

SPRING 2026

¡ADELANTE!

THE MAGAZINE OF TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY—SAN ANTONIO



MOMENTUM
Jaguar Athletics charts a bold trajectory
of progress and possibility **RISING**





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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As you turn the pages of the Spring 2026 edition of *Jaguar Ante!*, a clear theme emerges: momentum. Though we are still a relatively young institution, we are boldly meeting the challenges of today — and of the future—with the pioneering spirit that has come to define our University. We are not standing still; we are moving forward with purpose and accelerating toward a future filled with promise.

This drive is evident throughout campus. We are focusing our efforts on ways to enhance engagement and build a deeper sense of community. Our Jaguar Athletics has become a powerful catalyst for that connection and pride—energizing our campus and creating opportunities for students to thrive both in competition and in the classroom. At the same time, we are challenging the traditional narrative of a commuter university. We are redefining what it means to commute to campus and creating a space where both commuters and residents feel at home while here.

This forward motion is woven throughout the campus but extends far beyond our physical boundaries, as well. Our faculty are amplifying impact through their publishing and research, from our partnership with Texas A&M University Press to our groundbreaking work in hydroponics, we are leading the advancement of knowledge in many fields. Students, too, are leading the way— while keeping up with a rapidly changing digital world, from our Influencer Club to student entrepreneurs. These efforts demonstrate that we are not just keeping pace with change—we are propelling it forward.

This past year, we also celebrated milestones that affirm the quality and rigor of our academic programs. From achieving accreditation of our undergraduate computer science program by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology to earning strong rankings in U.S. News & World Report, we are delivering on our promise—to provide an exceptional education that prepares students for meaningful careers and lives of impact. These milestones are more than accolades—they are proof of the excellence and dedication that define our community.

As you read the stories in this issue, I invite you to see what I see every day: a university that is young but bold, and on the move. Together, we are building a future where access and excellence go hand in hand, and where every student can find their place, their purpose, and their path to success.

The best is yet to come as we continue to move forward and build momentum. Thank you for being part of this journey.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Salvador Hector Ochoa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Salvador Hector Ochoa, Ph.D.

MOMENTUM RISING



Jaguar Athletics charts a bold trajectory of
progress and possibility

BY SAM BOYKIN

M

ore than 900 fans packed into Texas A&M University–San Antonio’s new Recreation Center to watch the women’s basketball team take on Southern University at New Orleans. After a tough back-and-forth contest, the buzzer sounded, securing an 89–73 victory for the Jaguars as the crowd—including then-Mayor Ron Nirenberg, former Mayor Henry Cisneros, and Councilmember Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia—erupted with cheers.



They had good reason to be excited. The Oct. 28, 2024, matchup was more than a single win. It marked the debut of men’s and women’s basketball and signaled the next chapter for A&M–San Antonio Athletics, which also includes men’s and women’s soccer, men’s golf, and softball.

In less than five years, Jaguar Athletics has grown into a powerful force—serving as the front door to the University and transforming campus spirit. As momentum builds, the University is shaping a culture rooted in excellence while inspiring students to connect, compete, and believe in something bigger than themselves.

BEATING THE ODDS

Momentum defines this era for Jaguar Athletics—a program that began against all odds and is now on a trajectory of growth and excellence.

With four active competitive sports, six teams, nearly 150 student-athletes, numerous conference achievements, and expanding facilities, the University's accomplishments are remarkable for such a young program.

It all began in 2019, when students voted to approve a \$10-per-credit-hour fee to fund an intercollegiate athletics program. The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents soon gave approval, clearing the way for

A&M—San Antonio to launch Jaguar Athletics. The University competes in the NAIA's Red River Athletic Conference (RRAC), with member institutions across Texas, Louisiana, and New Mexico.

Dr. Darnell Smith was selected as the University's inaugural athletic director. A San Antonio native, Smith

previously served nearly a decade as assistant athletic director of compliance at the University of Central Oklahoma.

But just as the program began to take shape, an unexpected challenge emerged.

"The University hosted a press conference on January 15, 2020, and I got to introduce myself to the community," Smith said. "About two months later, COVID-19 hit."

Despite the disruption, Smith was able to hire important key leaders. Among the earliest additions was Christi Cano, men's head golf coach and assistant athletic director. At the time, Cano, a San Antonio native, was working as the men's head golf coach at the University of Houston-Victoria.

"Houston was my first coaching gig, and I'm so glad I took a leap of faith to start my coaching career there, because it gave

me the experience and opportunity to come back home and help start A&M-San Antonio's athletics program," she said.

I'm so glad I took a leap of faith to start my coaching career there, because it gave me the experience and opportunity to come back home and help start A&M-San Antonio's athletics program.

Coach Christi Cano

Another early addition was Nicole Dame, head softball coach. Like Cano and Smith, Dame is a San Antonio native. She previously served as the assistant softball coach at Austin's Concordia University

Texas from 2016 to 2020. Prior to that, she worked as the head coach at several high schools.

"I had been at Concordia for five seasons, and I was ready to explore what head coaching opportunities were out there when I found out about the opening at A&M-San Antonio," she said. "I was lucky enough to get the job. It was like the stars aligned for me."

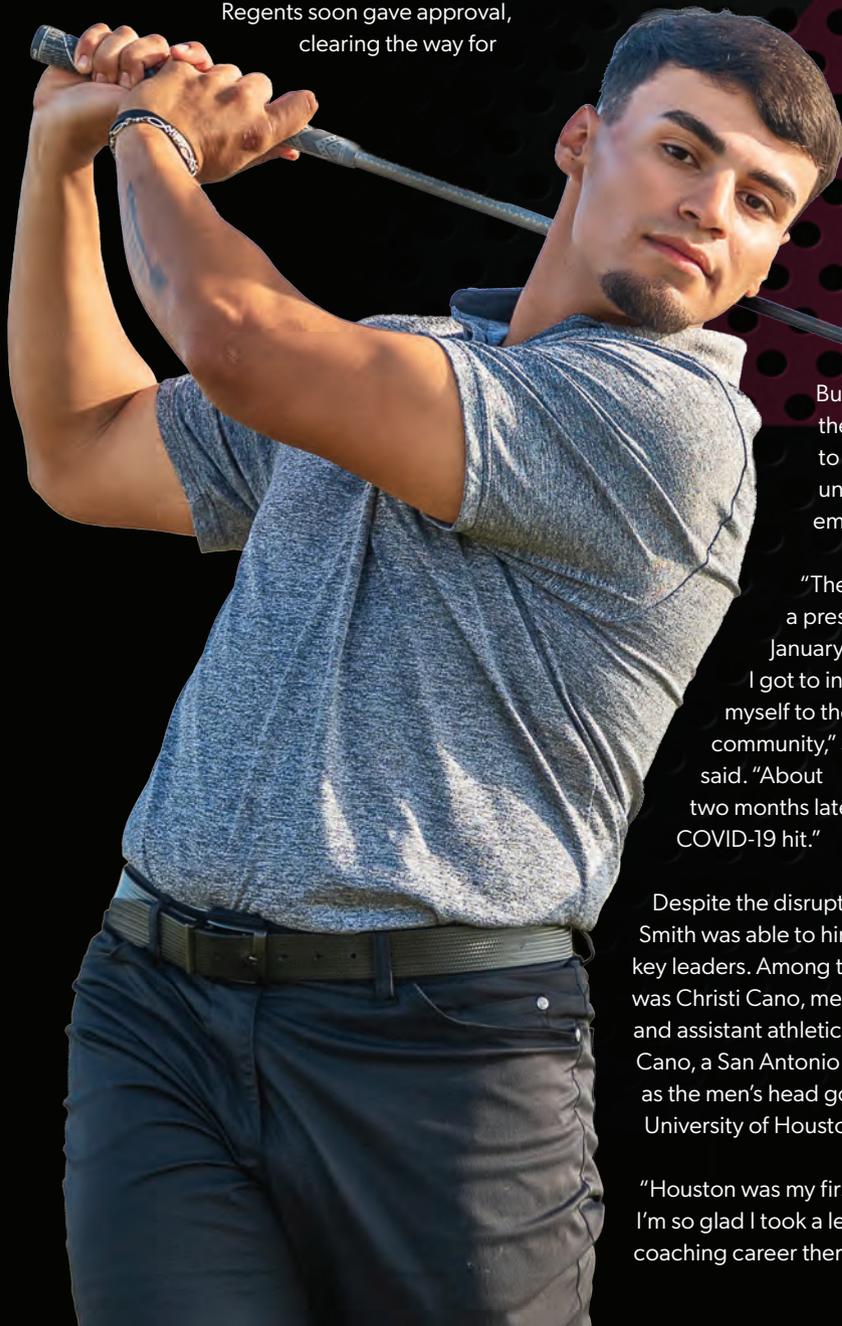
Along with the coaches, another early hire was Deputy Athletic Director Stephen Sherman, who previously served as an

assistant athletic director and head coach for cross country and track and field at Our Lady of the Lake University.

But soon after the arrival of Cano, Dame and Sherman, the national shutdown halted progress.

"Sports were put on hold," said Smith. "And not just locally, but globally."

Despite the challenges presented, the University regrouped and officially launched its athletics program in spring 2021, beginning with softball and men's golf. However, with some COVID-19 restrictions still in place, the coaches had to conduct most of their work remotely.



WHAT IT TAKES TO START FROM SCRATCH

Launching a new athletics program is not written in a playbook. It takes vision, persistence, and a relentless commitment to the program and to student-athletes. For coaches Dame and Cano, that meant creating opportunity from a blank slate.

The process began with recruiting, no small feat for a program that did not yet exist, while also adhering to COVID social distancing rules. But the coaches were able to inspire the first student-athletes to come to A&M-San Antonio.

"We made a lot of phone calls and held countless video meetings to recruit players and build our roster," Dame said.

One of Dame's early recruits was Ebbie Rodriguez, who embraced the challenge of joining a brand-new team. Rodriguez would also go on to forge an impressive athletic career during her time at the University, including being named the most valuable pitcher during the 2023 RRAC Softball Tournament.

"It was very exciting to start with a brand-new program," Rodriguez said. "I'm a San Antonio native, and when I got the offer to play for Coach Dame, I was like, 100 percent, I'm there."

With the excitement came the reality of the challenges a new program faces: limited facilities, minimal equipment, and the pressure of proving themselves.

"You just had to trust the process," she said. "But we all grinded it out, and that first year was truly great. Everyone on the team worked together. It was a big learning experience because I saw what it takes to grow a program from the ground up."

That resilience and teamwork paid off. Rodriguez earned a bachelor's degree in 2023 and graduated with an MBA the following year. She recently completed the nursing program at the UT Health San Antonio (now UT San Antonio) School of Nursing and now works in the pediatric intensive care unit at Methodist Children's Hospital.

Even with all her new job responsibilities, Rodriguez continues to come back to campus, working with Dame as a volunteer assistant coach.

"I had to come back because I wanted to be part of the program and show how truly grateful I am for the opportunity the coaches gave me," she said.

Like Dame, golf coach Cano also relied heavily on virtual recruiting—convincing

athletes to join a program they could not yet see.

"I told them they had the chance to build the first-ever golf team from the ground up," she said. "Fortunately, A&M-San Antonio sells itself, and the A&M name holds a lot of weight in Texas."

Her first recruit was Javier Jazo, who later became the University's first male student-athlete to graduate. He earned his MBA in 2023 and now

works as a senior manager at the Defense Research Institute in his hometown of Chicago. During his time at the University, he received the Red River Athletic Conference Champions of Character Award and was named a Red River Athletic Conference Association of Student-Athletes representative.

"My time at A&M-San Antonio was great," Jazo said. "I had a remarkable experience, and the instructors and professors were world-class. Coach Cano and I are still great friends. She taught me so much, and she's so well respected."



“It was very exciting to start with a brand-new program. I’m a San Antonio native, and when I got the offer to play for Coach Dame, I was like, 100 percent, I’m there.”

Ebbie Rodriguez '23

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

The launch of softball and golf was only the beginning. With those programs off to a strong start, A&M–San Antonio set its sights on expanding opportunities for student-athletes and deepening its presence in collegiate sports. Soccer was next to debut in fall 2021.

Roberto Jaramillo is the head men's soccer coach and Tim Moody is the women's head coach. Both programs have made impressive strides. The men's team finished the 2024-25 season with an 11-4-2 record, marking the most successful season in program history. Meanwhile, three Jaguars on the women's team were selected for the RRAC 2025 All-Conference Team.

The momentum does not stop there, as Jaguar Athletics expanded its sports program once again with the launch of basketball in fall 2024. Under Head Coach Chris Minner, the women's team earned a spot in the 2025 RRAC Tournament as the No. 4 seed in the program's inaugural season. The men's team, under Head Coach Chris Dial, had multiple players earn RRAC All-Conference

honors during their inaugural season, including Alex Nunnally, who received the All-Conference Champions of Character Team Award for his leadership and dedication as a player and teammate.

As the University's athletic director, Smith said he is very proud of the past five years and all that the coaches and players have accomplished. Their successes represent more than wins and titles—they reflect a strategic vision and a shared commitment.

"After COVID, we figured out a way forward," he said. "We started with sports that made sense from a competitive, financial, and community standpoint and then hired coaches who believed in our mission and recruited student-athletes who shared that vision."

FACILITIES FUEL GROWTH AND COMMUNITY CONNECTION

As the athletics program expands, so do the facilities that bring students, families, and fans together. The new Recreation Center, which opened in 2024, hosts men's and women's basketball. The 22,322-square-foot venue features a fitness center, locker rooms, retractable volleyball nets, and seating for approximately 900 spectators.

The University also unveiled its state-of-the-art athletics complex in spring 2026, which features an eight-lane NCAA-certified competition track, a multipurpose field, and major upgrades to the softball complex—including new seating for 350 fans, dugouts, and a press box. Along with the Recreation Center, the complex serves as a vibrant new gathering place for students and fans to support Jaguar Athletics.

"We're so excited to have this new on-campus field to call home," said Dame. "We are hoping to get lots of fans to come out and support our team."

Bexar County contributed \$10 million to support the complex, recognizing its value as a regional asset that benefits both student-athletes and the broader community.

"This is a strategic step forward for the University," Smith said. "It strengthens educational and athletic opportunities while filling a critical need for sports and recreation facilities on the South Side."

The complex also sets the stage for future expansion. In February, the University announced its plans to begin men's and women's track and field and men's and women's cross country. The University expects to have the sports' debut season in fall 2026.

"We're looking at our options as far as being able to compete at the highest level within our conference and winning a national championship within the next five years," Smith said. "We've built the foundation, and we're aiming high. That may be ambitious, but I think we're in a strong position."





COMMUNITY AND ALUMNI FUEL JAGUAR ATHLETICS

Philanthropic support has played a critical role in the growth and success of Jaguar Athletics, with community members and alumni stepping forward to invest in the University's future.

Dr. David Schmidt, longtime physician for the San Antonio Spurs and founder of Sports Medicine Associates of San Antonio, holds the distinction of being the first person to make a financial gift to A&M-San Antonio's rapidly expanding athletics program. When he learned in 2020 that the University was launching intercollegiate sports, he pledged to donate \$10,000 annually for five years.

"Giving to A&M-San Antonio Athletics was a no-brainer. It's amazing how the program has grown in such a short time," Schmidt said.

“Being able to write checks, not for personal gain, but to support other students, is a testament to the success of our University. It’s an awesome feeling to be able to come back and make those contributions.”

Ryan Bergmann '09

A&M-San Antonio alumnus Ryan Bergmann '09 was among the basketball program's earliest donors. A business administration graduate who now runs the Bergmann Law Firm PLLC, Bergmann was eager to support the University's new basketball teams and the broader growth of Jaguar Athletics.

"Being able to write checks, not for personal gain, but to support other students, is a testament to the success of our University," Bergmann said. "It's an awesome feeling to be able to come back and make those contributions."

Bergmann's gift directly supports student-athletes by helping fund travel, equipment, and other essential needs as the program expands.

JAGUAR ATHLETICS SHINES IN THE RED RIVER CONFERENCE

In five years, Jaguar Athletics has earned standout recognition across the Red River Athletic Conference and beyond.

MEN'S GOLF

Captured its first-ever tournament victory at the 2025 Chicken Express Classic, with player Jacob Pena earning RRAC Golfer of the Year and Conference Champion honors. The team also set a new program record for best single-round score during the win.

SOFTBALL

Received the 2024–25 RRAC Sportsmanship Award. In 2023, three players were named NAIA Scholar-Athletes, and standout athletes Yaya Jones and Peyton Vasquez earned NFCA All-Region recognition.

MEN'S SOCCER

Made its first-ever RRAC tournament appearance in 2022. Ronald Aguilar received the 2024 RRAC Offensive Player of the Year award.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Earned three consecutive RRAC tournament appearances, finished the 2025 regular season in fifth place, and advanced into the playoffs as the sixth seed. Several athletes—including Ana Barragan and Maram Abdeljaber—have received All-Conference honors.

BASKETBALL

The newest programs are already earning early recognition. Natalia Trevino was named RRAC Women's Basketball Player of the Year, and Evelyn Lorenzo earned RRAC First-Team All-Conference honors.

JAGUAR ATHLETICS PROGRAM RECOGNITION

A&M–San Antonio has achieved back-to-back RRAC Sportsmanship Awards and earned NAIA Gold Status for Champions of Character. Athletic Director Darnell Smith was named 2023–24 RRAC Athletic Director of the Year. The Athletics Department also finished the 2024–25 academic year with a 3.10 GPA, the highest department GPA for an academic year in the program's history.





A NEW ERA OF PRIDE AND PURPOSE

From a vision launched on the eve of a global shutdown to packed stands and championship ambitions, Jaguar Athletics has rapidly become the heartbeat of student life and a rallying point for the surrounding community. The University is not only producing competitive teams but also shaping leaders and writing a powerful new chapter for South San Antonio.

As Smith reflected, “We’re building champions on the field, on the court, in the classroom, and in the community. The sky’s the limit.”

With more sports on the horizon and a growing wave of student and community support, Jaguar Athletics is far more than a program—it is a movement redefining pride, purpose, and possibility at A&M–San Antonio.



A&M-San Antonio announced in February 2026 that they’ll be adding 6 new sports to Jaguar Athletics. These additions strengthen the athletics program, bringing more competition and opportunity for students.

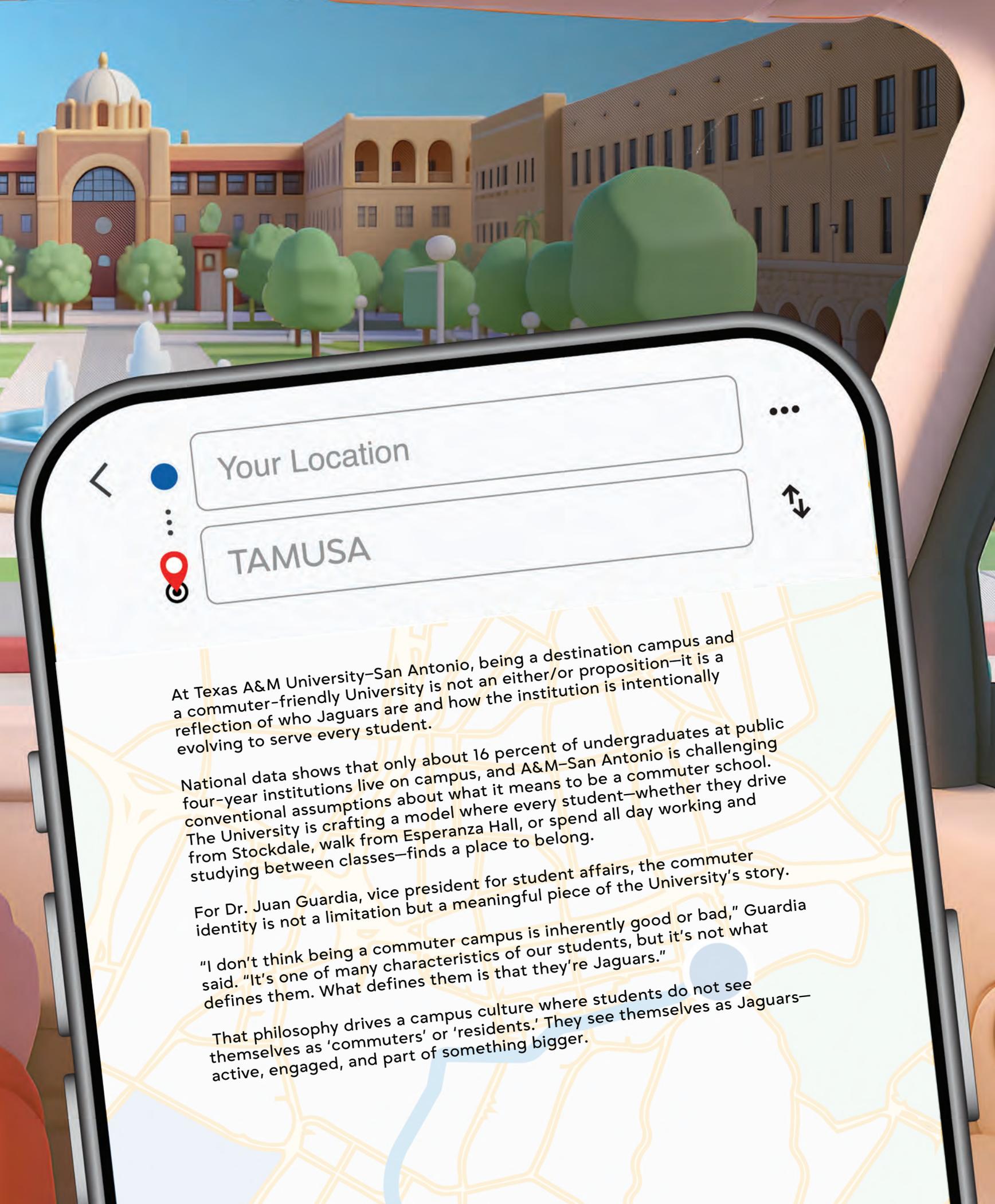
***MEN’S AND WOMEN’S
INDOOR TRACK AND FIELD
OUTDOOR TRACK AND FIELD
CROSS COUNTRY***



REACH YOUR DESTINATION

Blending Destination-Campus Energy with
Commuter-Friendly Culture

By Sam Boykin



Your Location

TAMUSA

At Texas A&M University–San Antonio, being a destination campus and a commuter–friendly University is not an either/or proposition—it is a reflection of who Jaguars are and how the institution is intentionally evolving to serve every student.

National data shows that only about 16 percent of undergraduates at public four–year institutions live on campus, and A&M–San Antonio is challenging conventional assumptions about what it means to be a commuter school. The University is crafting a model where every student—whether they drive from Stockdale, walk from Esperanza Hall, or spend all day working and studying between classes—finds a place to belong.

For Dr. Juan Guardia, vice president for student affairs, the commuter identity is not a limitation but a meaningful piece of the University's story.

"I don't think being a commuter campus is inherently good or bad," Guardia said. "It's one of many characteristics of our students, but it's not what defines them. What defines them is that they're Jaguars."

That philosophy drives a campus culture where students do not see themselves as 'commuters' or 'residents.' They see themselves as Jaguars—active, engaged, and part of something bigger.

“If I live 20 minutes away and I’m able to commute, I’m going to do that, but I also want to be involved. I want to take advantage of everything happening here.”

Olivia Vielma



Drive Here

The experiences of A&M–San Antonio students reflect that nuance. Their stories reveal that commuting is not simply a logistical choice. It can be a financial decision, a cultural practice, a matter of family responsibility, or even the result of being from a nearby community that already feels like home.

Sophomore education major Olivia Vielma embodies this blended identity. Born and raised in the small town of Lytle, she drives 25 minutes each day on I-35 to reach campus.

Like many students, what keeps Vielma grounded—and on campus—is involvement. She works in the Student Life office and is active in Campus Activities Board, a student organization that helps create fun and engaging programming.

“If I live 20 minutes away and I’m able to commute, I’m going to do that,” she said. “But I also want to be involved. I want to take advantage of everything happening here.”

Senior Faith Gonzales, who lives an hour away in Stockdale, echoes that sentiment, but her path to connection took longer. When she previously attended community college, her experience was typical of many commuters.

“It was kind of just school and home,” she said. “I would eat lunch in my car, then go right to class. I wasn’t involved at all.”

That changed when she transferred to A&M–San Antonio. Through her on-campus job, she helps students plan events and find their community. She calls it her “family,” one that ultimately shaped her academic path.



Fabian Hernandez

“The events, the community, seeing the same faces every day...that kept me here,” she said.

Gonzales’s experience highlights why University leaders are deliberately investing in spaces, programs, and initiatives designed to make the campus a true destination—whether students commute or live here.

The opening of the new commuter lounge is part of a broader effort to give

students a sense of place. The lounge opened in 2025 on the first floor of the Central Academic Building and features comfortable seating, study areas, and

kitchen amenities. Though designed with commuters in mind, the lounge is open to all students.

“We needed students to have a space that reflects their needs and acknowledges their presence. A home base,” said Zeak Naifeh, associate vice president and dean of students.

Other efforts are expanding across campus. The University now offers extended service hours once a month, keeping offices open until 7 p.m. to support students who work or take evening classes. A new director of student leadership and community engagement will help shape the early stages of a Commuter Student Engagement Master Plan.

“We’re still gathering baseline data, listening to students, analyzing what they need,” Guardia said. “We don’t want to build things for commuters without knowing what they actually need.”

Part of that evolving plan may include commuter ambassadors—students

specifically tasked with supporting commuter needs—but Guardia stresses the importance of creating a plan with students as essential contributors.



Live Here

At the same time, A&M–San Antonio’s residential population is steadily growing. For many residents, living on campus is not about avoiding a commute but about seeking independence, convenience, and social belonging.

Junior Lynaida Bonilla, a psychology major from Houston, chose A&M–San Antonio in part because it offered the opportunity to live on campus affordably. Bonilla resides in Estrella Hall, which opened in 2024.

“It’s easy for me to stay busy. If you take the initiative, there are lots of opportunities to get involved,” she said.

Similarly, sophomore Danajsa Sims came to A&M–San Antonio from the Dallas–Fort

Worth area. For her, residential life served as a critical entry point into community.

“There’s a difference between just having classmates and actually sharing a residential hall with someone,” she said.

Support systems like the Office of First-Year Experience (OFYE) play a pivotal role in making A&M–San Antonio a true destination campus for all students from day one. Through programs, resources, and personalized guidance, OFYE ensures that new Jaguars do not just attend classes—they



build connections and begin to see the University as home.

Sims said residence halls are another part of creating supportive environments through resident advisor-led programming and community spaces that encourage socialization.

“I see people hanging out in the community rooms, even doing their laundry together,” she said. “It really helps people break out of their shell, especially if they’re far from home.”



Belong Here

As A&M–San Antonio grows, the lines between commuter campus and destination campus continue to blur. They complement one another. The vibrancy of student life depends on both.

Surrounding development is also contributing to its growth. The recent opening of nearby housing options, including VIDA San Antonio, is transforming the area into a bustling hub of activity.

“In a few years, this area is going to feel like its own city,” Guardia said. “That growth is exciting, but it means we must be mindful of scheduling, traffic, transportation, and making sure students can get to campus and participate without barriers.”

Even students living just a few blocks away technically count as commuters. It is another reminder that at A&M–San Antonio, “commuter” is a broad and evolving category.

A&M–San Antonio is becoming a place for students to spend the entire day—going to class, working, attending events, studying in the lounge, and building friendships—regardless of where they sleep at night.

That blend of commuter strength and destination-campus vibrancy is, in many ways, the University’s identity. A&M–San Antonio is proving itself to be a community-focused, accessible destination campus.

“You can have multiple identities at the same time and still be part of the Jaguar family,” Guardia said.

“ I see people hanging out in the community rooms, even doing their laundry together. It really helps people break out of their shell, especially if they’re far from home.

Danajsa Sims



Alumni and Students make waves as Jaguar Entrepreneurs

By Sam Boykin

Alumna Michelle Titzman and her family were recently in the national spotlight after appearing on ABC's "Shark Tank" and securing a \$50,000 investment.

As they prepared to audition for "Shark Tank," Michelle drew heavily on the knowledge and skills she gained as a communications major at A&M-San Antonio.

Titzman is one of many students and alumni turning their ideas into successful ventures, often with the support and resources they find at A&M-San Antonio.

The moment marked the culmination of years of hard work building Warrior Kid Medic,

"When we wrote our script, I used so many of the skills and concepts I learned at

The University offers multiple academic pathways focused on entrepreneurship, from an undergraduate certificate to the accelerated 11-month MBA program. Students also benefit from resources such as the Cisneros Institute for Emerging Leaders and the Mays Center for Experiential Learning and Community Engagement, which offer professional development in entrepreneurship and small business management.

Another key resource is the Entrepreneurship Club, which hosts monthly meetings featuring guest speakers who share firsthand insights on starting and growing a business.



the emergency-preparedness startup she launched with her husband, Dustin, in 2023. The company sells kid-friendly medical kits that teach real-world response skills such as tourniquet use, wound care, and CPR.

A&M-San Antonio in classes like media law, scriptwriting, and journalism," said Titzman. "That education really shaped me, and I'm incredibly grateful."

"As the Entrepreneurship Club continues to grow, we are expanding our vision to provide even greater support for aspiring student entrepreneurs," said Dr. Josephine Sosa-Fey, professor of management and club advisor. "Our long-term goals include offering hands-on assistance to students who need help setting up their business entity, whether



it be an LLC, sole proprietorship, or other structure. Our mission is to guide, support, and encourage students as they work toward their entrepreneurial dreams.”

Dr. Douglas Carter, visiting instructional professor in the Department of Management and Marketing, said the University’s culture and South Side location offer a fertile environment for entrepreneurship.

“We’re in a perfect environment for entrepreneurs with our student demographics,” said Carter, who recently partnered with Associate Professor Dr. Leonard Love to present on pitching business plans to investors during San Antonio Startup Week. “Quite a few of our students come from families that own a small business, while others simply want to be more self-directed. And we’re in a part of town that has historically been about small businesses. There’s a real drive to create opportunities for our students and alumni.”

One example is Alexa Avila, who graduated in May 2025 with a Bachelor of Business Administration and now works as a student life coordinator at the University.

In September, during General’s Mercado, A&M–San Antonio’s monthly open-air market, Avila and her parents launched Made by Avila, offering woodburning and crochet items they craft together.

Woodburning and crocheting have been part of Avila’s family for decades. When her parents retired, the family decided it was the perfect moment to turn their shared hobbies into a business.

“We’ve always loved the idea of having a small family business, and even though we’re still learning and figuring everything out, it’s been such a rewarding, challenging, and exciting experience,” said Avila. She plans to expand into additional markets throughout the region.

Sophomore finance major Eyan Escobedo also joined the entrepreneurial ranks when he launched E’s Vintage T’s last summer.

“I started my business out of a mix of boredom and ambition,” said Escobedo. “I didn’t want to spend the summer being unproductive, so I decided to invest my time into building something meaningful.”

His home-based company sells vintage T-shirts, sweatshirts, hoodies, denim, and outerwear at markets across the city, including General’s Mercado. Escobedo



Alexa Avila, Natalia Estrada, Eyan Escobedo (left to right)

curates, stores, and manages all inventory, sourcing items primarily from thrift stores, vendors, and online resellers.

Early on, he worried about profitability, but consistency and experience paid off.

“Some markets bring in just over \$200 in sales, while others generate more than \$600,” he said. Escobedo estimates he sells between 50 and 80 items each month, depending on his market schedule and online posting.

“While I’m not yet certain about the exact career path I want to pursue, I’m confident that the skills I’m developing will open a variety of opportunities,” he added. “One day I’d love to open a vintage or thrift store of my own.”

For alumna Natalia Estrada, entrepreneurship offered the flexibility she needed to balance career and family. After graduating in 2017 with a degree in

kinesiology, Estrada became a full-time softball coach for Athletics Mercado Academy while raising a family with her husband, Jesse. It was a lot to juggle.

“I wanted to figure out a way to spend more time with my family,” Estrada said.

In 2021, she launched Kaliana’s Boutique—named after her husband’s first daughter—selling game-day clothing and accessories representing universities and community colleges across the region. Her business steadily grew through social media

marketing, and by 2024, her side hustle became a full-time job.

Today, Estrada sells nearly 400 items a month. She designs many of them using her iPad and an embroidery machine, and partners with artisans in Midland who help create her popular hand-beaded accessories.

With two part-time employees, she regularly sets up shop at markets including The Shops at La Cantera, Marketplace at Old Town Helotes, and General’s Mercado.

In January 2025, she opened a booth at Painted Tree Boutiques in North San Antonio and hopes to continue expanding.

“I’m hoping in 2026 we can open up our own boutique here in San Antonio,” Estrada said. “I was born and raised here, and our items reflect the local culture. It feels great that I’m now able to run my own business and get to spend more time with my family.”

The journey of Estrada and the other alumni and students underscores the University’s growing role as a regional hub for entrepreneurship, where ideas are nurtured and skills are sharpened. Through academic programs, experiential learning, mentorship, and community-centered opportunities like General’s Mercado, the University helps Jaguars turn creativity into commerce and passion into sustainable ventures. Whether launching a startup on national television or testing an idea at a local market, A&M–San Antonio is empowering the next generation of entrepreneurs.

PUBLISHING POWERHOUSE

A&M-SAN ANTONIO MAKES ITS MARK IN THE WORLD OF ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

By David DeKunder

With a growing list of faculty authors and a book series partnership with a major university press, Texas A&M University-San Antonio is gaining recognition as a publishing powerhouse while steadily expanding its footprint in academic publishing.

Since 2021, A&M-San Antonio has partnered with Texas A&M University Press on the Vistas book series, which publishes scholarly works on the history of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. Alongside this partnership, at least eight faculty members have recently published books or expect to see their manuscripts released by 2026.

"Publishing is very important to our faculty here," said Dr. Katherine Gillen, English professor and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "It shows we're maturing as a University, that our faculty is becoming established in their fields. People are publishing with well-regarded presses. There's a lot of good work happening."



Gillen herself is among the faculty authors. She co-edited "The Bard in the Borderlands: An Anthology of Shakespeare Appropriations en La Frontera," a three-volume collection featuring multilingual reimaginings of Shakespeare's plays rooted in the history, culture, and lived experience of the Borderlands. Her collaborators include Dr. Adrianna Santos, associate professor of English at A&M-San Antonio, and Dr.

Kathryn Vomero Santos, associate professor of English at Trinity University.

Gillen noted that students benefit greatly from being taught by actively publishing scholars.

"It's important for our students to learn from leading scholars," she said. "Faculty who publish books have strong national and international networks they draw on in their teaching."

She also emphasized the University's support systems for faculty research. A&M-San Antonio provides an annual grant for faculty research or conference travel. Additional support comes from the Office of the Provost, which offers competitive Research Council Grants that often fund new projects.



One of the University's most notable recent achievements came in 2024, when Dr. Philis Barragán Goetz, associate professor of history, received a \$60,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for her forthcoming book, "The Borderlands of Inclusivity: Jovita González and the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement." The book, to be published by University of Texas Press, explores the life and influence of González, a





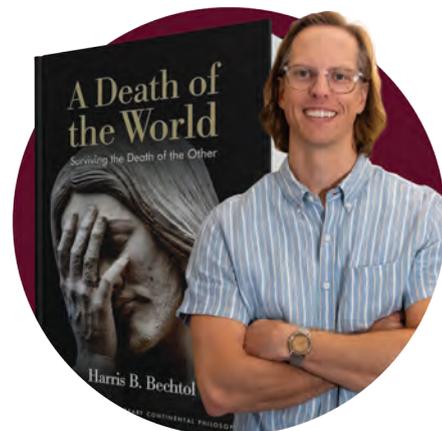
pioneering but historically underrecognized folklorist, writer, and educator from Roma, Texas.

Barragán Goetz also received a Research Council Grant, allowing her to take a yearlong research sabbatical.

“It shows we’re maturing as a University, that our faculty is becoming established in their fields. People are publishing with well-regarded presses. There’s a lot of good work happening.”
Dr. Katherine Gillen

“I got a tremendous amount of research done,” she said. “It’s not an exaggeration to say it would have taken me up to five years to do the same research if I had been teaching full-time. When you consider our teaching load and the amount of resources we have—and compare that to our research and publication output—I think we’re definitely boxing outside of our weight limit.”

Perhaps the University is, but they are holding their own. Barragán Goetz’s first book, “Reading, Writing, and Revolution: Escuelitas and the Emergence of a Mexican American Identity in Texas,” was published by University of Texas Press in 2020 and earned multiple awards, including the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Book Award.



Another faculty author, Dr. Harris Bechtol, lecturer of philosophy, released his book “A Death of the World: Surviving the Death of the Other” in 2025. The work grew out of his personal experience with the death of a close mentor during his undergraduate years at Baylor University.

“I had a pretty life-shattering experience with death,” Bechtol said. “It raised all kinds of questions for me.”

Writing the book has strengthened his teaching, he added.

“Students know I’ve lived through experiences like theirs,” he said. “Even though I’m the professor at the front of the room, there’s a shared level of experience that helps build camaraderie and makes the classroom more open and comfortable.”

A&M-San Antonio reached a significant milestone in 2024 when it helped publish the first book in the Vistas series: “The Lost War for Texas: Mexican Rebels, American Burrrites, and the Texas Revolution of 1811,” written by former adjunct history instructor James Bernsen.



Dr. William Kiser, professor of history and chair of the Department of History, Philosophy, and Geography, serves as general editor of the Vistas series. He oversees a five-member editorial board composed of A&M-San Antonio faculty. The board reviews submitted manuscripts, provides detailed feedback to authors, and approves projects before they move on to Texas A&M University Press.

“The purpose of this series is to promote scholarship—especially monographs on Borderlands history,” Kiser said. “It aligns with South Texas, with San Antonio, and with the University’s mission. Many of our faculty have expertise in Borderlands studies, and this series provides a public-facing scholarly venue to share that work through Texas A&M University Press.”

Kiser said the partnership allows the University to champion scholarship from across the country.

A&M-San Antonio’s growing presence in academic publishing, through faculty research, award-winning books, and the Vistas series, reinforces the University’s growing recognition and influence. As faculty authors continue to publish meaningful work, the University is strengthening both its scholarly reputation and the academic experience it offers students.

Big IMPRESSION

CREATORS, COMMUNITY AND CONFIDENCE: INSIDE A&M–SAN ANTONIO’S RISING INFLUENCER CLUB

By Kevin Castro

When Nayahna Treviño first heard a county commissioner urge new Jaguars to “leave a legacy” during her JagX new student orientation, she did not expect the message to shape the remainder of her college experience.

The challenge stayed with her: if something meaningful does not exist on campus, create it. That idea eventually led to the formation of the Influencer Club, now one of Texas A&M University–San Antonio’s most distinctive and fast-growing student organizations.

What began as Treviño’s desire to build community around creativity quickly grew into a collaborative space where students explore digital storytelling, marketing skills and personal branding.

Instead of operating like a traditional student organization, the club functions more like a creative studio where students encourage one another, swap ideas, practice pitching to brands, and experiment with content in a supportive,

“We’re creative, we’re authentic, and we’re part of a network that exists only during this time in our lives.”
Nayahna Treviño

judgment-free environment. In two years, it has become a home for students who want to share their stories but are not sure where to start.

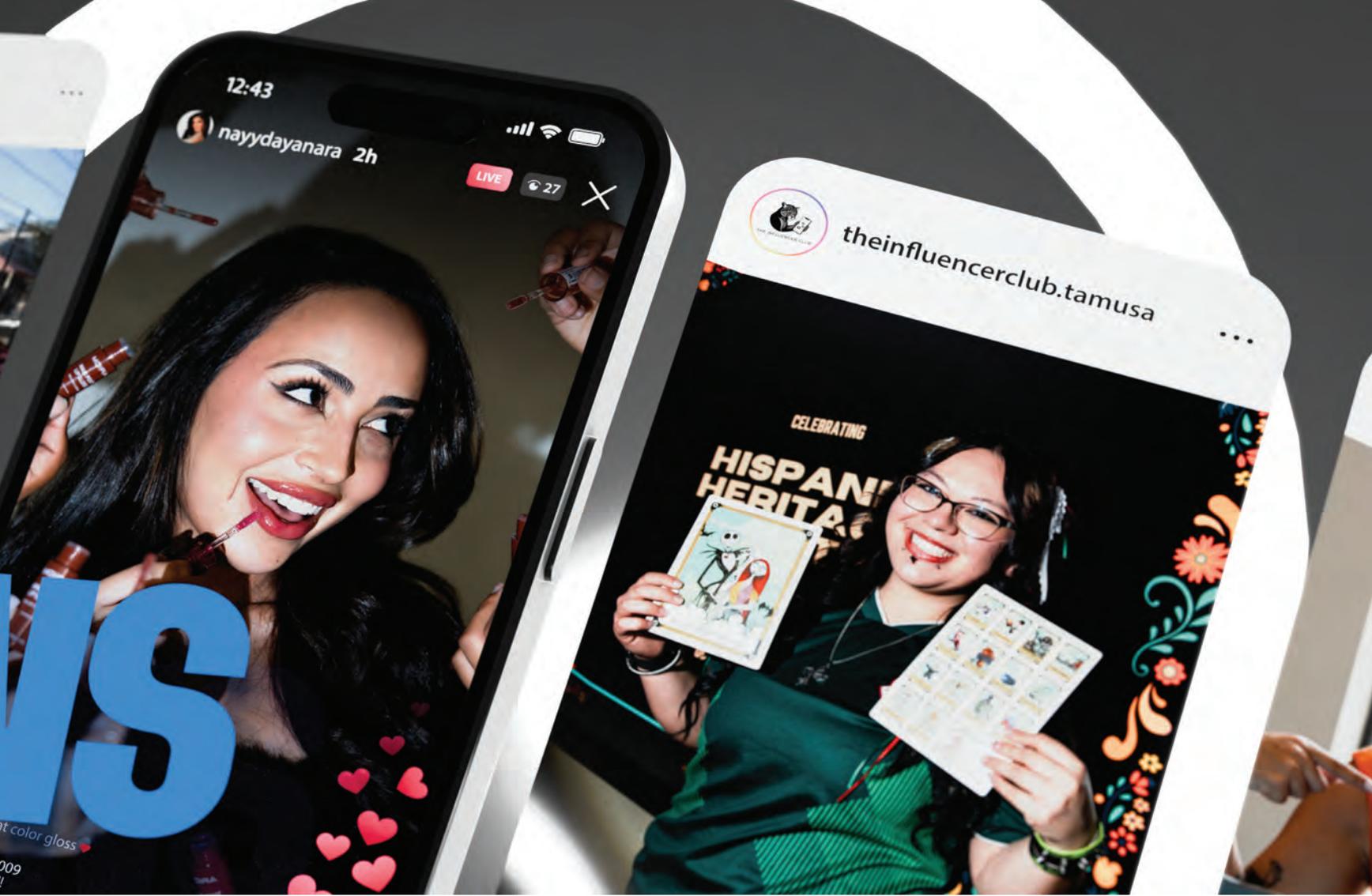
Treviño, now a senior political science and legal studies major, founded the club after discovering her own unexpected success in content creation. A New Year’s resolution to post more online led her to collaborate with more than 100 brands through sheer persistence and drive. She realized other A&M–San Antonio students could benefit from similar opportunities if the campus had a centralized community to support growing creators.

“Brands love college students,” Treviño said. “We’re creative, we’re authentic, and we’re part of a network that exists only during this time in our lives. If more people at our campus wanted these opportunities, brands would start looking at A&M–San Antonio.”

The club’s mission, she said, is rooted in one word: community. And it is that community that drew junior biology major Kimberly Marroquín to the organization. Marroquín said the group helps students overcome the fear of posting by giving them a built-in support system.

“It’s great to see how forming a community when posting online eases so many worries for people,” Marroquín said. “The main reason people don’t like to post is because they’re scared of not getting any likes or views. But with the Influencer Club, you better believe we will be there in support.”

Advisor Julianne Garcia, assistant director for New Student Orientation, said the organization fulfills a need on campus for students to express themselves and develop confidence outside the classroom. She describes the organization as a space where students can test ideas, receive feedback, and learn how to develop effective communication skills that translate far beyond social media.



MS
 at color gloss
 2009

"It's a creative outlet where you can pour your ideas, be encouraged to execute those ideas, and get constructive feedback," Garcia said. She added that content creation often intimidates newcomers who assume they must be in front of the camera, but the club showcases the range of roles available behind the scenes.

"You can still make a positive impact, tell your story and be a leader without recording yourself."

The club's signature events reinforce those lessons. Its Content Creation 101 workshop teaches students how to pitch to brands, grow



The Influencer Club is putting A&M-SA on the map. Prospective students are watching.

Julianne Garcia, Club Advisor

their platforms, and build portfolios. Each session includes a brand sponsor, allowing students to practice with real products and data. Content Days, which are held at locations across San Antonio, allow members to take

photos, test ideas, and collaborate. The events function as part workshop, part networking opportunity, and part confidence booster.

Treviño said seeing members secure opportunities, internships, brand deals or their first successful posts is the most rewarding part of leading the club. Her leadership earned her President of the Year at the 2025 Jaguar Awards, recognition she credits to the group effort behind the organization's growth.



"A leader is nothing without their team," she said. "That award truly belonged to everyone."

Garcia said the group's success has also expanded A&M-San Antonio's digital footprint. Partnerships with brands such as Fenty Beauty, Its August, Bubble, Odyssey and Liquid Death

have drawn attention to the University's students and their creativity.

"The Influencer Club is putting A&M-SA on the map," Garcia said. "Prospective students are watching."

Treviño believes the club's impact lies not in the rise of influencers but in the rise of confidence. She said every student has a voice worth hearing, whether they are creating videos, shooting photos or supporting their peers.

"When you are an influencer, you have influence," she said. "You have the power to empower others through your story."

As the club moves into its second year, Treviño hopes to organize a future brand trip for members, an experience she believes would show them the kinds of spaces they belong in. But her larger goal remains the same: building a creative community where Jaguars feel seen, supported and encouraged to pursue their passions, whether they are online or off.

"As long as they are elevating their content and connecting with their community," she said, "they will always be successful."

Growing the Future

Reimagining Agriculture Through Hydroponics

By Mariah Gonzalez

When Dr. Rodolfo Valdez Barillas talks about plants, his enthusiasm is unmistakable. But beneath that excitement is a deeper mission—expanding opportunity, reshaping agricultural education, and building something lasting at Texas A&M University—San Antonio.

That mission took shape when, in summer 2024, the University announced a collaboration with Texas A&M AgriLife Research in Uvalde. This joint venture centers on hydroponics, an innovative method of growing plants without soil. A key goal is to create pipelines for students to gain hands-on agricultural research experience.

To launch the effort, Valdez Barillas, associate professor of biology, built a hydroponic research space inside a 12-by-24-foot on-campus greenhouse. There, he and his students grow crops in nutrient-rich circulating water systems rather than soil.

“Hydroponic systems give you more control over what you give to your plants,” Valdez Barillas explained.

The team began with a wide selection of nutrient-dense crops—tomatoes, beets, spinach, kale, collard greens, peppers and snap peas. While the peas and peppers struggled, the tomatoes, beets, and kale thrived. Valdez Barillas harvested enough cherry tomatoes to donate fresh produce to the campus cafeteria, sharing the rest with colleagues and students.

“I only need a small amount for analysis,” he said. “When the plants give us more, why not share it?”

Collard greens also flourished, though they generated less excitement.

“I learned quickly that in San Antonio, not many people know what to do with collards,” he laughed.



Phase two of the project shifts the focus to enhancing the nutritional value of food while keeping it accessible. The method, as Valdez Barillas describes it, involves “literally tanning the vegetables and fruits.” Just as human skin produces more pigment to protect against UV light, plants increase antioxidants when exposed to specific light or biostimulants.

“Researching hydroponic agriculture feels like a step in the right direction toward minimizing the hardships endured by farmers and providing quality products to the consumer.”

Anissa Avina

The challenge is finding the sweet spot: crops that grow robustly while remaining densely packed with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. If successful, their findings could reshape how hydroponic crops are produced—and how consumers get nutrition from the produce aisle.

Currently, five undergraduate researchers support the project. Students help grow, maintain, harvest, and analyze crops; participate in trips to Uvalde; work alongside agricultural scientists; and conduct lab testing both on campus and at AgriLife facilities.

Student Anissa Avina began her research journey in Uvalde during a Texas A&M AgriLife internship in 2024.

“I learned about plant pathology and how plant diseases affect farmers across Texas,” she said.

After the internship, Avina joined the University’s new hydroponics project, helping assemble

hydroponic towers, mix fertilizers, test nutrient cycles, and care for crops.

“Researching hydroponic agriculture feels like a step in the right direction toward minimizing the hardships endured by farmers and providing quality products to the consumer,” she said.

Every new harvest is proof that the effort is paying off.

The hydroponics initiative is driving student engagement, sparking innovative curriculum development, and laying the groundwork for community outreach and sustainability programs that could transform how A&M—San Antonio approaches food, science, and learning.

“This isn’t just about growing plants,” Valdez Barillas said. “It’s about showing what’s possible on our campus, in our community, and even in someone’s home.”

Tomorrow's TECH Workforce

Powering San Antonio's STEM Talent Pipeline

By Matt Swenson

Ernesto Diaz Jr. is a clear example of what happens when Texas A&M University-San Antonio invests in potential—and that bet pays off. Originally from Laredo, Texas, Diaz received a scholarship and housing grant to attend the University. He graduated in 2025 with a B.S. in Computer Science and now works as an artificial intelligence (AI) engineer for San Antonio-based Frost Bank, where he tests software vulnerabilities to protect the bank and its customers.

"It's just so exciting and fresh," he said of his work.

Diaz's journey reflects both the University's growth and its impact on the region. His experience highlights the expanding need for computer science and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) skills throughout the rapidly evolving tech and financial sectors.

A&M-San Antonio has invested heavily in developing computing pathways to meet that demand. The University launched its Bachelor of Science in Computer Science in 2012 and its Master of Science in Computer Science in 2019. In 2021, it added a cybersecurity-focused bachelor's degree, followed by a graduate program in 2023. Today, about 500 students are enrolled in the Computer Science and Cybersecurity programs.

Last year, the Computer Science program reached a major milestone: accreditation from the Accreditation Board for Engineering

and Technology (ABET), the international standard for academic rigor in applied science fields.

A&M-San Antonio now boasts the only ABET-accredited Computer Science program in San Antonio. Associate Professor Dr. Jeong Yang, director of the Center for Information Technology and Cybersecurity, who led the accreditation effort, said the designation strengthens student recruitment, enhances alumni career prospects, and signals the University's commitment to workforce

We are continuing to expand our footprint across the city, across the state, and across the nation.

Dr. Debra Feakes

preparation.

"This is a significant achievement for both the Computer Science program and the University," Yang said. "It reflects years of hard work and dedication by the faculty, staff, and students."

According to the Science & Technology Action Committee, more than 36 million people—24 percent of the U.S. labor pool—work in STEM fields, yet the pipeline continues to lag behind industry needs.

"One of the hallmarks of this University is that we are very workforce-driven," said Dr. Debra Feakes, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "We are continuing to expand our footprint across the city, across the state, and across the

nation."

For Diaz, who entered college with little computer experience, the program's curriculum and faculty mentorship made all the difference.

"All of my professors made sure we could explain complex computer science topics—especially to people who don't have a background in computing," he said. That skill has helped him transition quickly into his role at Frost Bank.

He is not the only Jaguar making an impact there. Arturo Corona '23 also works at Frost as an Android mobile software developer, helping ensure customers enjoy seamless mobile experiences. A self-described gamer, Corona said the Computer Science program prepared him to enter the workforce confident and capable.

"My teachers were really invested," he said. "They kept us up to date with new technology. Now I get to practice what I learned."

Yang describes these success stories as "closing the loop"—connecting classroom learning to real-world application.

As A&M-San Antonio continues to expand its offerings, alumni like Diaz and Corona are proving why these investments matter. With ABET accreditation, industry partnerships, and a rapidly evolving curriculum, A&M-San Antonio is positioning itself—and its graduates—as key contributors to the region's economic and technological transformation.



A&M-SAN ANTONIO SHINES BRIGHT IN NATIONAL RANKINGS

By Mariah Gonzalez

Texas A&M University–San Antonio continues to strengthen its standing in the higher education landscape, earning a series of national rankings that highlight its growing impact on student success, social mobility, and support for military-connected families. This underscores the University’s increasingly vital role in the region and signals a bright trajectory ahead.



2026 U.S. News & World Report Rankings (West)

In the U.S. News & World Report 2026 College Rankings, A&M–San Antonio climbed 12 spots to No. 56 in Regional Universities West,

a competitive category spanning 14 states, including California. The University also moved up in the Top Public Schools category, rising to No. 29 from last year’s No. 37.

#29
**TOP PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**

A&M–San Antonio posted one of its strongest gains in Top Performers on Social Mobility, jumping 34 spots to No. 40. This category measures how effectively universities serve students from lower-income backgrounds—a key priority for A&M–San Antonio, where approximately 79 percent of students are Pell Grant eligible.

#40
**TOP PERFORMERS
ON SOCIAL MOBILITY**

For the first time, A&M–San Antonio was also recognized in two additional categories: No. 29 in Best Value Schools and No. 30 in Best Colleges for Veterans.

MilitaryTimes

Best for Vets: Colleges

#24
**IN THE
SOUTHWEST**

The University’s commitment to military-connected students also earned recognition from Military Times, whose annual Best for Vets: Colleges rankings placed A&M–San Antonio at No. 15 in Texas and No. 24 in the Southwest. As a proud military-embracing institution, approximately 16 percent of students are military-connected, including 6 percent who are veterans or active-duty service members.

Washington[®] MONTHLY

2025 College Guide and Rankings (South)

A&M–San Antonio was also recognized in the Washington Monthly 2025 College Guide and Rankings. The University ranked No. 8 in Best Bang for the Buck (South)—a category that highlights institutions where students of modest means achieve the greatest return on their investment. The University also placed No. 40 in the Master’s Universities category, which evaluates institutions that grant a substantial number of master’s degrees but few or no doctoral degrees.

#8

**Best Bang for
the Buck**

Together, these rankings affirm A&M–San Antonio’s mission of expanding access, elevating opportunity, and serving the region’s diverse needs of South Texas. As the University continues to grow, its commitment to affordability, quality education, and community impact remains stronger than ever.



20,000 Graduates and Counting

Celebrating the University's historic milestone

A&M–San Antonio celebrated its 20,000th graduate during the Fall 2025 Commencement, shining a spotlight on Cristian Moran as the honorary 20,000th graduate. Moran is a first-generation student and earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Computer and Information Science.

Moran stands as a symbol of the thousands of Jaguars who preceded him and have transformed their lives through higher education since the University opened in 2009. Raised by a working-class immigrant family in Houston, Moran grew up working alongside his family in construction. But in high school, he realized he wanted something different and started at A&M–San Antonio in 2021.

Now a proud graduate with plans to apply to Ph.D. programs, Moran embodies the persistence and aspiration of thousands of students who have completed degrees while balancing jobs, families, and responsibilities.





Alamo Bridges Launches \$3M grant supports Texans with disabilities

Texas A&M University–San Antonio secured a \$3 million federal grant to launch Alamo Bridges: Pioneering Workforce Transitions for Texans with Disabilities, a five-year initiative designed to improve school-to-work transitions for young adults with disabilities.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, the program will develop a comprehensive training model for vocational transition specialists—professionals who support students as they move into college, vocational programs, and employment.

Led by principal investigator Dr. Mariya Davis with co-investigators Dr. Eric Lopez and Dr. Gavin Watts, Alamo Bridges will strengthen the pipeline of educators and rehabilitation professionals equipped to empower individuals with disabilities toward meaningful employment and independence.

“This grant is an incredible opportunity to build something new and impactful for Texas,” Davis said. The project will blend coursework, mentorship, and hands-on fieldwork, ensuring trainees are prepared to meet the needs of diverse communities.

Smarter Course Scheduling

New initiative helps Jaguars stay on track

Dr. Duane Williams, associate vice provost of student success and retention, is spearheading an initiative designed to remove barriers to graduation and better support students juggling school, work, and family obligations.

A&M–San Antonio is one of 20 institutions selected to participate in the national Student-Centered Course Scheduling cohort led by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and funded by a \$2.4 million grant from Ascendium Education Group.

Through the cohort, A&M–San Antonio administrators are receiving course-planning analytics, data coaching, guided management support, and technical assistance. With these tools, the University is building more efficient, equitable, and transparent systems that enable Jaguars to stay on track and graduate on time.





Doctoral Program Debut

Ed.D. launches at A&M-San Antonio soon

Texas A&M University–San Antonio will launch its first-ever doctoral program: a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership. Approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the program is designed to prepare educators for leadership roles that address educational disparities and strengthen preK–12 systems across the region.

President Salvador Hector Ochoa said the new program reflects the University’s commitment to expanding educational opportunity and community impact. Developed with input from regional school districts—including school districts in South Bexar County—the curriculum aligns with national and state standards and emphasizes real-world leadership challenges.

The fully online program accommodates working professionals, offering evening and weekend courses along with in-person symposiums and superintendent partnerships. Students may choose from specializations in early childhood education, special education, or bilingual education.

The degree prepares educators to lead as principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, and district administrators. As A&M–San Antonio’s first doctoral offering, the program marks a major institutional milestone and strengthens its reputation as a university of choice for educator preparation.



Fulbright Specialist Honor

Dr. Volkan Ozbek advances global collaboration

Dr. Volkan Ozbek, assistant professor of management at A&M–San Antonio, was selected for the prestigious Fulbright Specialist Program, an honor awarded by the U.S. Department of State. Ozbek spent two weeks at the University of Presov in Slovakia, collaborating with faculty on a project centered on organizational and managerial strategies for navigating global instability.

During his visit, Ozbek served as a keynote speaker, presented scholarly work, and helped build long-term institutional partnerships. His research has appeared in leading journals, including “Academy of Management Review” and “American Business Review.”

Only about 400 applicants nationwide are selected for the Fulbright Specialist roster each year. Ozbek’s appointment highlights his academic leadership and strengthens the University’s global engagement.

Miss Texas Latina

Student leader Nayahna Treviño earns title

Senior Nayahna Treviño was crowned Miss Texas Latina 2025, achieving a long-held dream while demonstrating the power of discipline, creativity, and self-confidence. A political science and legal studies major, Treviño is also president and founder of the Influencer Club, one of the University's fastest-growing student organizations.

She launched The Influencer Club in 2024 to teach students content creation, brand partnership strategy, and digital marketing skills. Her success with social media and campus leadership skills helped bolster her pageantry career, which culminated in winning the Miss Texas Latina crown—a title that leads to the Miss U.S. Latina and Miss Latin America of the World competitions. “This wasn’t something that was handed to me,” she said. “I had to work for it.”



Leader in Veteran Education

University earns 2025 VEERA Gold honor

Texas A&M University–San Antonio was named a Gold Recipient of the 2025 Veteran Education Excellence Recognition Award (VEERA) by the Texas Veterans Commission. This marks the University’s fifth VEERA and fourth Gold-level distinction. The award honors institutions that provide exceptional support to military-connected students, including veterans, active-duty service members, spouses, and dependents.

Interim Military Affairs Director Leah Musquiz said the recognition affirms the University’s longstanding commitment to service members and their families. Sixteen percent of A&M–San Antonio students are military-connected, including roughly 500 veterans.



Funding the Future

Aggie Alumni Establish Scholarship to Support STEM Students

Four friends have established the South Texas Four Endowed Scholarship at A&M-San Antonio to support South Texas high school students pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM). The initiative includes a combined pledge of \$25,000 over five years.

Chuck Gregory, a senior principal and vice president at Terracon Consultants Inc., spearheaded the effort, rallying fellow Aggie alumni and professional engineers Kent O’Brien, Coy Armstrong, and John Metting to join him. All four grew up in South Texas and graduated from Texas A&M University in College Station. The scholarship provides local students with critical financial support to attend A&M–San Antonio, pursue their academic goals, and prepare for success in a fast-growing, high-demand career field.



New Dean of the College of Business

University welcomes Dr. Jorge Villegas

Dr. Jorge Villegas is the University's new dean of the College of Business. Villegas, who started in January, previously held key leadership roles for over a decade at the University of Illinois Springfield, including the associate dean of the College of Business and Management.

His career successes include developing strategic plans, implementing data-driven solutions, starting successful undergraduate and graduate programs, and fostering collaborative partnerships across campus. Through his leadership, he has advanced curricular innovation, strengthened shared



governance, and championed experiential learning opportunities.

“Texas A&M University-San Antonio and the college are powerful catalysts for opportunity and economic development for stakeholders of South Texas and beyond,” said Villegas. “I am excited to collaborate with exceptional faculty, dedicated staff, and talented students to advance a shared commitment to excellence, relevance, and access.”

New STEM Partnership

Terracon collaboration opens doors for graduate students

In a collaboration with Terracon, a San Antonio-based engineering consulting firm, two A&M-San Antonio graduate students have received the Terracon Foundation Graduate STEM Scholarship.

The College of Graduate Studies and University Advancement worked together in securing sponsorship for the competitive STEM scholarship, which provides for the two graduate students—Ashlynn Smith and Ahmad Elallaf—with \$1,250 for both the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 academic years.

“This is our first sponsored graduate scholarship. It’s really a milestone for Texas A&M University-San Antonio,” said Dr. Ting Liu, dean of the College of Graduate Studies. “It’s an industry partnership that will create more opportunities for our students down the road.”



Researchers Study Childhood Obesity

\$400K grant funds two-year study

Texas A&M University–San Antonio received a \$400,000 grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s Minority Health Research and Education Grant Program (MHGP) to support a two-year study on childhood obesity among Mexican American youth. Led by Drs. Ravindranath Duggirala and Srinivas Mummidi of the University’s Public Health Genetics and Genomics Group, the research will explore how environmental and socioeconomic factors—such as diet, stress, neighborhood conditions, and physical activity—shape long-term metabolic health.

The interdisciplinary team also includes Elizabeth Lutz of Bexar County’s Health Collaborative and Dr. Jun Fan of the Texas

A&M Institute for Genome Sciences and Society. Together, they aim to understand how external factors influence biological markers associated with obesity and related diseases.

“Childhood obesity doesn’t occur in isolation,” Duggirala said. “It’s shaped by lived environments and economic realities.”

The competitive MHGP program funded only 15 institutions statewide in its 2025 cycle. The project positions A&M–San Antonio as a leader in addressing health disparities and generating actionable research to improve outcomes for underserved communities.



Jaguar March

University welcomes largest incoming class

More than 1,200 students participated in the University’s annual Jaguar March, a cherished tradition that welcomes first-year students and marks the beginning of the academic year. Now in its ninth year, the event is a key feature of the JagX New Student Orientation. Held in August, the march reflected the University’s largest freshman class, more than double the number from 2020.

Led by President Salvador Hector Ochoa and University leadership, students and families began the march at the campus fountain, then walked the iconic Miracle Mile to the Torre de Esperanza (Tower of Hope), symbolizing their entry into the Jaguar community.

Ochoa described Jaguar March as a powerful message of belonging: “It’s more than a walk across campus—it’s our way of saying, ‘You belong here.’”





Jaguar Classic Golf Tournament

Record-breaking \$109K raised for student-athletes

The annual Jaguar Classic athletic scholarship golf tournament set a new record in 2025, raising \$109,310 to support student-athlete scholarships and Jaguar Athletics. Held at the Golf Club of Texas, the event brought together alumni, supporters, and community members for a day of competition and philanthropy.

The tournament represents far more than sport—it embodies the community’s commitment to helping student-athletes succeed on and off the field. Participants played alongside Jaguar athletes, including a challenge against members of the men’s golf team, who reached the Red River Athletic Conference tournament last season.

A highlight was the Helicopter Golf Ball Drop, sponsored by Herff Jones, where 1,000 purchased golf balls were released from above the course. The two balls landing closest to the hole won unique experiences at Ox Hunting Ranch, including driving a German Leopard tank and operating an armored vehicle.



Honoring Their Daughter's Legacy

Camarillo Family Establishes Scholarship in Memory of Victoria

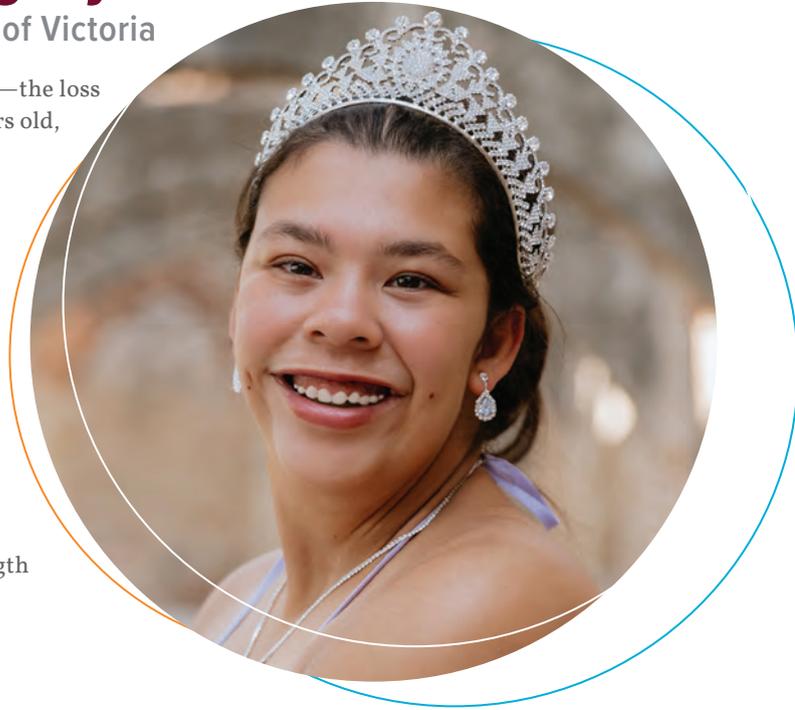
Carlos and Christine Camarillo had to endure what no parent ever should—the loss of their child. Their daughter, Victoria, passed away last July at just 18 years old, only a few months after being diagnosed with leukemia.

Victoria, who also lived with Williams Syndrome, had planned to enroll in A&M–San Antonio's Tu Casa program, which offers students with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to experience university life.

Her parents are ensuring her legacy lives on through the newly established Victoria Christine Camarillo Endowed Scholarship, a \$25,000 endowed scholarship available to all students with disabilities. Despite the challenges, she lived a remarkable life filled with achievements and advocacy.

"We kept setting goals for her, and she kept accomplishing them," Carlos said. "She always wanted to know what was next."

Although the Camarillo family continues to grieve, they are finding strength through faith, community, and the memory of Victoria's giving spirit.



Tackling the Teacher Shortage

Best of Both Worlds hosts 9th symposium

The ninth Best of Both Worlds symposium, hosted in November, brought together education leaders and community partners across the region to address the ongoing teacher shortage in Texas. Many districts continue to face rising vacancy rates and post-pandemic attrition, prompting urgent discussions about strengthening the educator pipeline.

Moderated by Drs. Lawrence Scott and W. Sean Kearney, with planning support from Dr. Elisabeth Krimbill, the panel featured K–12 principals and regional leaders who examined the root causes of the teacher shortage and shared actionable strategies to support recruitment and retention.

The symposium is part of the College of Education and Human Development's annual series focusing on critical issues impacting the region. This year's event aligned with the University's launch of the Texas Teacher Residency Preparation Route—a yearlong program providing hands-on classroom experience, mentorship, integrated coursework, and an Enhanced Standard Certificate from the Texas Education Agency.

Soccer RRAC All-Conference Honors

A&M–San Antonio placed multiple student-athletes on the 2025 Red River Athletic Conference Men's and Women's Soccer All-Conference Teams, highlighting another successful campaign for the Jaguars.

Women's Soccer



Senior forward Ana Barragán was selected for the All-Conference Second Team. Barragán, from Brownsville, Texas, capped off her Jaguar career as one of the team's offensive leaders, providing key scoring opportunities throughout the season.



Junior midfielder Jasmin Dominguez was also named to the All-Conference Second Team. A San Antonio native, Dominguez anchored the midfield, showcasing consistent playmaking ability and creativity.



Ali Lopez was named to the RRAC Champions of Character Team for her leadership and commitment to the five core values of the NAIA Champions of Character initiative.

Men's Soccer



Sophomore defender Jose de la Torre also earned a place on the All-Conference First Team. The San Antonio native anchored the Jaguars' back line and helped the team secure several victories during conference play.



Senior midfielder David Torres, hailing from Cali, Colombia, was named to the Second Team after a strong season.



Senior defender Eduardo Hernandez, from Houston, was named to the Second Team, showcasing his veteran presence and consistency.



Freshman midfielder Joshua Olivares, from San Antonio, was recognized on the All-Freshman Team.



Jaguar Men Make Historic Run to Second Round of RRAC Tournament

Under Head Coach Roberto Jaramillo, the men's soccer team had a historic 2025 season, making it to the second round of the RRAC tournament for the first time, defeating Texas A&M–Texarkana 3–0 at home.

Junior forward Jacob Olivares was the star of the match, scoring twice within a five-minute span during the first half. In the second half, Oscar Hernandez helped maintain the team's momentum, scoring a third goal and sealing the victory. Goalkeeper Marco Matranga had two second-half saves, with the rest

of Jaguars' defensive players holding Texarkana to just seven total shots.

"This team has worked hard all year to reach this point, and making the second round for the first time is a testament to their belief and commitment," said Jaramillo.

The Jaguars ultimately came up short during the conference semifinals, falling 3–1 to nationally ranked LSU Shreveport. The Jaguars finished the year with an 11–4–2 record, marking the most successful season in program history.

Aguilar Earns Second Consecutive NAIA All-American Honor

Senior forward Ronald Aguilar once again etched his name into the Jaguars' record books, earning NAIA Men's Soccer All-American honors for the second consecutive year. The prestigious national recognition places Aguilar among the top collegiate soccer players in the country and highlights his continued excellence on the field. Aguilar also earned a spot on the All-Conference First Team, marking his second straight First Team selection.

A senior from Chalatenango, El Salvador, Aguilar consistently delivered in key moments throughout the season. He paced the Jaguars in scoring, applied constant pressure to opposing defenses, and provided veteran leadership that helped elevate the team's overall performance. His play earned him multiple conference honors while cementing his reputation as one of the premier forwards in the NAIA.

Head coach Roberto Jaramillo praised Aguilar's dedication and influence on the team.

"Ronald sets the standard for our program," said Jaramillo. "Earning All-American honors in back-to-back seasons speaks volumes about his work ethic, consistency, and commitment to excellence."

Golf

Men's golf opened its 2025-26 campaign at Texas Wesleyan University's Texas Intercollegiate Tournament by shooting the lowest team round in University history, finishing four under par in the third and final round of the tournament.

All told, the Jaguars finished +8 for the tournament, finishing in seventh place out of nine teams.

Express Classic, held in October in Plainview, Texas.

After three rounds of play, the Jaguars were tied with host Wayland Baptist at the conclusion of the final hole, forcing a one-hole playoff. The Jaguars clinched the victory in dramatic fashion during the tiebreaker, securing the program's first tournament title. Sophomore Loris



"Every round we were led by a different guy, showing our depth. If we can develop consistency and play on the level of our final round for every round of a tournament, we are going to be hard to beat," said Head Coach Christi Cano.

The men's golf team also earned its first-ever tournament championship at Wayland Baptist University's Chicken

Bonnetton Alban led the team in the final round, finishing four under par.

"What a historic run for the men's golf team," said Athletics Director Darnell Smith. "This marks the team's first tournament win in the short history of the program, and I'm confident there will be many more victories in the years to come."



Battle of the Big Cats: A&M-San Antonio and A&M-Victoria Launch Rivalry Series

Texas A&M University-San Antonio and Texas A&M University-Victoria have kicked off a spirited new rivalry within the Texas A&M University System, officially branded the Battle of the Big Cats. The competition, which started in October, brings Jaguars vs. Jaguars to the field, the golf course, and beyond. The two universities will meet across multiple sports throughout the year, including golf, soccer and softball, in an effort to ultimately win the Jaguar Cup.

"We are thrilled to launch the Battle of the Big Cats and to build a spirited rivalry with our fellow Jaguars from A&M-Victoria," said Dr. Darnell Smith, athletics director at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. "This series will showcase the talent and dedication of our student-athletes, while creating new traditions that energize our campus community, alumni, and fans. Rivalries are at the heart of college athletics, and we are excited to see this one grow for years to come."

A LEGACY THAT INSPIRES

Jane Macon's Legacy Inspires the Next Generation of Jaguars

By Sam Boykin



For nearly six decades, attorney and civic leader Jane Macon has been breaking barriers, advancing education, and shaping San Antonio's civic landscape. As Texas A&M University–San Antonio's 2025 Dream Maker honoree, she was recently recognized for her pioneering legal career and for helping lay the groundwork for the University itself.

A Kingsville native raised by educator parents, Macon shared “education is in my DNA.” That foundation fueled a career defined by public service, determination, and strategic relationship-building. After becoming San Antonio's first female city attorney in 1977, she quickly became known as a leader able to navigate legal, political, and civic circles with ease.

At the same time, San Antonio leaders—including State Senator Frank L. Madla Jr.—were pushing for a public university on the South Side. Macon became a key figure

“A&M–San Antonio is changing lives every day. My greatest hope is that there will never be a child on the South Side without an opportunity.

Jane Macon

in rallying support. Alongside her close friend and business leader Rosemary Kowalski, she worked with the Texas A&M University System to identify land for the new campus. A scouting trip through undeveloped ranchland led to the selection of the site anchored by a single mesquite tree. Soon after, the Verano Land Group donated 694 acres, paving the way for A&M–San Antonio's permanent campus.

“Seeing that land become the beautiful A&M–San Antonio campus it is today has been a wonderful experience,” Macon said. “A&M–San Antonio is changing lives every day. My greatest hope is that there will never be a child on the South

Side without an opportunity.”

One of those opportunities belongs to Alberto Hernandez-Ontiveros, a first-generation biology major and recipient of a Dream Maker Scholarship. A member of the Honors Program and President's Leadership Class, Hernandez-Ontiveros also serves as vice president of the Honors Student Association

and president of the American Society of Microbiology chapter on campus.

Growing up in El Paso, he watched his immigrant parents work multiple jobs to support their family. Affordability shaped his college decision, and A&M–San Antonio’s scholarships—including the Honors Program Scholarship, President’s Leadership Class Scholarship, and Achiever Promise—made attending possible.

“My parents taught me what hard work really means, so being recognized as a Dream Maker means a lot to me and my family,” he said. “It really feels phenomenal.”

His interest in medicine began in a high school medical magnet program and deepened through undergraduate research on health disparities. Hernandez-Ontiveros plans to attend medical school after graduating in 2026, with aspirations in general and reconstructive surgery. “Everything I’m doing is for

my parents and for people like them,” he said. “Now it’s my turn to pay it forward.”



The 17th Annual Dream Maker Scholarship Celebration drew more than 500 supporters to the Witte Museum’s Mays

Family Center, raising more than \$310,000 for scholarships. In just the last decade, Dream Maker has generated nearly \$2.6 million in scholarship support, helping thousands of students with financial need achieve their educational goals. The Dream Maker Scholarship Celebration is a testament to the power of community partnerships in San Antonio.



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2008



Monica Cruz has completed her 20th year of teaching. She is currently a fourth-grade teacher for the Southside Independent School District. She has also taken on various leadership roles and assisted with curriculum and instruction. In addition, Cruz was selected as her campus's Teacher of the Year and was awarded the Kens5 EXCEL Award for her impact in the classroom and the Southside community.

2009



Miriam Garza Fernandez recently completed 10 years with Bexar County as an auditor for the probate court. Fernandez has two daughters and serves on the PTA board as historian. She also coaches their soccer and basketball teams.

Elizabeth Villarreal has taught for 17 years at Harlandale ISD. She was named Teacher of the Year at Gillette Elementary for the 2019-2020 school year. Her third-grade class was recently featured on "Science with Sarah Spivey" on KSAT.

2010

Josie Castillo serves as the senior director of finance and accounting for a technology company, where she leads financial operations and strategy to support innovation and growth.

Jose De Leon III is a sixth-grade social studies teacher and coach at Zamora Middle School. He just finished undefeated Zone Champions two out of three years.

Richard Delgado Jr. was recently selected for 12 Under 12, an award created by the Association of Former Students at Texas A&M University to recognize Aggies who have graduated within the past 12 years and contributed to their communities, professions, and the Aggie Network. He was also named an Outstanding Former Student at Palo Alto College.

Jorge Garcia launched MindXpan LLC, a coaching and financial education company dedicated to empowering individuals to expand their mindset and achieve financial well-being. He recently earned his Certified Financial Education Instructor (CFEI) designation through the National Financial Educators Council, strengthening his mission to help educators, families and young adults make informed financial decisions for a brighter future.

2012

Barry Wolfe has earned two master's degrees from Sam Houston State University in history and political science. He is now an adjunct professor at seven different schools, including two universities.

Monica Zapata was named a 2024 Texas Incentive Allotment (TIA) Exemplary Teacher by the state of Texas for her outstanding contributions to education. Continuing her professional growth and commitment to student success, she proudly achieved the 2025 TIA Master Teacher designation. Zapata currently teaches fifth-grade science in the Harlandale Independent School District at Gillette Elementary.

2014

Joseph Camacho currently serves as a senior digital publisher at USAA. He has continued to expand his expertise through professional certifications, including SAFe (Scaled Agile Framework) and AI for Business from MIT.

Irma Iris Duran de Rodriguez has been selected to serve as the State Association of Texas Pioneer's 104th Honorary Lady Chair. The position awards a distinguished member to represent the organization throughout the year and during Fiesta San Antonio events. She is one of the youngest women to hold the position and the first millennial to do so. She is currently the inaugural board president of the Texas A&M University-San Antonio College of Business Alumni Association.

Nathan Gershon recently started pre-production on a new movie, "Night of the Witch," in conjunction with Little Spark Films. Night of the Witch was written by Stan Lee and Lloyd Kaufman. Gershon previously starred with Kaufman in "Evil for Dinner." Gershon has two feature films slated for release, "Friday Night Delight" and "Vicemares," in which he has starring roles.



2015

Jacinta M. Flores '15, '19 just completed three years with H-E-B in the finance and accounting department, supporting the company's manufacturing plants. She also serves on A&M-San Antonio's Family Association Executive Board. Through its Student Angel program, the association helped 110 students in 2025. Flores is also involved with alumni groups that promote the University, career advancement, networking, and social activities.



Peter L. Lawson Sr. earned an honorary doctorate in ministry leadership from Regional Christian University, recognizing his decades of service and leadership in faith-based community

development.



Victoria S. Rojo '15, '18 began her career in the classroom, serving as a dual language teacher for six years before transitioning into leadership as an English language learner liaison at the middle school

level. Today, Rojo serves as the bilingual teacher facilitator for grades preK-12, supporting educators across the district with curriculum, professional development, and instructional guidance.

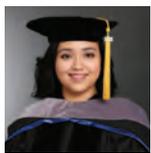
2016

Hannah M. Eli has earned a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Western Governors University.

Penny Golden established Umas Creations, a small business specializing in custom sewing and design. The entrepreneurial venture enabled her to dedicate time to community service through the "Mobilize the Mission" program at Cowboy Fellowship, her church in Atascosa County. In this role, she collaborates with fellow mobilizers and the city of Poteet to connect, grow and serve the Atascosa community. Her efforts have focused on building strong partnerships with both the Poteet community and the town of Poteet, supporting local initiatives and fostering positive change.

Gabrielle Herrera serves as a senior marketing manager for community growth at HubSpot, where she oversees global advocate programming and community engagement initiatives. In November, Herrera spoke on an expert panel at a technology conference in New Orleans and returned to the A&M-San Antonio campus to participate in the American Marketing Association's Q&A Speaker Series.

2017



Angelee Almendarez has earned her Doctor of Chiropractic (DC), as well as a Master of Science in clinical neuroscience and a Bachelor of Science in anatomy from Parker University. She has

spent the past couple of years practicing in West Texas.

Joseph Cruz is currently living in Oklahoma City working for Tinker AFB as a contracting specialist in acquisitions.



Ileana Lopez-Barratachea is working for South San Antonio ISD as a fourth-grade teacher.

Brandi D. Wolfe runs a family law firm and domestic violence nonprofit focused on empowering those who are oppressed.

2018

Veronica Abrego is now a licensed life and health insurance agent and has started an insurance company with her husband, focusing on health, Medicare and life insurance. She also assists clients with the Medicare application process.

Jason J. Opalinski '18, '23 works at Close to Home, the lead agency for San Antonio and Bexar County's homeless response system, as a training manager.

2019



Ebenezer N. Serda recently opened EverStone Psychotherapy, where he specializes in working with children and in serving the male Hispanic community.

2020

Michael B. Krepelka now manages the production control department at Toyota's new unit plant in San Antonio—a facility that will build axles for the Tundra, Sequoia and Tacoma. The plant is preparing to launch production at the end of 2026.

La-Tieka Sims Howell is pursuing an 11-month MBA at A&M-San Antonio. She has been named president-elect of the local nonprofit Driving Single Parents Inc., which serves single parents in need by providing them with a vehicle at no cost. She has also been named the first-ever honorary board member of the American Red Cross Greater San Antonio Chapter.

2021



Andrew A. Klebahn pursued a master's degree at St. Mary's University, where he published his first academic scholarship. He later transferred to UTSA and published two short stories with support from the Peter T. Flawn Graduate Research Scholarship.

Stefany M. Wampler has taken on the role of social media chair for the San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo Medical Committee. She is also proud to be a member of the Women's Club of San Antonio, which organizes charitable events benefiting local children and San Antonio Fiesta!

2022

Johnathon G. Blue recently graduated with a Master of Public Affairs degree from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. He was also inducted into the Phi Alpha Alpha National Honor Society for Public Affairs and Administration.

Alyssa N. Lopez will be attending Louisiana State University for a master's in education starting in 2026.

Essie Richardson completed a master's degree at the University of Houston in the Graduate College of Social Work. She plans to study abroad on a trip to India and Taiwan to learn more about global social work and services.

2023

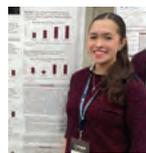
Gabriel J. Perez is going into his second year at Methodist Hospital in clinical laboratory science.

Yvone T. Samuels '23 '25 graduated from Texas A&M-San Antonio with an M.A. in English. She received the Fall 2025 Academic Distinguished Award for the College of Arts & Sciences.

2024

Kaitlyn G. Alejandro is working as a journalist for the Uvalde Leader-News. She has written feature stories, produced daily and special edition newsletters, and reported on issues relevant to the community. She also took first place in the Poetry, Essay, and Fiction division of the Southwest Texas College Creative Arts Contest.

Kevin G. Alvarez works at J.P. Morgan Chase as a fraud specialist, where he leverages his expertise to safeguard the company's assets and maintain its reputation.



Celina Cantu recently started a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program and has been learning how to create exercise programs for future patients. She was also recently named a Hispanic Scholarship Fund recipient. Her goal is to become a pediatric physical therapist.

Victoria A. Gonzalez recently started a new chapter at A&M-San Antonio, where she is pursuing an MBA with plans to graduate in December 2026.

Zachery R. Salazar has been promoted to head virtual tutor for math and science for Each One Teach One, a nonprofit organization that teaches adults K-8th-grade core subjects if they are looking to either improve their skills or go for a GED.

2025

Steven V. Carrillo Jr. earned his BAAS in Business, achieving this milestone at age 67 as part of his retirement bucket list.

Humberto Cruz started a new job with the City of Cibolo as their utility accounting specialist. He plans to start pursuing his Master of Professional Accounting in 2026.



Kashmir E. Davis joined the San Antonio cohort of the Project Management Institute and started a new position at the San Antonio Philharmonic as a development manager.



Lauren M. Esp is pursuing a master's degree in drug discovery and development at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (now UT Health San Antonio).

Samantha A. Rosas launched her career recently as a career advisor at the University of the Incarnate Word. Through her recent experience as a peer leader and her studies in business administration, communications, and psychology, she is committed to enhancing the student experience in higher education.



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