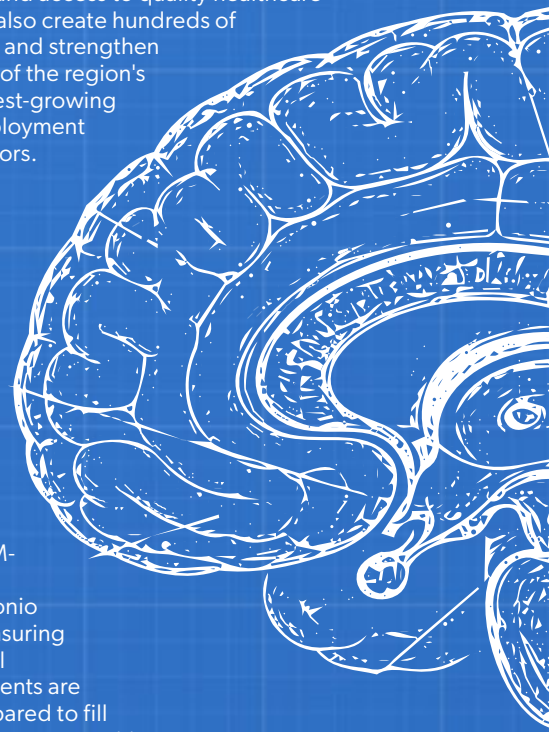


University
Health

Just across the street, construction continues on University Health Palo Alto Hospital, a full-service hospital scheduled to open in 2027. The hospital will not only expand access to quality healthcare but also create hundreds of jobs and strengthen one of the region's fastest-growing employment sectors.

A&M-San Antonio is ensuring local students are prepared to fill those opportunities.

The University's new Public Health and Education Building, opening in fall 2026, will expand health sciences education, research and



experiential learning while serving as a hub for another landmark partnership.

Earlier this year, officials from Texas A&M University Naresh K. Vashisht College of Medicine, University Health and A&M-San Antonio formalized an affiliation agreement that will expand medical education and physician training in South Texas. Under the collaboration, A&M-San Antonio will provide classroom and office space for medical students, faculty and staff in the new building,

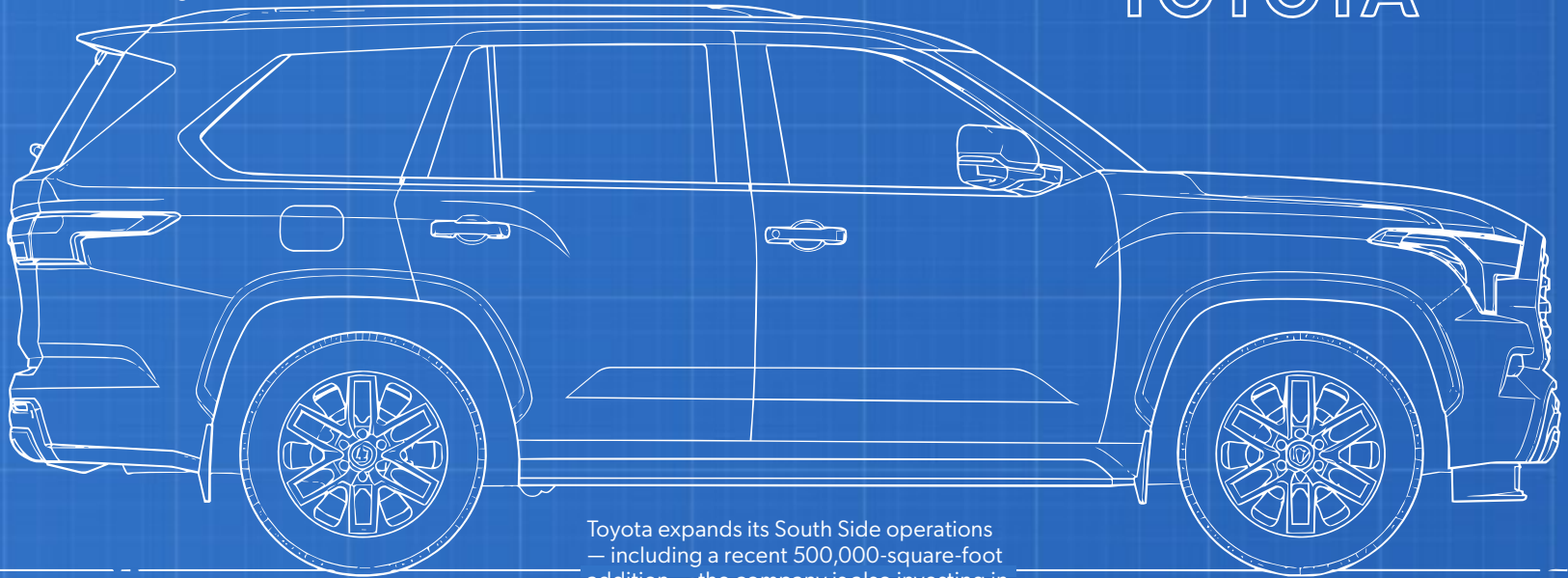
while Texas A&M medical students complete clinical rotations at University Health Palo Alto Hospital and other sites throughout the region.

The University's collaborative approach extends beyond healthcare into advanced manufacturing and engineering.

Just a few miles from campus, Toyota Motor North America operates one of the region's largest manufacturing facilities. As



TOYOTA



Toyota expands its South Side operations — including a recent 500,000-square-foot addition — the company is also investing in the workforce that will power its future.

Toyota recently donated \$25,000 to support the creation of a new Programmable Logic Controller Laboratory for the University's Electronic Systems Engineering Technology program. Expected to open in 2027, the lab

This philosophy — building educational programs around regional workforce needs while inviting industry to help shape the experience — has become one of A&M-San Antonio's defining strengths.

The University brings together government agencies, nonprofit organizations, health systems and private industry around shared goals. The result is a model in which investments reinforce one another: New housing attracts families and professionals, healthcare creates jobs and improves quality of life, and industry partnerships ensure graduates are ready to contribute immediately to the regional economy.

Building educational programs around regional workforce needs while inviting industry to help shape the experience has become one of A&M-San Antonio's defining strengths.

will give students hands-on experience with the same industrial automation systems used in modern manufacturing facilities, including Toyota's nearby plant.

For students, the partnership creates a direct connection between classroom learning and careers in manufacturing, avionics, medical electronics, energy and other high-demand industries. For employers, it provides a pipeline of graduates with the technical skills needed to keep pace with an evolving economy.

At a time when many institutions are searching for a path forward, A&M-San Antonio has established a strong foundation. Its success has never been measured solely by enrollment or buildings, but by the lasting partnerships it cultivates and the opportunities those partnerships create for students and the surrounding community.



LEADERSHIP ACADEMY *Action* IN

By Mariah Gonzalez



Strong universities are built by strong leaders, and every student success story is supported by employees working behind the scenes. At Texas A&M University-San Antonio, the Leadership Academy cultivates a culture of collaboration, innovation and service by investing in the professional growth of its employees. These dedicated faculty and staff members guide teams, navigate change and create the best possible experience for students.

Soon beginning its sixth cohort, the three-year program helps faculty and staff strengthen leadership skills and think strategically about how they can make a greater impact. As participants grow personally and professionally, they return to their roles better equipped to support students and advance the University's mission.

For Aaron Jagers, assistant director of recreation and head esports coach, the Leadership Academy provided a rare opportunity to step away from his daily duties and think bigger.

"This was a special day once a month that was set aside for my professional development," he said. "It was a chance to pause, reflect and become more intentional about how I lead my team and support students."

Whether supporting student life, helping students navigate challenges or improving campus services, Leadership

Academy graduates like Jagers return to their departments with stronger communication, collaboration and decision-making skills.

The interactive program is designed to strengthen existing leadership abilities while preparing employees for greater responsibility. Through presentations, discussions and hands-on activities, participants explore leadership principles specific to higher education while building relationships with colleagues from across campus.

The curriculum is intentionally progressive. During the first year, participants focus on foundational leadership skills such as delegation, time management, prioritization and working effectively with others. The second year focuses on leadership in higher education and how leadership styles align with the University's culture and mission. In the final year, participants gain a broader understanding of The Texas A&M University System and A&M-San Antonio's role within it.

For Yaribel Caraveo, assistant director in the Office of First-Year Experience, the Leadership Academy came at the perfect time.

After completing her master's degree, Caraveo was looking for new opportunities to continue her professional growth. Encouraged by colleagues and supervisors, she joined the program's third cohort to develop her leadership

skills further and explore new ways to contribute to the University.

The cohort model brings together employees from across campus, creating opportunities to exchange ideas, ask questions and gain a deeper appreciation for the work happening in other departments.

"The overarching theme through the three years is the reflection component," Caraveo said. "This program allowed us an opportunity to step away and really examine how we lead and ways to improve."

Participants apply what they learn to their daily work, strengthen communication, build stronger partnerships across campus and make more informed decisions. They also leave with a broader understanding of how every department contributes to creating an exceptional student experience.

As A&M-San Antonio grows, developing leaders from within remains essential to the University's future. By investing in the people who serve students every day, the Leadership Academy strengthens the entire campus community. Better-equipped leaders create stronger teams, more effectively support their colleagues and, ultimately, provide an even greater experience for the students who call A&M-San Antonio home.



The **FACES** behind the **FEED**

Student Creators Bring the Jaguar Experience to Life By Kevin Castro

Scroll through Texas A&M University-San Antonio's Student Life Instagram feed, and you'll find more than event promotions. You'll see students laughing with friends, campus traditions unfolding in real time and trending videos that feel authentic to the Jaguar experience.

Behind every reel, photo and post is a team of students whose creativity is helping shape how the University connects with its campus community and beyond.

What started as an effort to better engage students has evolved into one of the University's most recognizable social media presences, driven by a student-led team that understands exactly who they're creating content for — themselves and their peers.

"Students want to see themselves," said Emily Banda, director of Student Life. "We wanted to make sure our social media reflected that. We don't just highlight events — we highlight our students because everything we do is for them."

Rather than relying on polished graphics alone, the Student Life team embraces trends, humor and authentic moments that mirror how students naturally communicate online.

"We know this generation has grown up with social media," Banda said. "Our responsibility is to meet them where they are."

That strategy has become more than a communications effort. It has become a learning experience for the students behind the camera.

Graduate assistants Alexa Avila and Priscilla Cazares help lead Student Life's social media presence while mentoring the next generation of student creators. Together,

they have transformed the Instagram account into a space where students discover events, organizations and opportunities while seeing firsthand what it means to be a Jaguar.

"One of the most rewarding parts of creating content for Student Life has been seeing our team come together and grow throughout the process," Alexa said. "We've created an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing ideas, stepping outside of their comfort zones and expressing their creativity."

"We know this generation has grown up with social media. Our responsibility is to meet them where they are."

Emily Banda

That collaborative approach has helped students develop more than creative skills.

For Alexa, the experience revealed that leadership isn't about having every answer.

"It taught me that leadership is less about having all the answers and more about creating an environment where others feel comfortable sharing ideas, trying something new and growing in their own confidence," she said.

Priscilla discovered a passion for mentoring while helping grow the Student Life Instagram account over the past year and a half.

"What meant the most to me was seeing students actually engage with the content and use it as a way to feel more connected and involved," she said.

That impact is something Olivia Vielma, a sophomore

education major, sees firsthand every time she picks up a camera.

"The most rewarding part is having the ability to capture moments that students will remember for a lifetime," Olivia said. "Many students come to our events just because they saw a post or a reel."

Sophomore Danajsa Sims believes the team's work goes beyond creating content.

"I've seen how a simple post or video can be the reason a student shows up to something, joins an

organization or finally feels like they know where they belong on campus," Danajsa said. "It's less like promotion and more like participation in their experience."

For Banda, those moments affirm the team's approach.

She recalled hearing from a prospective student during Future Jaguar Day — an event designed to introduce prospective students to the University — who said Student Life's social media played a role in choosing A&M-San Antonio.

"Students are seeing the experiences we're creating, and they want to be part of that," Banda said. "That's why we do this work."

The success of Student Life's social media isn't measured only in views or likes. It's reflected in fuller event spaces, stronger campus traditions and students who arrive already feeling connected before they ever step into a classroom.

Every reel, trend and photo is about more than creating engaging content. It's about capturing what it means to be a Jaguar and helping others find their place within that story.





EXPLORING THE FINAL FRONTIER

How A&M-San Antonio Research Could Help Protect Future Astronauts

By Matt Swenson

Ten astronauts currently live aboard the International Space Station (ISS), a multinational laboratory traveling at approximately 17,500 mph. Orbiting 250 miles above Earth, the ISS serves as the testing ground for the Artemis Program, a NASA-led initiative aimed at returning humans to the moon.

As the Artemis Program continues its mission, research from Assistant Professor

Alba Chavez may prove vital to the health of explorers of the final frontier. While the vacuum of outer space does not support life, there are potentially hazardous microorganisms that have found ways to thrive in these extreme conditions. Chavez studies how microbes change and survive in space, including why some become more resistant to antibiotics. Researchers believe the extreme conditions on the ISS place unique stresses on microorganisms, sometimes making them more resistant to antibiotics or changing how they interact with human hosts.

Chavez is also exploring whether existing medicines can be used in new ways to treat these microbes and help keep astronauts healthy during future space missions.

"There's not much known about this field of research," Chavez said. "We're just barely starting to know how important this is."

Being at the cutting edge of a space-related field was not how Chavez envisioned her professional career when growing up in Mexico. After working in infectious disease research, Chavez joined Embry-

Riddle Aeronautical University, where she began studying microbial strains collected from ISS surfaces like computers, spacesuits and exercise equipment.

While the study has largely focused on humans, researchers like Chavez are asking similar questions about microorganisms. Chavez's work focuses on almost-invisible organisms like fungal strains collected aboard the space station. She collaborates with other experts in the field and has been regularly published in respected journals, such as *Life Sciences in Space Research*.

"We found out that these fungi were changing a lot in terms of how they look and how they behave," she said. "They were behaving like pathogens — organisms capable of causing disease."

Chavez joined A&M-San Antonio in 2026 and is an important new contributor to The Texas A&M University System's expansive space exploration enterprise.



From left to right: Iris Foster, Dr. Alba Chavez, and Alyssa Medellin

This fall, working in collaboration with Professor of Biology Davida Smyth, she plans to expand her research into space microbiology and antibiotic resistance to support space exploration efforts. She also plans to take select students to the American Society for Gravitational and Space Research Conference in Northern Virginia this November.

As NASA prepares to send astronauts deeper into space than ever before, Chavez hopes the next generation of scientists helping to further explore the last frontier will come from A&M-San Antonio.

"I really admire my students because they show so much enthusiasm and put in a lot of effort," she said. "It has been really rewarding."

TRAILBLAZING BEYOND BORDERS



TWO FACULTY MEMBERS MAKE UNIVERSITY HISTORY THROUGH PRESTIGIOUS FULBRIGHT AWARDS

BY SAM BOYKIN

Volkan Ozbek and Claire Braaten both believe learning should extend beyond the walls of a classroom. The two trailblazing Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty members represent a university that is earning national and international recognition for innovative research and global impact.

Ozbek, assistant professor of management, and Braaten, professor of criminology and criminal justice, recently became the first A&M-San Antonio faculty members to receive the Fulbright U.S. Scholar recognition, marking a historic milestone for the growing University.

Their achievements reflect the University's commitment to advancing academic distinction by supporting faculty research, expanding global partnerships and bringing real-world experiences back to the classroom.

For Ozbek, that distinction will come through his upcoming Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program award, which will take him to Management Center Innsbruck, a leading business-focused institution in Austria, during the spring 2027 semester.

There, he will teach international business and management while building relationships that he hopes will lead to future collaborations with A&M-San Antonio.

The award is the latest international honor for Ozbek, who joined A&M-San Antonio in 2023. In 2025, he received a Fulbright Specialist Program award and spent nearly two weeks teaching and collaborating at the University of Presov in the Slovak Republic.

"The Fulbright is a golden bracelet among academics," Ozbek said.

A Turkish native who has traveled to 30 countries, Ozbek has long viewed international experiences as an essential part of his teaching.

"It is really important for me to teach my students about life overseas," he said.

During his time in Austria, Ozbek plans to study how international business is evolving in today's changing economy and incorporate those lessons into his courses when he returns to A&M-San Antonio.

While Ozbek will focus on global business, Braaten's Fulbright research will take her to Southeast Asia, where she will examine the growing threat of cyber-enabled labor trafficking and transnational scam operations.

Students are much more engaged when you can bring real fieldwork into the classroom and show them what's happening in the world today.

Claire Braaten

Through the Fulbright U.S.-ASEAN Visiting Scholar Initiative, Braaten will conduct field research in the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam during summer 2027. She will interview prosecutors, judges, law enforcement officials and other criminal justice professionals to better understand how governments are responding to complex cases involving victims who are forced into criminal activity.

"It's a great opportunity," Braaten said. "I've been wanting to do this for several years, and I was very interested in this specific subject matter."

Braaten's research focuses on scam compounds, criminal enterprises that lure victims with fraudulent job advertisements before forcing them to participate in online crimes, including cryptocurrency fraud and investment scams.

"They're brought to these scam compounds, and they can't leave," she said. "They're victims of labor trafficking, but they're forced to scam people around the world."

Braaten's interest in the region is also personal. Originally from the Philippines, she practiced law before moving into academia and joining A&M-San Antonio in 2011.

Her Fulbright project builds on research she began in 2024 with support from an internal A&M-San Antonio Research Council grant. That work included interviews with government officials in Manila and Bangkok and has contributed to a book manuscript currently under review.

"I teach human trafficking, criminal law, cybercrime and cybersecurity, so this research directly informs those classes," she said. "Students are much more engaged when you can bring real fieldwork into the classroom and show them what's happening in the world today."

As A&M-San Antonio continues to grow, the trailblazing accomplishments of Ozbek and Braaten demonstrate the expanding influence of its faculty and the University's emerging culture of scholarly excellence.



Jaguar Emergency Aid Fund Boosted by Donation from A&M System Chancellor's Century Council

By David DeKunder

When unexpected financial hardships hit Texas A&M University-San Antonio students, additional support is now available thanks to a recent donation from The Texas A&M University System Chancellor's Century Council.

The Chancellor's Century Council donated \$10,000 to the University's Jaguar Emergency Aid Fund, which provides one-time critical financial assistance to A&M-San Antonio students with a serious financial hardship due to a sudden emergency, accident or unforeseen circumstance. The council is a support and advisory group for the Texas A&M University System, consisting of business and community leaders who advocate for higher education.

"The strength of the Texas A&M System is that it serves students in very real and practical ways across this state," said Steve Cooper, chair of the Chancellor's Century Council. "At A&M-San Antonio, the Jaguar Emergency Fund helps students who are working hard toward a degree but face a temporary crisis — a medical bill, a housing issue, a transportation problem or loss of income. This gift is about helping those students keep moving toward graduation."

The emergency fund is administered by the A&M-San Antonio Dean of Students Office and is funded through private donations from University alumni and community members.

Zeak Naifeh, A&M-San Antonio associate vice president and dean of students, said that during these challenging economic times, the \$10,000 donation is a critical resource for Jaguars who are facing an emergency.

"Now we're once again able to help more students who may be in need," said Naifeh.

The Jaguar Emergency Aid Fund was established during the COVID-19 pandemic with support from alumni and community members and began assisting students in need in the Fall of 2022.



Since its inception, the emergency aid fund has helped more than 100 students.

"It can be almost anything as long as it's really an emergency," Naifeh said. "We've

had several students who have lost their jobs and gotten behind on their bills. So, we have helped with those things. We've assisted students who are trying to get out of an abusive relationship and need a down payment for an apartment. Really, it's across the board.

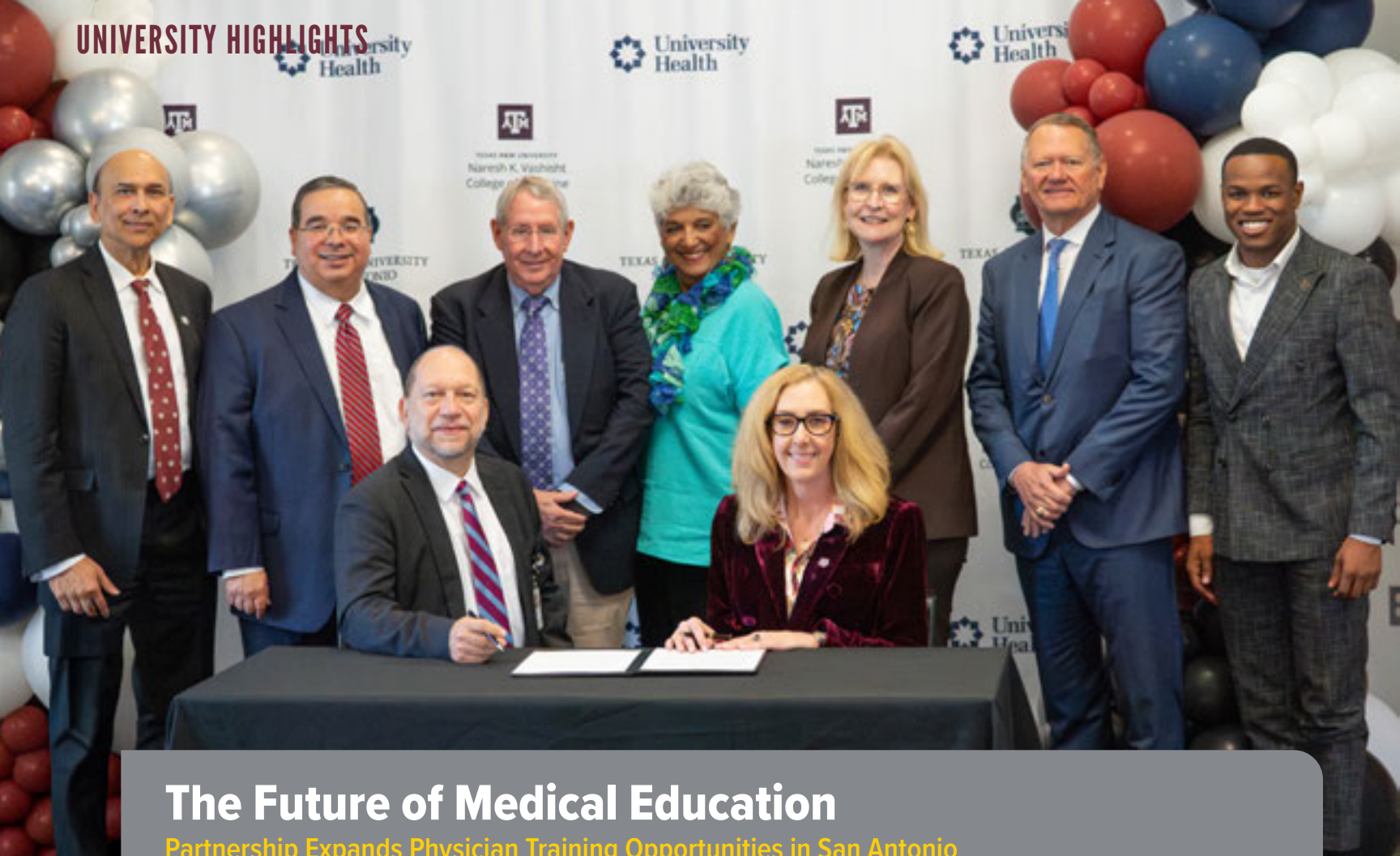
"The reason we think this fund is necessary is that life happens," Naifeh added. "We want to make sure when a student is facing an unexpected financial challenge, we're able to help them get back on their feet and continue with their education and degree attainment."

Students are eligible for financial assistance if they meet certain criteria, including being enrolled at A&M-San Antonio and having a nonrecurring financial hardship caused by a sudden emergency, accident or unforeseen circumstance that affects their ability to remain enrolled.

Applications are reviewed by a committee, and approved students may receive up to \$250, depending on available funds.

Fred Heldenfels IV, chair-elect of the Chancellor's Century Council, said providing financial support to the Jaguar Emergency Aid Fund is an investment the council is proud to make.

"The gift is not just about emergency assistance," Heldenfels said. "It is about stewardship — helping A&M-San Antonio protect the progress students have already made and giving them the support they need to stay enrolled, complete their coursework and continue toward graduation."



The Future of Medical Education

Partnership Expands Physician Training Opportunities in San Antonio

A new partnership between Texas A&M University Naresh K. Vashisht College of Medicine and University Health will expand medical education opportunities in San Antonio and help address the region's growing need for physicians.

University officials signed an affiliation agreement that will provide Texas A&M medical students with clinical training opportunities throughout Bexar County, including at University Health Palo Alto Hospital. Texas A&M faculty physicians are expected to begin providing patient care at Palo Alto Hospital in the fall of 2027.

As part of the collaboration, Texas A&M University-San Antonio will provide classroom and office space to support the broader medical education initiative. The partnership also includes plans for physician residency programs in family medicine and internal medicine, with potential opportunities for future growth.

By bringing together higher education and healthcare leaders, the partnership aims to strengthen access to care while preparing the next generation of physicians.





Athletics Complex Debut

New Facility Elevates Student-Athlete Experience

The University celebrated a major milestone with the grand opening of its new Track and Field Complex, furthering its vision of becoming a destination campus and expanding opportunities for Jaguar Athletics.

Made possible through a \$10 million investment from Bexar County, the complex features an eight-lane competition track, a multipurpose field, and a renovated softball stadium complete with a press box, dugouts and seating for 350 spectators. University leaders were joined by Bexar County Judge Peter Sakai, Commissioner Rebeca Clay-Flores and community partners for the grand opening ceremony.

The new facilities will serve as home for the University's growing men's and women's athletics programs while enhancing recruiting and providing student-athletes with premier training and competition venues. Beyond campus, the complex also fills an important community need by offering additional recreational and athletic space on San Antonio's South Side.



Game On

Jaguar Overwatch Earns First National Championship Appearance

The members of the Jaguar Overwatch team, part of A&M-San Antonio's esports program, reached a new milestone as they competed in the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE) National Championship in Orlando, Florida.

The Jaguars earned their place after battling through NACE's highly competitive Super Conference and securing a berth during the league's last-chance qualifying tournament with victories over the University of South Florida and Cleveland State University.

The national appearance marks the program's second consecutive postseason appearance and its first trip to the national top eight, underscoring the rapid growth of esports at A&M-San Antonio.

Now in its sixth year, the University's esports program fields six varsity teams — Overwatch, Valorant, Super Smash Bros., Chess, Call of Duty and League of Legends — giving students opportunities to compete at the highest collegiate level.





First Alum to Establish Endowed Scholarship

LeWayne Ballard Creates Lasting Legacy for First-Generation Students

Alumnus LeWayne Ballard is creating a lasting impact for future generations by establishing the University's first alumni-endowed scholarship.

Ballard, who earned a bachelor's degree in computer information systems in 2013 and an MBA in 2014, created the LeWayne Ballard Leave Your Legacy Endowed Scholarship. The \$50,000 endowment will provide ongoing support for first-generation students who demonstrate a commitment to serving their communities.

A successful technology leader, Ballard currently serves as chief technology officer at Linebarger Goggan Blair &

Sampson. Throughout his career, he has remained connected to A&M-San Antonio and has supported the University through charitable giving and community involvement.

For Ballard, creating an endowed scholarship is a deeply personal commitment. As a first-generation college graduate, he understands the importance of opportunity and support in helping students achieve their goals.

The scholarship will provide immediate assistance through annual gifts while the endowment grows, eventually creating a permanent source of support for Jaguars pursuing their education.

Through his generosity, Ballard is helping ensure future students have the resources and encouragement needed to succeed.

Holistic Approach to Student Success

Symposium Highlights Importance of Supporting the Whole Student

Educators, community leaders and student advocates gathered for the 10th annual Best of Both Worlds symposium, which focused on supporting students beyond the classroom.

Hosted by the College of Education and Human Development, the event featured a panel discussion titled "Beyond Academics: A Holistic Approach to Student Support and Success." Moderated by Lawrence Scott and Elisabeth Krimbill, both associate professors in the college, the conversation explored how institutions and communities can work together to address students' academic, emotional, and personal needs.

Panelists representing education, government, cultural organizations, and nonprofits discussed topics including student wellness, early intervention strategies, mental health support, and the role of partnerships in helping students thrive.

The symposium reflected the University's commitment to student-centered education and its belief that student success requires a comprehensive approach.



First Vice President for Research

Guido Verbeck Joins A&M-San Antonio

In July, Guido Verbeck joined A&M-San Antonio as its first-ever vice president for research, marking a significant step in the University's growth as a doctoral-granting institution.

Verbeck brings more than two decades of research leadership experience and an internationally recognized background in mass spectrometry and instrument design. His research portfolio includes more than 100 peer-reviewed publications and more than \$6 million in external funding.

He previously served as associate dean of research and graduate studies in the College of Science and Mathematics and chair of



the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Augusta University in Georgia.

In his new role, Verbeck will lead the Division of Research and Innovation, strengthen research infrastructure, and expand opportunities for faculty innovation, industry partnerships, and student research experiences.

His appointment supports A&M-San Antonio's continued momentum toward becoming a nationally recognized research institution.

National Recognition for Military Support

University Receives 2026-27 Military Friendly Gold Designation

A&M-San Antonio has once again been recognized for its commitment to serving military-connected students and their families, earning the 2026-27 Military Friendly School and Military Friendly Spouse School designations.

The University received Gold Status, placing it among the nation's top institutions for supporting veterans, active-duty service members and their families. This marks the seventh time A&M-San Antonio has received the Military Friendly School designation.

The recognition is based on institutional data and measures key areas, including student retention, graduation rates, career outcomes and support services.

Through the Office of Military Affairs, military-connected students receive support through academic resources, transition assistance, and partnerships with organizations including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Bexar County Department of Military and Veterans Services, and the Texas Veterans Commission.



Shakespeare Reimagined

Classic Literature Through a Latine Lens

During a weeklong series titled “The Bard in the Barrio: Latinx Pop Culture and Shakespeare Reimagined,” the University celebrated the enduring influence of William Shakespeare, exploring the intersection of classic literature, Latine culture, and visual storytelling.

The event featured discussions, film screenings, crafts, comics and scholarship highlighting how Shakespeare’s works continue to evolve across cultures and generations. The program was sponsored by the Borderlands Shakespeare Colectiva and departments within the College of Arts and Sciences.

A central focus of the celebration was the University Library’s Latinx Comics Special Collection, which includes more than 80 comics and graphic novels. The collection provided a unique opportunity to connect Shakespeare’s themes of identity, conflict and storytelling with contemporary forms of expression familiar to students.

By blending literature, art, and cultural perspectives, “Bard in the Barrio” showcased the creativity and diversity of scholarship taking place across A&M-San Antonio.



Toyota Investment Drives Innovation

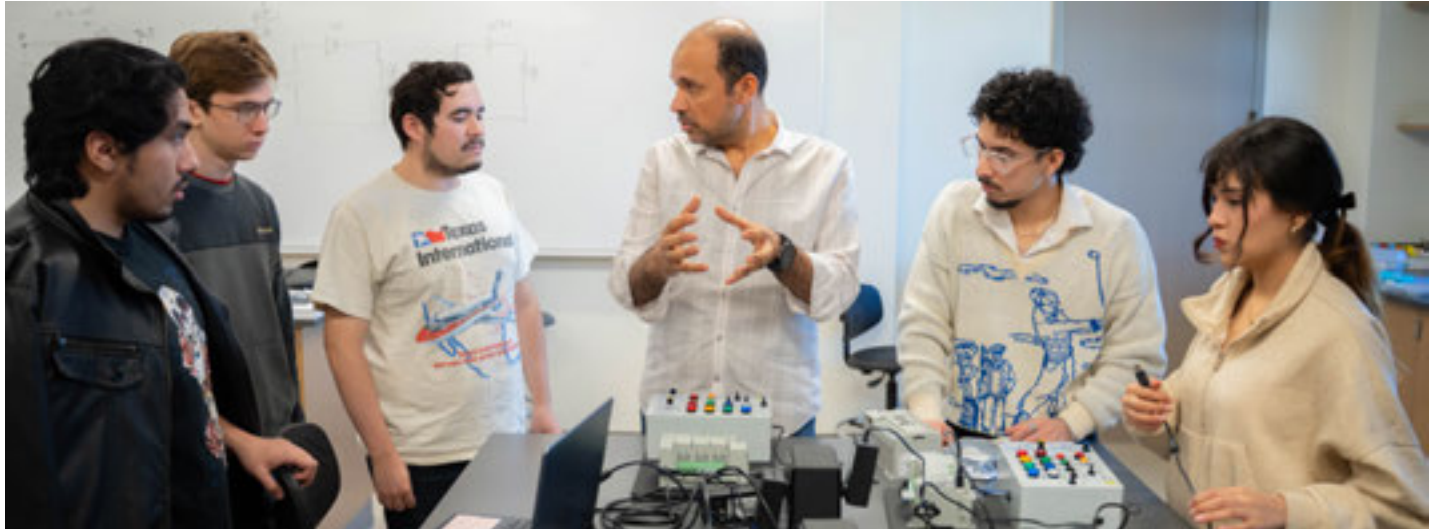
New Lab Will Train Future Engineering Technologists

A new partnership with Toyota Motor North America will strengthen STEM education at A&M-San Antonio. The company recently gifted \$25,000 to support the development of a state-of-the-art laboratory for the University's Electronic Systems Engineering Technology (ESET) program.

The new Programmable Logic Controller Lab, expected to open in Fall 2027 in the Science and Technology building, will provide students with hands-on experience with the same types of industrial technologies that power modern manufacturing and automation systems.

ESET prepares students for careers in industries such as manufacturing, avionics, medical electronics, energy, and infrastructure. Graduates are equipped for roles such as engineering technologists, technicians, and specialists in product development and manufacturing.

As A&M-San Antonio expands its STEM programs, collaborations like this help ensure students graduate ready to meet workforce needs.



Ahead of the Curve

High School Students Earn College Credit Before Graduation

Nearly 80 high school students celebrated a major academic milestone during A&M-San Antonio's inaugural Dual Credit and Early College High School Recognition Ceremony. The event honored students from Harlandale STEM Early College High School and Southwest Preparatory Early College High School who earned 42 or more college credit hours before graduating high school.

Some students began their college journey as early as age 13, attending classes on the A&M-San Antonio campus while completing their high school requirements. Through dual credit and early college programs, students earn both high school and college credit while gaining firsthand experience in a university environment.

Taught by University faculty and supported by campus resources, these Jaguars-in-training are building confidence, developing college-level skills, and accelerating their path toward a degree.



Investing in Creative Expression

Foundation Support for Student Artists, Writers and Musicians

A \$50,000 gift from the New York-based Edouard Foundation is creating new opportunities for students to explore their creativity and gain hands-on artistic experience.

The gift supports three signature programs: the University's Visiting Writers Series, Mariachi Los Jaguares del Sur, and Mosaic, A&M-San Antonio's undergraduate literary and visual arts magazine.

Students will benefit from expanded opportunities to engage with accomplished authors through the Visiting Writers Series, led by Writer-in-Residence Laurie Ann Guerrero. Mosaic will continue showcasing student writing and artwork and will debut in print alongside its digital edition in Spring 2027. The investment in Mariachi Los Jaguares del Sur will

help preserve and celebrate a rich cultural tradition while enhancing student performance opportunities.

The Edouard Foundation supports programs that improve quality of life through education, the arts, healthcare, and community service.



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SAN ANTONIO

Historic Academic Milestone

First Doctoral Degree Welcomes Inaugural Cohort

Less than a year after announcing its first doctoral degree, A&M-San Antonio began accepting applications for its inaugural Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership program.

The fully online program welcomed its first cohort in Fall 2026. Designed with working professionals in mind, the flexible program features year-round coursework and will prepare educators for leadership roles such as principals, superintendents and curriculum directors.

The doctorate focuses on helping educational leaders address challenges facing schools throughout South Texas and beyond. Future specialization tracks in early childhood education, special education, and bilingual education will provide students with advanced, interdisciplinary training aligned with the region's workforce needs.

The launch marks a historic milestone for A&M-San Antonio, expanding its academic offerings and strengthening its role as a leader in preparing the next generation of educators.



Starships to Strategy

Professor Amy Lewis' New Book Uses Star Trek to Explore Leadership and Management Principles

Amy Lewis, professor of management at Texas A&M University–San Antonio, is combining her lifelong passion for Star Trek with her academic expertise in a new leadership book scheduled for publication in the summer of 2027. Titled “To Boldly Go: Leadership Visions from the Future,” the book is part of Emerald Publishing’s popular culture and leadership series, which explores management concepts through well-known franchises.

Co-authored with scholars from the University of Louisiana Monroe and the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, the book examines topics such as negotiation, conflict resolution, leading organizational change, and the impact of emerging technologies through the lens of the iconic science fiction series.

A self-described lifelong Star Trek fan, Lewis says the franchise’s themes of exploration, collaboration, and striving for a better future make it an ideal framework for making leadership theories more engaging and accessible. The project builds on her previous scholarship connecting Star Trek and management education, including a 2024 journal article and the 2023 book “Entrepreneurial Cosplay.”



Diane Gavin's Legacy Continues

Donations Support Students Through Library Collection and Career Closet

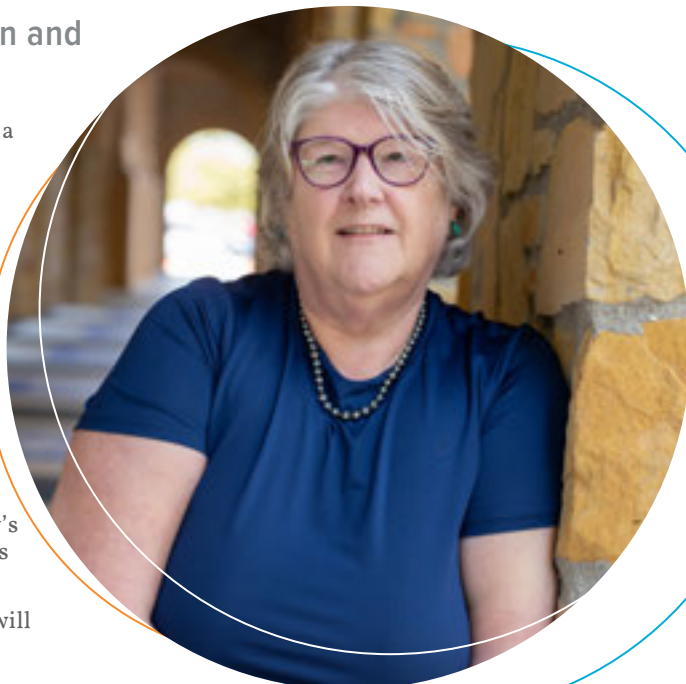
The legacy of Diane Gavin continues to inspire University students through a generous gift that reflects her lifelong passion for education, creativity and learning.

Gavin joined A&M-San Antonio in 2023 as executive director of the Center for Academic Innovation, where she collaborated with faculty to advance student-centered teaching and learning. Before her passing in 2025 after a brief battle with cancer, she made plans to give back to the University community she valued.

Honoring her wishes, Gavin's husband, Tim, donated more than 2,000 books from her personal collection to the University Library. The collection spans topics ranging from research methods and photography to space exploration and will continue benefiting students for years to come.

He also donated nearly 400 pieces of professional clothing to the University's Career Closet, which provides students with attire for interviews, career fairs and networking opportunities.

Through these gifts, Gavin's commitment to education and student success will continue shaping Jaguar experiences for generations.



A National Voice on Thoreau

Professor James Finley Shares Expertise in Ken Burns Documentary

Associate Professor James Finley was featured recently in a PBS documentary about the influential 19th-century author Henry David Thoreau. Produced by acclaimed filmmaker Ken Burns, the three-part documentary explores Thoreau's life, literary legacy, and enduring influence on environmentalism, social justice and nonviolent resistance.

Finley, who has spent much of his academic career studying Thoreau, was invited to appear in the film after producers recognized his expertise. In addition to being interviewed on camera, he served as a consultant and reviewed portions of the documentary's script.

A faculty member at A&M-San Antonio for 10 years, Finley teaches courses in American and environmental literature and has authored and edited numerous scholarly works on Thoreau. He is currently co-editing "The Oxford Handbook of Henry David Thoreau" and will publish a new book this summer.



Jaguar Athletics Recognized with RRAC Awards

Jaguar Athletics earned significant Red River Athletic Conference (RRAC) honors during the 2025-26 academic year, reflecting the department's commitment to both competitive excellence and student-athlete well-being.

Head Athletic Trainer Robert "Bobby" Ramirez was named the 2025-26 RRAC Athletic Trainer of the Year, an award recognizing outstanding commitment to student-athlete health and safety, excellence in sports medicine and

service to the conference. Selected by a vote of his peers, Ramirez oversees the health, safety and performance of Jaguar student-athletes across multiple sports.

The University also received the RRAC Sportsmanship Award for the third consecutive year. Voted on by conference athletic directors, the award honors the institution that best exemplifies teamwork, fair play, respect and integrity across its athletic programs.

Men's Golf Records Two Tournament Titles in 2025-26

The men's golf team continued its upward trajectory during the 2025-26 season, capturing two tournament championships and earning multiple top-five finishes. The Jaguars claimed team titles at the Chicken Express Invitational and The Lark Invitational, demonstrating steady growth throughout the year.

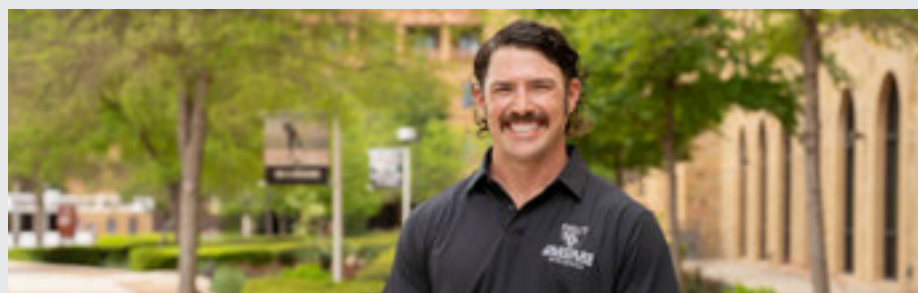
Individual Highlights



Nils Emil Sjö won the individual title at The Lark Invitational and was named RRAC Men's Golfer of the Week. He was also named to the All-RRAC Men's Golf Team following his standout junior season.

Jaguar Athletics Expands with Six New Varsity Sports

In spring, A&M-San Antonio announced the largest expansion of its athletics program, adding men's and women's indoor and outdoor track and field, along with men's and women's cross country, beginning in 2026-27. The addition of six varsity sports increases the University's athletics offerings to 12 programs and is expected to grow the student-athlete population to nearly 200. This expansion supports the University's vision of becoming a destination campus while creating new opportunities for student success, competition and community engagement.



Blair Sohl Named Inaugural Track and Field, Cross Country Coach

Blair Sohl joined Jaguar Athletics in April as the inaugural head coach of its men's and women's cross country and track and field programs. Sohl brings more than a decade of experience in collegiate coaching, recruiting, and strength and conditioning as he prepares to launch the University's newest varsity sports. He will lead the programs as they begin competition in 2026-27 and train at the University's new on-campus track and field complex.

Women's Basketball Makes History in Record-Setting Season

In only its second season, the women's basketball team continued its remarkable rise, finishing 21-7 overall and earning the No. 2 seed in the Red River Athletic Conference (RRAC) Tournament. The Jaguars also qualified for their first-ever NAIA National Championship Tournament and made history by winning the program's first national tournament game. Combined with back-to-back RRAC Tournament appearances, these national milestones cap off a record-setting year.



Individual Highlights

Evelyn Lorenzo earned First Team All-RRAC honors for the second consecutive season.



Aniyah Lewis and Kierra Sanderlin were named to the All-RRAC Second Team.



Male'ata Polamalu was selected to the RRAC Champions of Character Team for exemplifying leadership, integrity and sportsmanship.

Men's Basketball Reaches First RRAC Tournament

The men's basketball team made history by earning its first-ever spot in the Red River Athletic Conference Tournament.

In just the program's second season, the Jaguars secured a postseason spot and continued building a strong foundation for future success.

Individual Highlights

Antwone Gonzales earned First Team All-RRAC honors.



Dezmon Dudley received Honorable Mention All-RRAC recognition.



Paul Minjoth was named to the RRAC Champions of Character Team for his leadership, integrity and sportsmanship.



Milestone Career Wins

Two A&M-San Antonio coaches reached significant career milestones during the 2025-26 academic year.



Head Softball Coach Nicole Dame earned her 200th career victory during the Jaguars' 25-0 win over Texas College. The only head coach in program history, Dame has guided Jaguar Softball from its inaugural season to its status as one of the Red River Athletic Conference's rising programs, leading the team to multiple conference tournament appearances and its first NAIA National Championship berth.



Chris Minner, head coach of the women's basketball team, recorded his 500th career victory, marking a milestone in a coaching career spanning more than two decades. Since launching the Jaguars' program in 2024, Minner has led the team to back-to-back winning seasons and consecutive Red River Athletic Conference Tournament appearances.

Together, the achievements reflect the leadership, consistency and competitive excellence helping to shape the future of Jaguar Athletics.

Softball Posts Breakthrough Season with 26 Wins

The Jaguar softball team turned in one of the best seasons in program history, finishing 26-18 overall and 17-10 in Red River Athletic Conference play. The Jaguars advanced to the RRAC Tournament, where they went 2-2 and competed in three one-run games against the conference's top teams.

Individual Highlights

Kaylee Barlow and Samara Aguilera earned First Team All-RRAC honors.



Krisilyn Corral was named Second Team All-RRAC and earned a spot on the RRAC All-Tournament Team alongside Samara Aguilera.



Krissy Luera received an Honorable Mention All-RRAC recognition.



WELCOME TO JAGUAR NATION



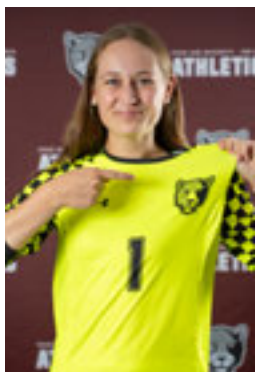
International Student-Athletes Find Opportunity, Community, and a Place to Call Home

By Kevin Castro

For Texas A&M University-San Antonio's international student-athletes, competing as a Jaguar is about much more than playing a sport. It often means leaving behind family, friends, and familiar traditions to pursue an education and athletic career thousands of miles from home.

As Jaguar Athletics has grown, so has its international presence. While A&M-San Antonio primarily serves San Antonio and South Texas, the University has expanded its reach over the years and now attracts students from 30 countries around the world. This includes student-athletes who are helping elevate the University's programs while bringing new perspectives, cultures and experiences.

"Our international athletes have become pillars within the University community," interim men's basketball head coach David Smith said. "They are the first to volunteer whenever anything is needed on campus and approach everything they do with a remarkable sense of school pride."



Smith said those contributions extend beyond competition. International student-athletes strengthen team culture by sharing traditions, meals and experiences that help teammates see the world through a different lens.

"Our international students love teaching others about their culture and also learning from everyone else as well," Smith said. "It just creates an environment of curiosity and

understanding that is hard to duplicate in any other environment."

For men's basketball player Luca Stubel, that journey began in Germany.

"I always knew I wanted to play in America," said Luca, a sophomore studying international business management. "When A&M-San Antonio called and invited me for a visit, it just clicked instantly. This was the place, this was the moment, and exactly the kind of challenge I had been waiting for."



The transition wasn't always easy. A new culture, new routines, and thousands of miles separating him from home presented challenges both on and off the court. But after facing unexpected health issues during his first semester, Luca discovered what made A&M-San Antonio different.

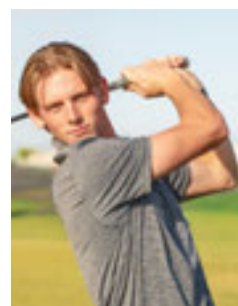
"What got me was how many people showed up for me without having to," said Luca, who plays guard. "That meant everything to me and showed me immediately what kind of community this is. That's the moment this place became home."

Luca now shares pieces of his own culture with teammates while embracing life in South Texas.

"I'm learning San Antonio's culture just as much as I'm sharing my own," said Luca.

Timothy Moody, women's soccer head coach, believes those cultural exchanges benefit every student-athlete.

"When players from different countries come together, everyone learns to communicate better, appreciate different viewpoints, and find common ground," Moody said. "That diversity strengthens our team chemistry."



The impact of international student-athletes reaches beyond individual teams. According to Director of Athletics Dr. Darnell Smith, the international student-athlete population has more than doubled as Jaguar Athletics has expanded.

"International athletes have enriched Jaguar Athletics in ways that go far beyond competition," Smith said. "They bring new perspectives, styles of play and cultural traditions that broaden the team experience."

For students like Luca, the opportunity represents something larger than basketball. "We show up here knowing absolutely nobody, on a different continent, in a completely foreign country," he said. "For people here, Texas is home. For us, it's a whole new world."

That willingness to step into the unknown is helping shape the future of Jaguar Athletics. While international student-athletes arrive from across the globe, they quickly discover that wearing the Jaguar logo means becoming part of a community that feels like home.

2008



Jason M. Tam is an Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom veteran and currently serves as a Major in the Air Force Reserve at the 433AW here at Lackland AFB, where he is a formal training unit instructor and evaluator on the C-5M Super Galaxy. Tam is also a Captain for United Airlines, based in Houston, flying the Airbus 319, 320 and 321. Tam graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in Business Management through Palo Alto's 2+2 program, where he also pursued professional pilot training.

2011

Melissa Torres was awarded Master Teacher for the year 2024-2025 by the Texas Education Agency.

2013

Jacqueline Hernandez founded Revelation Counseling Services in 2019. As a licensed professional counselor-supervisor, she leads a team that provides mental health education, crisis response services, support groups, and outreach initiatives designed to reduce stigma and increase access to care for underserved populations. The practice recently celebrated seven years of service, growth, and impact and expanded into a larger location at The Convent at Our Lady of the Lake University.



2014



Lupe Alsidez Building on the foundation of two bachelor's degrees and a master's in English, Alsidez has actively expanded his creative and professional footprint as an artist producing under the brand The Pinto Scribe. Recently, his work has grown into a multimedia project spanning screenwriting, narrative poetry, lyricism, and digital audio production. One of his tracks, "The Kingdom," specifically celebrates his time at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Beyond art, Alsidez is a peer support specialist, helping individuals navigate journeys of recovery and resilience.

2016

Tim Holman graduated in May of 2016 from Texas A&M University-San Antonio with a bachelor's degree in science and a double major in special education and history. Shortly after graduating and teaching his first year of high school in San Antonio, he moved back home to his home state in the suburbs of Chicago. He graduated in May of 2025 with a Master of Arts in Education from the University of Illinois-Springfield and completed his 10-year tenure as a special education teacher. He recently passed several content tests, which now allow him to teach 5th-12th grade



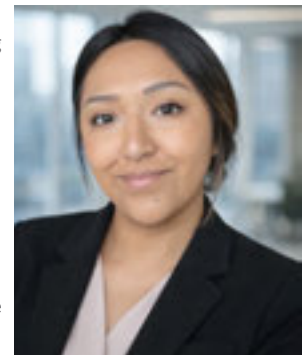
2020



Brianna Dzierzanowski After completing a bachelor's in history and social studies teaching certification at Texas A&M University-San Antonio, Dzierzanowski completed her master's degree in history at UT San Antonio. Combining her education and history backgrounds, Brianna began working in the museum field as an educator for the Texas Historical Commission before moving to Salt Lake City. She is currently working for the Utah Historical Society to open Utah's first state history museum. Dzierzanowski's area of focus is building the K-12 programs for the museum.

2022

Bianca Weaver graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration, concentrating in human resource management. During her time at Texas A&M University-San Antonio, she began an internship with the Bexar County Sheriff's Office and was later offered a full-time position, launching a career in human resources. Since then, Weaver has grown through a variety of roles within human resources and local nonprofit organizations, discovering a passion for serving and supporting the community. Weaver currently works in the healthcare industry as a talent acquisition specialist.



Lauren Huerta obtained her Master of Education with a concentration in special education from Texas Tech University in December 2025. She returned to Texas A&M University-San Antonio as a full-time staff member with Transition University and is excited about the program's growth.

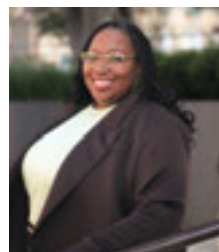
2023

Layla Hernandez attended and graduated with distinction from Northern Arizona University with her master's in December 2025. Upon graduation, she applied and was accepted into the Doctor of Philosophy English program at UT San Antonio. She has also been promoted twice within civil service and now serves as an executive assistant in air education and training command.



2026

La-Tieka Sims '20, '26 earned her Master of Business Administration at Texas A&M University-San Antonio and was promoted to chief of staff for City Council District 7.



A man with a beard, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and light-colored trousers, stands with his hands clasped in front of him. He is positioned on a paved walkway in front of a large, ornate building with a prominent dome and arched windows. The background is slightly blurred, showing greenery and other parts of the building.

FROM CARNIE TO CONSERVATION

By Kevin Castro

When Forrest Cobb walked across the commencement stage at Texas A&M University-San Antonio in 2015, he wasn't just earning a biology degree. He was taking the first step toward a career and purpose he spent years searching for.

Today, the San Antonio native helps shape environmental policy for 27 million acres of military land. As a national infrastructure coordinator with the U.S. Department of War, he helps ensure military installations remain environmentally sustainable while supporting training, conservation and recreation.

It's a career built on science, stewardship and leadership. But it almost never happened.

Cobb's journey to a college degree wasn't linear. Before discovering biology, he explored different careers and worked a variety of jobs, including a stint as a carnie for a traveling carnival. All the while, he wrestled with finding where he belonged.

"I had a drive to achieve, but I didn't quite know where to put that energy," Cobb said.

Looking back, Cobb said those early detours were just as valuable as the path he ultimately chose. One of those detours even led him to vocational training in welding before he realized something was missing.

"I very quickly found out that I was not going to be happy unless I was in more of an academic environment," Cobb said. "I'd always been fascinated by the natural world and the sciences, but somewhere along the line I convinced myself that maybe that wasn't something for me."

His journey eventually brought him to Texas A&M-San Antonio, where he found exactly what he had been seeking. The University's biology program offered small class sizes and close relationships with faculty who invested in his success.

Among his mentors were Associate Professor of Biology Rodolfo Valdez Barillas and former University adjunct faculty member Dean Wiemers, who taught courses in biology and wildlife ecology.

Valdez Barillas helped Cobb land an internship with the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, which supports private land stewardship, military land sustainability and species conservation.

Wiemers spent hours outside of class with Cobb, exploring the fields around campus and helping him sharpen his plant identification and field survey skills.

After graduating in 2015, Cobb joined the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute as a research assistant. For over a decade, he helped lead conservation research, community outreach and natural resource management projects across Texas.

In 2023, he accepted a new challenge with the Office of the Under Secretary of War for Acquisition & Sustainment, a key entity for logistics and supply chain within the Department of War. In his role as a natural infrastructure coordinator, he helps develop ecosystem management strategies and environmental policy for military installations nationwide.

"I wanted to be in places where big decisions get made," Cobb said. "I wanted to be impactful."

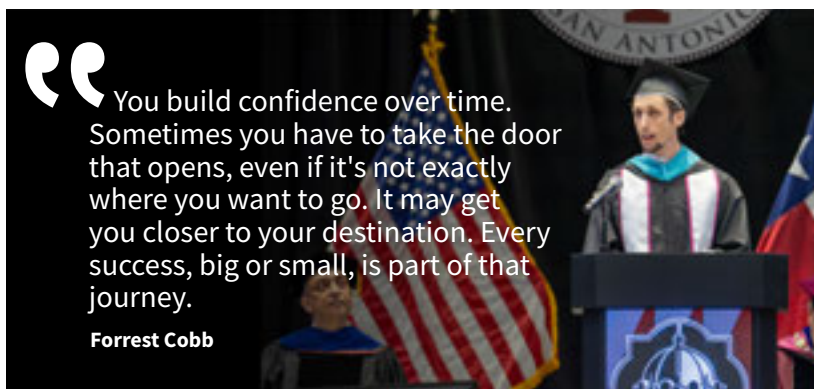
This spring, Cobb returned to A&M-San Antonio in a different role — not as a student, but as commencement speaker and recipient of the University's Distinguished Alumni Award.

Standing before graduates who undoubtedly faced some of the same uncertainty and self-doubt he once felt, Cobb shared a simple message: Success doesn't always follow a straight line.

"Most people feel imposter syndrome to some degree," he said. "You build confidence over time. Sometimes you have to take the door that opens, even if it's

not exactly where you want to go. It may get you closer to your destination. Every success, big or small, is part of that journey."

As the newest Jaguars begin charting their own course, Cobb's story is proof that purpose isn't always found on the first try. Sometimes, it reveals itself one step and one opportunity at a time.



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