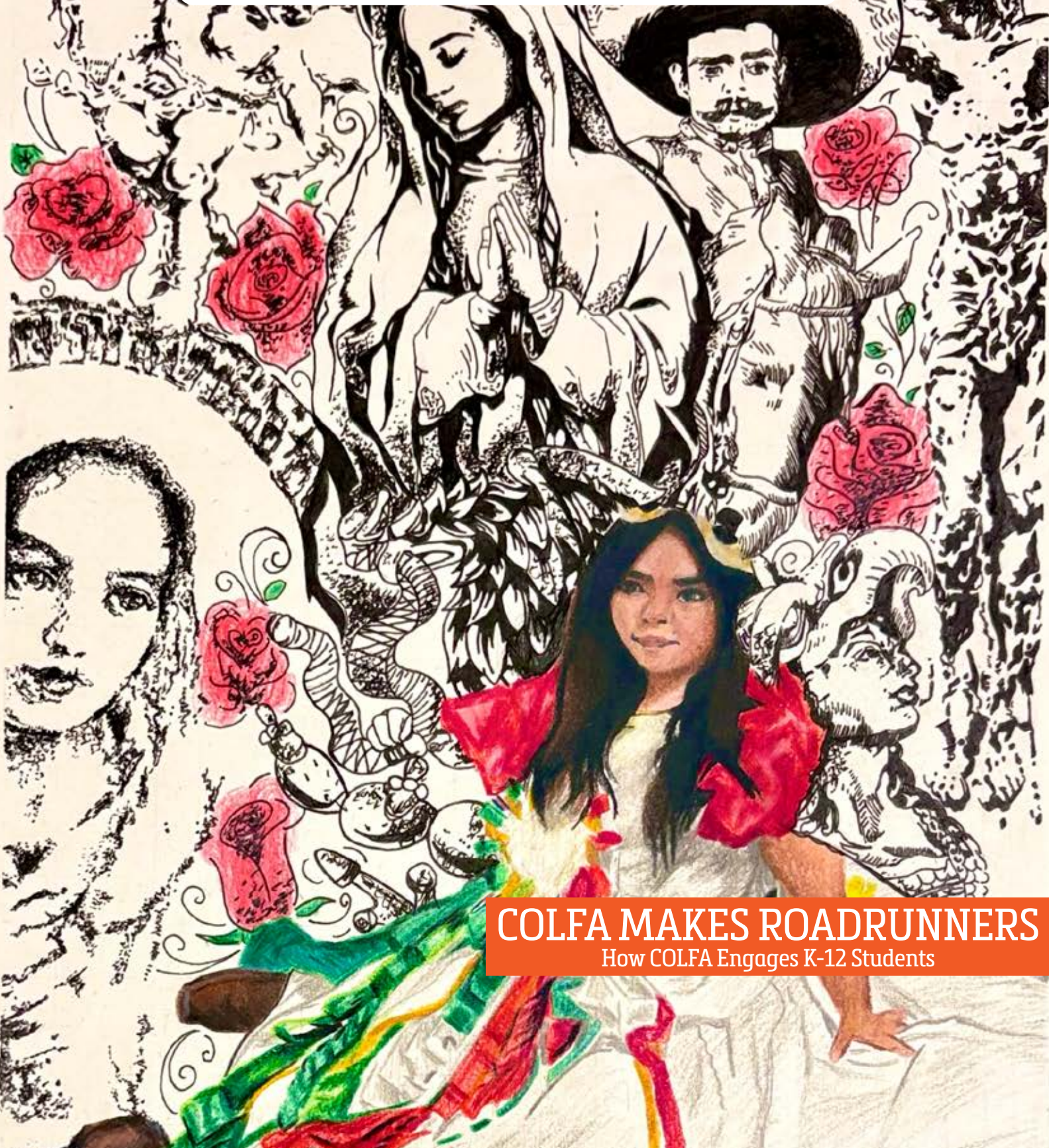




OVATIONS

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF UT SAN ANTONIO'S
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL & FINE ARTS

2026



COLFA MAKES ROADRUNNERS
How COLFA Engages K-12 Students

OVATIONS

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Editor

Nick Ward

Designers

Nick Ward

Breanna Castillo

Contributors

Emilie Amrein • Breanna Castillo

Jessica Nowlin

M. Kathryn Brown • Jason Yaeger

Cover Artwork

“The Hidden View,” 2026, by Christina Olvera.
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College Leadership

Dean

Glenn Martinez

Associate Dean for Community Engagement

Emilie Amrein, DMA

Associate Dean for Faculty Success and Administration

Jon Taylor, PhD

Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

Seok Kang, PhD

Senior Associate Dean for Research

Jason Yaeger, PhD

Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies

Nathan Richardson, PhD

Assistant Dean for Experiential Learning Initiatives

Michael Rushforth, PhD

Assistant Dean for Faculty Success and Administration

Makiko Fukuda, PhD

Assistant Dean for Fiscal Administration

Annie Herrera



Dear friends,

Welcome to the newest edition of Oventions.

We are pleased to report that our college has experienced unprecedented growth, with the number of students declaring a COLFA major increasing by nearly 30 percent over the last three years. This momentum is a direct result of our efforts to engage with the San Antonio community and show local talent that a world-changing future as a Roadrunner is completely within reach of every student who comes to us.

We are investing heavily in pre-collegiate outreach to remove barriers to higher education. Initiatives like the Early Birds Spanish Minor Academy allow high school students to earn college credit while discovering their passions. In the fine arts, programs like the UT San Antonio String Project and our youth studio art courses provide local students with accessible, hands-on creative opportunities. We want young people to see themselves as Roadrunners long before they fill out a college application.

With the merger of UTSA and UT Health into one institution, COLFA is exploring how our disciplines enhance and empower the medical community.

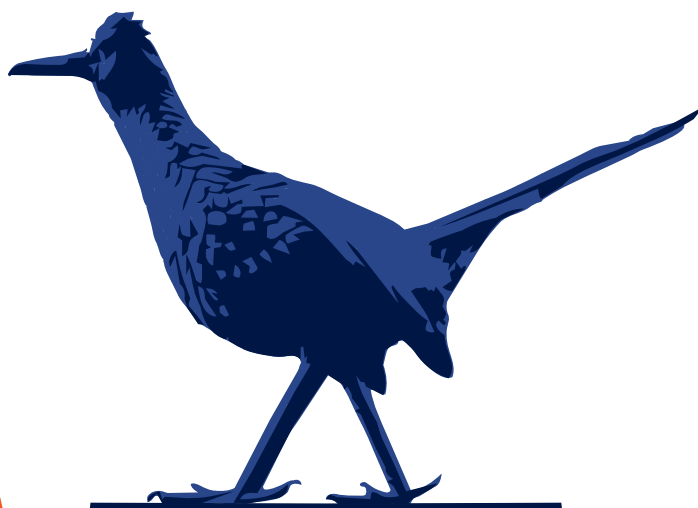
In this issue, you will find out how we are teaching students to navigate the cultural contexts of patient care and effectively communicate complex health information. Inside this issue, you will find stories of alumni and faculty who are utilizing their liberal and fine arts backgrounds to improve health outcomes and champion patient advocacy.

I invite you to explore these stories and discover the remarkable work happening across our college.

Con gran respeto y admiración,

Glenn A. Martínez, PhD MPH
Dean of the College of Liberal and Fine Arts
Professor of Spanish, Bicultural/Bilingual Studies,
and Public Health
Stumberg Distinguished University Chair





COLFA MAKES ROADRUNNERS

When did you feel that pull? That special spark of interest that empowered you to seek out your career. Many think students wait until senior year to sit down at a table and select “that one” from a numbered list, but we all know passion can arrive long before being forced to make a decision on a college entrance application.

The College of Liberal and Fine Arts (COLFA) makes Roadrunners. The college has experienced unprecedented growth, with the number of students declaring a COLFA major growing by nearly 30% over the last three years. Every department and school in the college experienced overall enrollment gains over the past year, pushing current enrollments to an all-time high. Programs seeing the largest surges include Art, Music, Communication, Film / Media, Dramatic Arts, Medical Humanities as well as the college’s online degree paths.

This momentum extends directly into graduate studies. Over the past several years, master’s and doctoral student enrollment increased by 2.1%, growing from 337 registrations in the 2023-2024 school year to 344 in 2026-2027. New degree and certificate options continue to strengthen these advanced studies, specifically the MFA in Film / Media, the MFA in Community Arts, the

Certificate in Digital Humanities, and the Certificate in Digital Communication. Alongside this rapid expansion in new students, COLFA has also maintained gradual, steady increases in retention and graduation rates over the last five years.

This growth comes at no surprise because of efforts by the college to consistently reach out into the community and work with potential and future students to provide opportunities to learn new skills and find their motivation, sometimes in the most unexpected of places.

Early exposure often determines whether a student’s higher education aspirations become reality. Nationwide, pre-collegiate academic outreach is a powerful catalyst for college enrollment. Research from Harvard University’s Center for Education Policy Research shows that structured early outreach programs increase the likelihood of college attendance by 8.9 to 14.9 percentage points. The impact is most profound among traditionally underserved, first-generation, and lower-income students, where targeted outreach and early exposure can double a student’s responsiveness to applying and enrolling. By bridging the information gap early, these initiatives actively dismantle systemic barriers and prove that cultivating a college-going mindset is essential to building UT San Antonio’s



next generation of scholars. COLFA channels this strategy through a variety of programs and community outreach efforts to reach local talent early, showing them that a vibrant, world-changing future as a Roadrunner is well within their grasp.

Spanish Dual Credit

COLFA is helping high schoolers get a head start on earning college credit through the Early Birds Spanish Minor Academy. Since the 2023-2024 academic year, 349 students have participated in the academy, and eighty-eight of those students successfully completed their Spanish minor before graduating high school.

The initiative reaches students across South Texas, with participating campuses including Valley View High School in Hidalgo and South Side High School in San Antonio. Alexander High School and United High School in Laredo have also recently joined the program.

Students typically begin the coursework during the spring of their sophomore year. To enroll, they must score a 3 or higher on the AP Spanish Language Culture Exam or pass a district-issued language test. They take one college level course for credit each semester until graduation.

A defining feature of the academy is a one-week summer residency on the university campus right before the students begin their senior year. The curriculum teaches Spanish as a heritage language. Many participants grew up speaking Spanish at home, so this approach validates their cultural background and strengthens their academic

language skills. Participants are held to the same expectations as undergraduate students. High school facilitators are placed in the classrooms to provide daily guidance and ensure the students succeed with the advanced material.

Healthcare interpretation serves as a core focus of the minor. Students take an intensive course covering medical terminology and communication strategies. Upon completion, students can receive a certificate qualifying them to sit for national certification exams like the CCHI or NBCMI. Earning these credentials early gives students a distinct advantage for future employment in the healthcare industry.

This year, the program expanded with half of the dual credit students taking medical interpreting and the other half, new this year, took an introduction to legal interpreting taught by Melissa Wallace and Michelle Pinzl.

One of the best aspects of the program is that financial barriers are completely removed for many participating families. The state's FAST program covers tuition for students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. School districts step in to cover any remaining fees. This zero-cost structure helps show students that a university education is an attainable goal and is an opportunity worth working hard for.

Mariachi

UT San Antonio's Mariachi program is growing under the guidance of Director Michael Acevedo. Acevedo spent 14 years teaching middle school before transitioning to his role at the university. He now

directs several of his former middle school students who enrolled at UT San Antonio. He also organizes a springtime vocal competition for younger students, an event that provides participants with feedback from a combination of university voice faculty and professional mariachi performers.

The UT San Antonio Mariachi program, Mariachi Los Paisanos, recently expanded to two full groups with 45 to 50 members each. Acevedo often recruits by inviting high school students from areas such as Kyle and San Marcos to attend university recitals. He also builds relationships with regional school directors so they feel comfortable recommending their students to UT San Antonio.

Mariachi plays an interesting role as compared to many traditional music students as many participants do not pursue music as a primary career. Students studying subjects like Engineering or Accounting often add a music minor so they can teach private lessons after graduation. Others participate to perform professionally. The mariachi scene in San Antonio is exceptionally active, and students can earn \$50 to \$60 an hour playing gigs while pursuing their degree.

For students who are interested in mariachi and a career path in education, UT San Antonio is launching a new degree concentration for the BA/BM in mariachi music education starting this fall. The curriculum swaps traditional requirements for mariachi-specific courses, such as harmonium and methods focusing on guitar and guitarrón. Several incoming students have already chosen UT San Antonio specifically for this degree path.

String Project and the School of Music

Mariachi is not the only music program that the School of Music is using to connect with area youth. The UT San Antonio String Project introduces children to music while removing financial barriers to arts education. Operating for over two decades and as a network member of the National String Project Consortium, the program provides low-cost instruction on orchestral stringed instruments and classical guitar to community students in third through eighth grade. By introducing instrumental education years before most public school programs

Opposite: Graduating class of the Valley View High School Dual Credit program. **Right from top:** Mariachi Summer Camp students at UT San Antonio; String Project students at their final performance of the term; SOSA Crew students line up with the band at the Alamodome.





“We are providing a connection to UT San Antonio before they’re even thinking about college.”

***-Majah Acton
Director, String Project***



begin, the project gives San Antonio students a valuable head start in their artistic development. This early exposure to a university campus helps younger students realize that learning an instrument can translate directly into a professional career in music as either a performer or instructor.

The initiative also serves as a training ground for future music educators. Undergraduate and graduate students from the School of Music teach the community classes under the supervision of master teachers and university faculty. This structure allows UT San Antonio students to build classroom experience before graduation. The program’s approach to serving local youth while preparing qualified educators earned it the Most Outstanding String Project of the Year award from the National String Project Consortium.

“UT San Antonio has helped shape my story from the very beginning. I earned both my undergraduate and graduate degrees here and I had the opportunity to help write the original grant that pioneered the String Project at our university,” said Project Director Majah Acton. “It’s especially meaningful to now serve as the String Project Director! The String Project gives students the opportunity to experience music but also creates the groundwork for holistic development. We are providing a connection to UT San Antonio before they’re even thinking about college.”

Additionally, the School of Music operates several summer camps targeted at local high school students including Choir Camp, Percussion Camp, and the Summer Band Institute. High schoolers can also get a firsthand look at collegiate marching band life by joining the SOSA Crew, an initiative that allows young musicians to practice and perform directly with the university’s Spirit of San Antonio band.

Teen Studio Intensive

Another initiative driving student passion is the Teen Studio Intensive (TSI), an after-school program run by UT San Antonio’s Professional and Continuing Education (PaCE) and facilitated by both the School of Art and UTSA Arts. Designed for middle and high school students with a strong interest in the visual arts, TSI offers young creatives a serious learning environment to develop their individual skills. High school students commit to an academic year-long program where they can build professional portfolios while earning college credit.

“By bringing high school artists into a college-level creative environment, the Teen Studio Intensive helps students see themselves as future Roadrunner



artists while giving them the skills, confidence, and experience to take that next step into art school,” said Program Manager for Young Artist Programs Kim Bishop. “Our TSI program creates a direct pathway to UT San Antonio and beyond, by giving students access to college-level instruction with our professional artist educators who share with students their experience and wisdom in how to create both for themselves and as a potential future career.”

For many participants, the program is a transformative experience that solidifies their decision to pursue higher education. Kaitlyn Endicott, a former student at Clark High School who is now attending UT San Antonio, shared how TSI expanded her creative horizons.

“My favorite thing about this program was having a space to express myself without any expectations. We had a lot of freedom to find what I want to do,” Endicott said. “My art style has grown so much thanks to them (TSI) because they’ve given me the resources to explore different mediums and different expression styles.”

By giving young artists the freedom and resources to explore different mediums, the program empowers students to step out of their comfort zones and use tools they otherwise wouldn’t have access to.

This is especially true for students whose high school campuses may lack funding for their art departments. These opportunities help ensure that the next generation of Roadrunners are equipped with both technical skills and creative confidence before they ever step foot on campus at UT San Antonio.

Knowledge for Freedom

This summer, just as it did in 2024 and 2025, UT San Antonio opened its campus, and its classrooms, to a select group of SAISD rising seniors through the Knowledge for Freedom (K4F) program. This free, four-week residential program immerses students in university life while challenging them to grapple with the “big ideas” that shape American democracy. Living in UT San Antonio residence halls throughout July, participants take part in a rigorous seminar led by Professors Jennifer Dilley from History, Andrea Aleman from Political Science & Geography, and Abraham De Leon from COEHD’s Educational Leadership and Policy Department. Along with COLFA undergraduates who are trained as mentors, the high school students engage directly with seminal texts that explore the intersections of freedom, and democratic practice. The experience is designed to spark thoughtful discussion between the students, to sharpen their intellectual curiosity,

Opposite, top: A student practices their printmaking skills in the Teen Studio Intensive Course; **Opposite, bottom:** UT San Antonio School of Art invites K-12 students and their families to CAM Day to enjoy facilities and college-level art practices; **Top:** The summer 2026 cohort of Knowledge4Freedom visiting the San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum.



and to prepare students to see themselves as civic leaders. The program extends well beyond seminars. Students also receive hands-on guidance in navigating the often-overwhelming path to college, from strengthening academic skills to understanding admissions, financial aid, scholarships, and eventually choosing their major.

After the summer concludes, participants continue working with UT San Antonio K4F as they carry out a civic engagement project, supported by their college mentors throughout their senior year. In 2025, student worked with the San Antonio Food Bank, and the K4F members volunteered in the SAFB warehouse packing and sorting goods for distribution.

The program also organized a month-long food drive across SAISD high school campuses to donate over 1,200 pounds of food to the San Antonio community, exemplifying the K4F motto that, “Democracy is a Verb.” By removing financial barriers and offering sustained mentorship, K4F aims to pave clear pathways to college, inviting students to step boldly into leadership and take part in the ongoing American experiment.

Film, Media, and Dramatic Arts

The connection between the university and the community is especially visible across the film and dramatic arts programs where faculty members frequently channel their industry experience directly into local projects and organizations.

In the film and media program, Director of the Film/Media Program Guillermina Zabala Suárez serves on the board of SAY Sí, an expansive tuition-free after-school arts education program serving area youth.

Fellow faculty member, Associate Professor of Practice Jimmy Mendiola, volunteers to run a documentary program with students at Lanier High School. Additionally, through UTSA Arts, the Professional and Continuing Education (PaCE) program at UT San Antonio runs the B-Movie Cinema Club, an after-school program where middle schoolers use classic sci-fi films as a blueprint to write and produce original mini-movies. Students collaborate as a full production crew to develop their own scripts and shoot their own scenes with professional equipment.

Community collaborations like these can culminate in area students being given the opportunity to exhibit their video productions at biannual showings at the Santikos Palladium. During a recent showcase, in addition to works from UT San Antonio students, films from East Central High School, SAY Sí, Communication Arts High School, St. Mary’s Hall, and Northwest Vista College were included in the evening’s line-up. Giving these young filmmakers a chance to see their work on the big screen at a major movie theater helps prove to them that a future in the industry is attainable.

“Engaging with the San Antonio community through partnerships and educational activities is not only a significant step on the development of our Film/Media program but also a way of providing career-oriented opportunities for our students and graduates,” said Suarez. “Through community engagement, we are able to witness both ends of the educational cycle: graduate students joining our recently launched MFA program, and middle and high school students getting involved with cinema through both film studies and production.”

The Dramatic Arts program shares this commitment to early outreach. With COLFA having launched the city's first public four-year degree in Dramatic Arts, veteran actor Victor "Vic" Trevino volunteers his time as works to create a devised theater workshop for Northside ISD. Professor Bradley Freeman Jr. has also taught puppetry at area high schools such as William J. Brennan.

UTSA Arts

UTSA Arts serves as the university's central hub for connection and creativity. The center supports public arts programming and community collaborations, driving research initiatives designed to weave the campus directly into the cultural fabric of the city.

Operating under this mission, COLFA collaborates with academic and community partners to bring artistic experiences directly to younger demographics in addition to the content promoted to more general audiences. The center offers multiple avenues for access to the arts for young artists, musicians, and creatives. The center offers targeted youth courses through the Professional and Continuing Education program, such as Improv Comedy for Kids, Teen Studio Intensive, and the B-Movie Cinema Club. This outreach extends to local educators as well, with the center providing professional development programs for fine arts teachers at districts such as Edgewood ISD.

While K-12 students frequently attend broader public exhibitions as audience members, the center also builds specific community engagement opportunities around these experiences. For example, backed by the

Brackenridge Endowment, filmmaker Clarence Maclin will present upcoming screenings designed specifically for students at the North East School of Arts (NESA). By extending the university's cultural programming to local campuses, UTSA Arts helps students sample elements of an artistic career and connect with mentors who can guide their journey.

Here for Tomorrow's Roadrunners

It all comes down to showing up early. Waiting until a student's senior year to pitch them on a degree means the window to actually shape their journey is almost already closed. Programs like these break down the intimidating walls that often surround higher education while potentially sparking new motivations that may have existed without our outreach. A teenager who has already earned college credit or performed in an ensemble group or debated civic texts on campus does not just hope they can handle university life, they already have proof that they are ready and capable.

Ultimately, these pipeline programs do more than drive enrollment growth across the college. They establish UT San Antonio as a familiar, supportive presence in the lives of youth across San Antonio and South Texas. By investing in these students early, COLFA ensures that when young people begin evaluating their future options and they sit down at the dinner table, ready to commit to a path for their future lives, they already see themselves as Roadrunners.

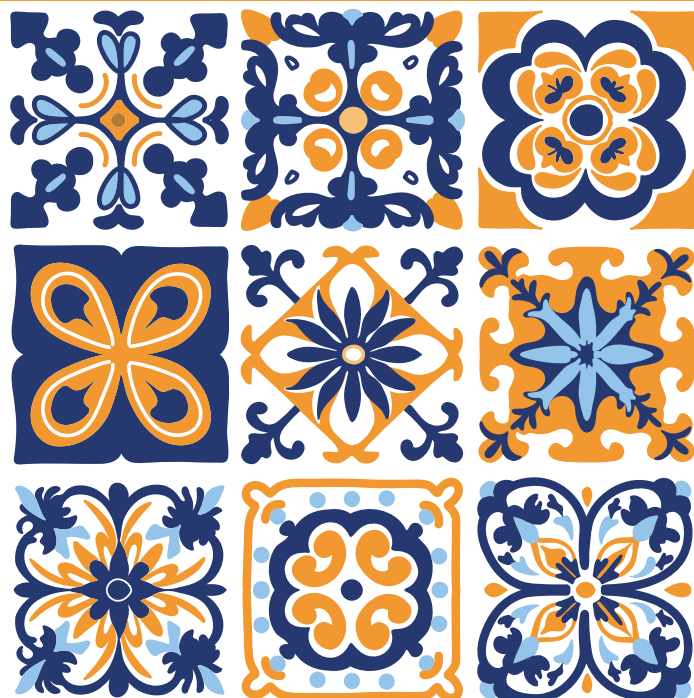
Opposite, from left: Students prepare to see their films at the Santikos Palladium; Instructor Bradley Freeman Jr. teaches puppetry at William J. Brennan High School, **Bottom:** Graduating students at the Alamodome





NAMS–MOLA CONFERENCE

in San Antonio



The National Association of Medical Spanish (NAMS) and the Medical Organization for Latino Advancement (MOLA) convened for their joint annual conference at the UT San Antonio Downtown Campus last November. The gathering provided a forum for healthcare professionals, educators, students, and advocates to address barriers affecting Spanish-speaking communities, including disparities in cultural and language competencies across healthcare fields.

The conference, themed “Más allá de las fronteras” or “Transcending Borders,” featured sessions on a wide range of topics, from language access to education to policy advocacy. Assistant Professor Stephanie Brock Gonzalez was instrumental in planning to bring this important conference to UT San Antonio and executing it to the high standard it has achieved in Chicago with 2025’s conference being the first time it was hosted outside the windy city.

“Hosting the NAMS-MOLA Conference in San Antonio was an incredible opportunity because it was the first time this national gathering was held outside of Chicago. I had the privilege of collaborating with an incredible organizing committee representing institutions and healthcare systems from across the country,” shared Gonzalez. “Celebrating what makes San Antonio so special reminds us that cultural knowledge is not an add-on to healthcare, it is an essential part of providing meaningful, patient-centered care.”

The conference intentionally partnered with local Latino-owned small businesses to highlight some of the foods that are part of everyday life in San Antonio, including breakfast tacos, Texas barbecue, café de olla, conchas, and antojitos you might find at a neighborhood snack stand. Organizers were also thrilled for participants to experience performances by UT San Antonio’s Ballet Folklórico, Mariachi Morado, and Latinoamerican Duo (violin and guitar), as well as taking part in a riverboat tour along the San Antonio Riverwalk.

Language professionals from within COLFA participated, including Dean Glenn Martínez, Professor of Spanish, Bicultural/Bilingual Studies and Public Health, who participated in a live recording of the NAMS Podcast titled “Talking Language Learning and How Multilingual Clinicians Can Thrive.” Hosted by NAMS President Pilar Ortega, MD, the live session brought together a diverse group of educators and clinicians to explore



the daily realities of working in multicultural medical environments and the state of higher education.

“One of the things that I often tell my undergraduate students in the Spanish for Health Care Professionals course is that this is not about proficiency or how many words you know,” said Martinez. “It’s about relationships. That is what medical Spanish is about. It’s about how you take linguistic resources and use those to establish and nurture relationships for the long term.”

Melissa Wallace, Professor of Translation and Interpreting Studies at UT San Antonio, gave a talk titled “Book Clubs, Community Building, and Language Access: Collective Reading for Disruption in Uncertain Times.” This presentation started conversations around the polycrises currently being experienced in the realm of language access policy and aimed to turn participants’ awareness back to the pleasures of collective leisure reading as a civic strategy at a time where clinicians, medical interpreters, and patients are facing increasing communication challenges.

Multilingualism in medical care is a baseline requirement for addressing health disparities. Professionals and community advocates at the conference outlined the challenges faced by immigrants and non-English speakers when interacting with the healthcare system. Designated health disparity zones reveal systemic gaps in care.

Rural agricultural workers living in work camps face vulnerabilities, including the extra labor required to translate medical information into multiple languages and a severe lack of options in where to seek care.

Recent data from health equity researchers stress the scope of these challenges. Nationwide, nearly 40 million people speak Spanish at home, yet a severe shortage of certified Spanish-speaking healthcare providers persists across the clinical landscape. As a result, patients regularly face prolonged wait times or depend on family members, often young children, to act as informal interpreters during complex medical consultations. Clinical studies confirm that unaddressed language barriers increase the risk of adverse medical events, reduce medication adherence, and can cause patients to delay necessary preventative care. Rural agricultural workers living in work camps are particularly vulnerable because they often lack language tools to meet their needs in communities outside major cities.

Effective care for Spanish-speaking patients demands an infrastructure that delivers accurate, culturally relevant medical communication without placing the translation burden on the patients themselves. Precision care across language divides involves understanding the patient’s regional background and community rather than applying a blanket translation approach.

Top: Ballet Folklórico de UTSA welcomes attendees to the conference.



“The conference reinforced why our work in the Spanish as a Heritage Language Program is so important. Heritage speakers bring valuable linguistic and cultural knowledge that can make a meaningful difference in healthcare and many other professional fields,” said Gonzalez. “Our goal is to build upon the skills students already possess, help them develop confidence in academic and professional settings, and recognize their bilingualism as a strength and an asset.”

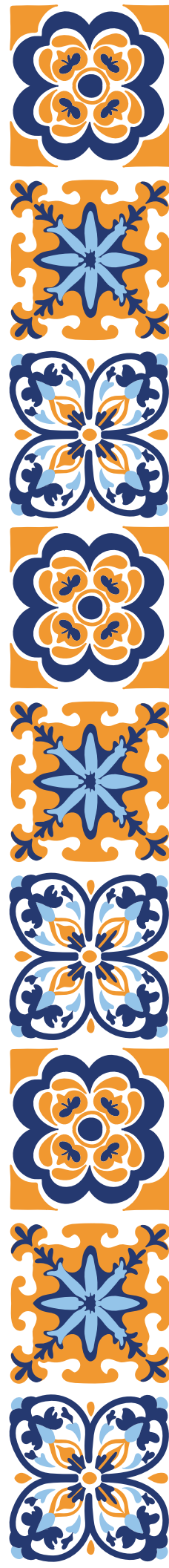
By supporting students in developing their language abilities while deepening their understanding of the communities they serve, COLFA is preparing graduates who can build connections, foster trust, and communicate across linguistic and cultural contexts. Preparing graduates who understand both language and culture is one of the most meaningful ways we can serve San Antonio and the communities that call it home.

COLFA is helping to address the workforce demands discussed at the conference through academic pathways to train the next generation of language professionals. The Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics provides students with the analytical skills to understand language acquisition and structure. The Graduate Certificate in Health Translation and Interpreting Studies provides training for working within legal and medical environments. For students looking to add onto their existing degree plans, the recently approved Minor in Spanish and Medical Humanities leverages two high-quality programs into a program that can open doors in multiple fields.

Given San Antonio’s long history of navigating language and healthcare, the city remains a natural fit to host future NAMS-MOLA conferences. Looking ahead, the integration of UTSA and UT Health into UT San Antonio positions the university to become a national hub for conversations in both healthcare and language, with COLFA students poised to become tomorrow’s experts.

Left from top: A special performance by Ballet Folklórico de UTSA; Live NAMS Podcast with Pilar Ortega MD, MGM, Bright Zhou, MD, MS, Glenn Martínez, PhD, MPH, and Reniell Iñiguez, MD.; Melissa Wallace presents; SHL instructors. Left to right, Ada Zamarripa, Stephanie Brock Gonzalez, and Aidee Larios Palomera.

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PRESS PLAY

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES & PATIENT CARE: AN INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA GAVIA

Tune in to **Press Play**, a video series featuring conversations with UT San Antonio COLFA alumni who are shaping their industries with a foundation in the liberal and fine arts.

COLFA Alumna **Jessica Gavia**, Executive Director of Patient Relations at University Health, brings a unique perspective to medical administration. As a ‘double Roadrunner’ who earned her undergraduate degree in American Studies from COLFA and a master’s degree in Public Administration, her undergraduate coursework in Women’s and Gender Studies, alongside Mexican American culture classes, formed her understanding of historical medical biases. Her career path has included work in local government and contract administration. This experience led her to University Health during a massive hospital construction project she was a part of, where she recognized she could impact patient care without working at the bedside.

Today, Gavia oversees patient care across University Health’s many care facilities including University Hospital and more than 30 outpatient health care centers. As part of her responsibilities, Gavia guides a \$3.6 million annual language access program providing medical interpreters. Her mindset emphasizes compassion among her staff to uphold patient dignity, and Gavia uses her multidisciplinary foundation today to prioritize the “human experience” over the traditional patient experience.

“We have actually moved away from referring to it as patient experience, and we call it human experience,” said Gavia. “Our patients are not just patients; they’re humans with entire lives and backgrounds and experiences before they come to our doors.”

While the American Studies degree is no longer offered, the approach Gavia champions now thrives in COLFA’s Medical Humanities program among many other interdisciplinary degree programs. With the merger of UT San Antonio and UT Health into one institution, the university continues to expand its role in the city’s healthcare landscape, and alumni success stories like Gavia’s show exactly how a liberal arts background can help build a better, more empathic healthcare system.



Join COLFA Dean Glenn Martinez for an in-depth conversation with Jessica Gavia. Scan the QR code to hear more about her unconventional career trajectory, her insights on patient healthcare in the age of AI, and the exciting collaborative potential for UT San Antonio students moving forward.



THE LEGACY AND FUTURE OF MAYA RESEARCH

AT UT SAN ANTONIO



“Is there anything left to dig?”

It is a question archaeologists hear regularly, with the thought that nearly everything worth finding has already been discovered. When discussing the ancient Maya civilization, the answer is a resounding “yes!” There is so much left to learn about how one of the most complex societies of the past not only lived but thrived. Maya civilization was a complex society with a long history, and documenting and reconstructing the history of this civilization requires a commitment to decades of continuous study.

Fieldwork in the region that was home to Maya civilization—southeastern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and parts of El Salvador and Honduras—demands physical and mental resilience. Hiking through the dense jungle is extremely taxing, as researchers navigate thick overgrowth and steep inclines to locate ancient settlements. The humidity and heat present constant challenges for the archaeological teams and their equipment. Despite the physical toll, the promise of discovery drives the university’s researchers forward.

This summer marked 54 years of field research in Maya archaeology for The University of Texas at San Antonio. Leading the charge today are Professors M. Kathryn Brown and Jason Yaeger. Together, they lead one of the premier Maya studies programs in the nation. Their combined efforts have reshaped our understanding of the ancient Maya, and they continue to bring global recognition to the university and unique hands-on research opportunities for our students.

A Foundation of Excellence

The roots of Maya archaeology at the College of Liberal and Fine Arts stretch back to the university’s first years. Richard E.W. Adams, the founding dean of the college in 1972, was a major figure in the field. His early advocacy established a strong foundation for Anthropology at UT San Antonio, and from his first year at UTSA until his retirement in 2005, he was an active researcher, most notably directing many years of research at the major city of Rio Azul, Guatemala.

Around the same time, Thomas R. Hester, founded the university’s Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), acting as its director for 13 years, from 1973 to 1987. Hester established CAR as one of the top cultural resource management programs in Texas, while also leading field schools in South Texas and Belize. Notably, he co-directed long-term excavations at the important Maya site of Colha, Belize.

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Opposite: Yaeger (left) directs the excavation of a funerary temple at Buenavista del Cayo, Belize, with UT San Antonio Anthropology PhD students Kyle Winters and Santiago Sobrino (both at top right). **Top:** Santiago Escobedo, ANT BA '77, HIS MA '05 at the Maya site of Caracol, Belize, in 1977. **Bottom:** Yaeger and Brown (center) flanked by project Associate Directors, Bernadette Cap (left) and Rachel Horowitz (right) on the stairs of the main acropolis at the Maya site of Xunantunich, Belize.

Laura Levi, who joined UTSA in 2002, kept the university at the forefront of Maya research after Adams' retirement. She directed fieldwork in Belize for many years, focused on the domestic economy of ancient Maya farmers and how they were organized into neighborhoods and communities. She recently retired, but she remains highly active, returning to Belize for research every summer and mentoring students from multiple universities.

Today, research on Maya culture continues at UT San Antonio through the work of M. Kathryn Brown, Jason Yaeger, and their graduate students. Their combined efforts are actively reshaping our understanding of this civilization.

M. Kathryn Brown serves as the Lutch Brown Endowed Professor of Anthropology. She currently directs the Mopan Valley Preclassic Project in Belize. Her work explores the earliest settled villages in the Maya world, where she examines topics such as ancient ritual and religion while investigating the origins of a hierarchical social system. She asks questions about what types of activities supported the shifts that led to the origins of this advanced civilization.

Brown's research tracks the origin of kingship across 1500 years of history. She studies the transfer of sacred knowledge from one generation to the next. Understanding religious pedagogy requires examining the specific institutions that maintained these beliefs. For instance, her work at the site of Las Ruinas de Arenal uncovered early jade offerings placed within a public space at the

heart of this early community. She has documented early ancestor veneration practices, the study of which shows that ancient Maya people carefully re-entered burial crypts to retrieve ancestral bones. Her work at the site of Xunantunich not only investigates ancient Maya ritual and religious practices across time but also examines how sacred knowledge was passed from one generation to the next. Her team has documented an ancient space of instruction, a school of sorts. Current UTSA PhD student, Lauren Nowakowski's research examines the living spaces of these young Maya scholars in training.

Jason Yaeger serves as President's Endowed Professor of Anthropology, and he studies Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations. Much of his research has investigated how Classic Maya rural communities were integrated into broader socio-political networks and institutions. He has excavated the houses of ancient Maya farmers, mapped agricultural terraces across Belize's Mopan River valley, and excavated the ruler's monumental palace at Xunantunich. Expanding his scope, he co-directed the San Pedro Maya Project to study how Maya immigrants from Mexico adapted to colonial British Honduras in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He also led the Tiwanaku Inka Settlement Program, examining how the Inka Empire reconfigured monumental temples at that ancient city to create sacred spaces that legitimized their rule.

His current work examines the Mopan valley's shifting political capitals to understand what factors led to the rise and fall of each in turn over the course of two millennia. For the last decade, he has been excavating a royal mortuary complex at the major site of Buenavista to document the establishment of the valley's first royal house and understand how they stayed in power for two and a half centuries, before Buenavista was eclipsed by another regional capital, Xunantunich. He has shown how Buenavista's divine kings and queens honored and celebrated their ancestors, communicating and interacting with them and other powerful supernatural beings through ritual practices, which in turn supported their own claims of divine rulership.





A Collaboration Built on Shared Passion

Brown's first experience in Belize archaeology was in 1986, and Yaeger's in 1990, but it was not until 2003 that they met, when they were both in Belize conducting archaeological research. At that time, Brown was an assistant professor at UT Arlington, and Yaeger was an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Appropriately, they were married in a ceremony at the Maya site of Cahal Pech, Belize, and they both joined UT San Antonio's Department of Anthropology in 2009 and 2010.

Since coming to UT San Antonio, each of them has maintained their research project in Belize. Together, they examine the rise and fall of Maya civilization, focusing on the roles of religion, economy, and warfare through time. Their research spans most of Maya history, from the earliest farming villages, through the Classic period when Maya society was governed by divine kings, to the historic period when Maya society responded to Spanish and British colonialism.

Innovation through LIDAR Technology

Archaeology is constantly adopting new technologies. In 2012, Brown and Yaeger collaborated with other scholars on a grant for airborne LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) mapping of a large area in western Belize. With this technology, an instrument mounted on an airplane sends out laser pulses and measures their bounce-back to create a detailed map of the ground surface. Because many of those pulses penetrate the jungle canopy, LiDAR can quickly and accurately map hundreds of square kilometers of landscape in a few weeks, an effort that would take decades using traditional methods of cutting through the jungle and mapping sites on the ground.

The results of the LIDAR survey were astounding. The team found new sites hiding under the jungle canopy, and they identified fortifications and ancient roads that locals and archaeologists alike had unwittingly stepped over for generations. The incredible number of ancient house platforms revealed a very dense population, and the landscape was heavily transformed with terraces and other field systems to produce the food needed to support that dense population. Ancient communities marked their connections by aligning their sacred buildings, despite being separated by 5 kilometers. Furthermore, the LiDAR survey revealed the region's geomorphology, revealing relic channels and oxbow lakes, areas where the Mopan River once flowed. The LiDAR data have provided the foundations for decades of additional research in the region.

Sustaining Traditions and Local Partnerships

Living and working in the same region for over three decades, Yaeger and Brown have developed strong ties with the local community of San Jose Succotz, where many residents are of Maya descent. They hire dozens of local men and women each summer, many of whom have decades of archaeological excavation experience.

This relationship extends beyond excavations, however. Their projects host the Succotz Archaeology and Heritage Day each summer, which is attended by hundreds of community members. The event brings together their projects and other collaborators (including the Belize Institute of Archaeology, other archaeology projects, local universities, and cultural groups) to share information about archaeology and celebrate the region's cultural heritage. The event keeps cultural traditions alive including traditional music and dances and the ancient Maya ballgame called pok-ta-pok, where teams use only their hips to volley a rubber ball back and forth.

Tourism is very important to the local economy, and Belizean tour guides take great pride in providing guests with the most up-to-date information. Brown, Yaeger, and their graduate students also give presentations each summer to the local tour guide associations to share with them the latest findings.

When the COVID-19 pandemic closed the country for tourism, the local economy suffered greatly. Brown and Yaeger spearheaded a GoFundMe campaign that raised over \$24,000 for food assistance that supported over 100 families in western Belize whose livelihoods depended on the income from archaeological fieldwork and tourism.

Mentoring the Next Generation of Scholars

Mentoring is a core component of the Brown and Yaeger's research in Belize. Their undergraduate field school offers a rigorous, hands-on experience that allows students to participate directly in producing archaeological data that sheds new light on the ancient Maya. Eight MA students and 12 PhD students from five different universities completed their degrees on the project, with others currently in progress.

Their graduate students have been highly successful. For example, Zoë Rawski utilized her experience to secure a position at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Another, Tiffany Lindly, is the Alamo Archaeologist. And Whitney Lytle is the Director of Scholarships at the Worthington Foundation in Maine. Lytle remains so dedicated to Maya archaeology that she uses her personal vacation time to return to Belize for two weeks of excavation each summer.

Building the Future of Maya Research

Since arriving 17 years ago, Brown and Yaeger have worked to add the next chapter to the long history of Maya research at UT San Antonio. In 2010, they founded the annual South-Central Conference on Mesoamerica, which brings together researchers from diverse disciplines who study ancient and contemporary indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica. The conference rotates through the region's universities, but UT San Antonio has hosted five times.

They have also built collaborations with partner institutions in San Antonio. They consulted with the Witte Museum when it hosted the exhibit "Maya: Hidden Worlds Revealed" in 2016. Then in 2021, they teamed up with Bernadette Cap and the San Antonio Museum of Art to create the exhibit "Nature, Power, and Maya Royals," which showcased artifacts from Yaeger's excavations of the royal tombs, the very first time these objects were on public exhibit.

They envision a bright future for Maya research in Belize and beyond, growing the program with continued grants and donor support. Maintaining the high level of graduate student mentoring remains a top priority, and they want to continue recruiting top-quality students.

"There could not be a better time to study Maya civilization. We can now read Maya hieroglyphs very well, LiDAR is revolutionizing our understanding of how the ancient Maya transformed their landscape, and new tools like ancient DNA and AI are poised to push the field forward. But the foundations of our knowledge are still the data we collect by basic fieldwork - mapping and excavating archaeological sites and analyzing artifacts," said Yaeger. "We are so excited for the future of Maya archaeology and for the next generation of Mayanist scholars being trained at UT San Antonio!"

To learn how you can support this research or get involved with the Department of Anthropology at The University of Texas at San Antonio, please visit the department's official website. Students interested in applying for the next Belize summer cohort should contact Brown and Yaeger via email at Jason.Yaeger@utsa.edu and Kathryn.Brown@utsa.edu.

Opposite, from top: UT San Antonio Anthropology PhD student, Madeline Stone Snyder, shows a child how to excavate at the Succotz Archaeology and Heritage Day. Brown and Yaeger (right) on a jungle expedition with Dr. Elma Kay and her team at the Belize Maya Forest Trust. The dancers of "Ritmo Succotzeño" after performing at the Succotz Archaeology and Heritage Day. A roll-out photograph of a painted vase from a royal tomb at Buenavista del Cayo, showing a ruler seated on a throne (left panel) and two underworld creatures in the form of an owl and rattlesnake (right panel).



A SCHOOL *like no other*

INTRODUCING THE *School of Communication, Language & Culture*

As humans, our connection to one another relies entirely on a shared system of meaning. Communication provides the method to share ideas. Language provides the structure for those ideas. Culture provides the context that makes those ideas matter. You cannot isolate one concept from the others, as they operate as an interdependent system. COLFA looks to align curriculum with this reality by launching the new School of Communication, Language, & Culture, an integration of the Department of Communication with the Department of Modern Languages & Literatures.

By the numbers, the new school has tremendous reach. The school will serve over 1,000 undergraduate majors alongside 50 Master of Arts students. A doctoral program in Communication is at the last stage of UT System approval. Students will have the opportunity to pursue six residential Bachelor of Arts degrees, two fully online Bachelor of Arts programs, two Master of Arts degrees, and multiple certificates, including the new Certificates in Digital Communication and Health Translation and Interpreting. In addition, the new school will be supported by nearly 70 faculty members.

“We are building ‘A School Like No Other’ in the city of San Antonio,” said COLFA Dean Glenn Martinez. “The school builds on the strength of two already distinguished departments into a singular unit that expands the impact of what these two units already accomplish individually. We are actively investing in the next generation of global communicators.”

Integrated degree plans and faculty collaborations are in the works and will draw on the strengths of both areas. Many institutions across the United States already recognize the overlap between these fields, and international models offer a blueprint for integration. Throughout Europe, universities frequently merge language studies and professional communication into a single academic ecosystem. Instead of isolating language courses, these schools weave cultural training directly into degree pathways.

A strong example of this model includes the new Bachelor of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies. Pioneered by Professor of Instruction and Assistant Dean of Faculty Success Makiko Fukuda, the program will allow students to select Chinese, Japanese, or Korean language and cultural study.



Opposite: Students take advantage of UT San Antonio being an Adobe Creative Cloud campus; Top, front left: Modern Languages and Literatures brings with it the largest study abroad presence on campus. Students in Urbino, Italy; Taiwan; Oaxaca.

The program emphasizes career readiness by focusing on language proficiency with technical training in a “language plus skills” framework. Through the Media, Arts, Languages, and Cultural Studies focus area, students apply regional knowledge to creative projects within media and entertainment fields through communication courses in digital media production. By not isolating either language or technical skills, students will be primed to explore a wide variety of careers in their culture of interest both domestically and internationally.

The curriculum continues to expand into career-focused pathways with COLFA’s minor programs. Professor of Translation and Interpreting Studies Melissa Wallace spearheaded two recently approved programs. Students can now minor in Spanish and Medical Humanities alongside a new minor in Spanish and Criminal Justice. These programs give graduates of any major a practical edge in fields where cultural fluency really matters.

Chad Mahood serves as the Interim School Director to guide the initial integration of the departments. UT San Antonio is currently conducting a nationwide search for an Inaugural School Director. This incoming leader will cement long-term goals for the school and recruit new faculty members to contribute to curriculum and research development.

“I served as the Comm Department Chair for the past four years, and during one of those years I also served as the Modern Languages Interim Department Chair,” said Mahood. “I know that some faculty in these former Departments already collaborate on important projects. I foresee even more amazing future collaborations in both research and teaching.”

This growth mindset extends into digital classrooms. Under Mahood’s leadership, the expanding number of online Bachelor of Arts in Communication majors now complements the online Spanish Multidisciplinary Focus Area. To support this expansion, Assistant Professor of Practice Elizabeth Olvera developed a

new accelerated language schedule for the 2026-2027 academic year. COLFA will offer eight-week Spanish classes for both residential and online students. This format allows individuals to advance from elementary to advanced proficiency in just a single year.

Plans are in the works to amplify and build upon our existing research centers and units, such as the Communication Center for Dialogue and Deliberation, where students learn to appreciate and apply fundamental communication skills, tools, and techniques to improve their relationships and career readiness while also learning about community decision-making. Also with Communication, Digital Initiatives aims to be an academic forum for media- and data-driven storytelling advancing community engagement by integrating interdisciplinary collaborations with language and culture. Modern Language and Literature’s Mexico Center is already in committee discussions about expanding its reach to cover all the Americas, as well as the Borderlands, for students interested in exploring their heritage along with new cultures.

A shared vision requires a shared home. COLFA plans to merge both departments within a single physical footprint. This environment will serve as a central gathering point for both departments and will include common areas that encourage conversations between students and faculty, technical spaces to engage in schoolwork and research, housing for specific centers, and spaces to host events centered around regional traditions. Spaces are currently being considered for final integration.

With the new school launching soon, COLFA is excited to explore the possibilities present when communication, language, and culture are merged into one interconnected ecosystem. Future graduates of the school will step into their careers recognizing this interdependent system and its importance to the human experience as they ready themselves to take on the careers of tomorrow.



HUMANIZING THE SCIENCE

*How Megan Keim Shapes
Patient-Centered Cancer Research*

A career in cancer research does not universally begin with a traditional medical track. For alumna **Megan Keim**, who serves as a Senior Protocol Project Manager for the Southwest Oncology Group (SWOG), a degree in Anthropology was her ticket to success. Keim graduated from The University of Texas at San Antonio in 2017 with a BA in Anthropology alongside a minor in Biology. Her daily schedule involves navigating the demands of federal organizations and pharmaceutical companies, where she utilizes her medical anthropology background to center patient care inside technical clinical trials.

Keim began her journey at the university in 2013. Originally on a multidisciplinary degree path as she tried to find classes that worked well together and sparked her interests, Keim was unsure of what specific direction to take her future career. A sophomore year class with Professor Deborah Moon Wagner changed her trajectory as she found herself entirely captivated by the field.

“It was something that I could really dive into and not get bored,” said Keim. “It was like a mixing of both of those worlds of science and the cultural learning. Medical anthropology made complete sense for me.”

Keim dove right into the field, and she immediately engaged with all that COLFA had to offer. She served as president of the Anthropological Society for a year. She even met her husband, David, through the organization. Under the mentorship of Professor Jill Fleuriet, Keim spent three semesters conducting research for her undergraduate thesis. She focused her work on mental health outcomes and patient access. She interviewed clinic patients directly to understand their experiences and identify potential avenues for resource allocation. Alongside her research, she completed an internship with the San Antonio Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse where she helped run a summer camp teaching military children about safe practices.

All of these experiences built a foundation for her current role within SWOG. The organization operates under The Hope Foundation and receives federal funding from the National Cancer Institute. Keim specifically works with genitourinary cancers, managing trials regarding bladder, prostate, and kidney diseases, facilitating the steps needed to bring potential treatments to activation. Her primary responsibility involves writing and organizing cancer research protocols alongside teams consisting of statisticians, data coordinators, fiscal/legal representatives and doctors implementing treatments.

OVATIONS



When asked how anthropology translates to clinical research, Keim points directly to the coursework she completed at the university. “Learning critical thinking throughout my time at college has supremely helped me,” said Keim. “Through the lens of anthropology, understanding how science interacts with humans continues to help me with developing clinical trials and aids in my perspective when doing it. For example, I apply that thinking when working with our patient advocates. Understanding how patient feedback and their lived experience play a role when you’re developing a trial is incredibly insightful. My job is to package all of that together for the benefit of patients that will enroll in these trials.”

The position requires adaptability. Developing a treatment trial takes nine to twelve months of planning. During this time, Keim must collaborate with pharmaceutical companies, subject matter experts, and the federal government to ensure that all parties are on the same page while compiling data and developing a workable clinical trial protocol and informed consent document.

“It is difficult crossing that barrier sometimes from the hard science community into a patient-focused world and bridging that gap,” said Keim. “Learning how to communicate between those two worlds is a huge part of my job.”

The outcomes make the effort worthwhile. For Keim, the most rewarding aspect of her career is reaching the point of activation in a trial.

“Getting to that point and putting it out into the world, knowing that you have created a strong protocol with all the input that you can possibly have, it is super rewarding to see it go out to sites and for sites to activate the trial and put patients on,” Keim shared. “Knowing that you had a part in providing care that could really help people is wonderful. I love that about my job.”

Recently, Keim began training for a new role as a clinical trials program manager. In this position, she will oversee multiple protocol project managers across different disease sites. She will facilitate discussions with the National Cancer Institute and drug companies to shepherd new projects forward. She is optimistic that she can further extend her reach and play an even stronger role in helping provide quality care for cancer patients.

Today, Keim looks back on her undergraduate experience with fondness. She maintains contact with her former instructors and regularly visits with former professors. For current social science students aspiring to enter the medical field, she offers straightforward guidance.

“Get an internship,” advised Keim. “Look into getting involved with your community, whether it is volunteering at a hospital or clinic or attending community events that involve whatever medical specialty you are interested in. Finding a professor that you connect with that can guide you in the right direction is incredibly helpful, and with their support you can put yourself in the best possible position to start your career right out of college.”

Top: Part of the protocol management team at Southwest Oncology Group; Keim attends a group meeting with Southwest Oncology Group
Opposite: Senior Protocol Project Manager and COLFA Alumna Megan Keim



Seed of Texas

Bexar County holds a vast wealth of history spanning over 12,000 years, from pre-colonial Indigenous peoples to westward expansion to the modern era. The sheer volume of archival material can be daunting to try to make heads or tails of, with archive after archive of aging tomes, religious documentation, census data, county health records, and so much more that few have access to. The Seed of Texas project, found at heritage.bexar.org, takes a dynamic, interactive approach to curating these records in a relevant and visually engaging way by creating highly interactive and informative modules for access by teachers and the public alike.

Department of History Professor Emeritus Jack Reynolds originated the idea in 2016 for the County's tricentennial and has received over half a million dollars in funding to complete its goals. He wanted to showcase Bexar County history using GIS technology, which utilizes software to map and analyze location-based data for academic and scientific research. Dual-appointed Department of Philosophy & Classics and Department of History professor Jessica Nowlin was brought on board for her expertise in using GIS in an archaeological context. The team started with a pilot program looking at the early parts of Bexar County's history, breaking the timeline into specific phases. Reynolds handled the first two phases covering

Indigenous peoples before European expansion and the successive rule of the Spanish, Mexicans, Texans, and US until the arrival of the railroad in 1877. Nowlin oversees the later two phases, guiding the timeline from 1877 to the modern era.

"Bexar County is just so rich in historical material. There's so much data and amazing history across different groups and peoples who still live and reside within Bexar County," said Nowlin. "When I started getting involved in the project, I was mostly brought on to do the GIS work, and I saw this wealth of information that documented San Antonio and Bexar County's history and was trying to find ways to make it more accessible for everyone."

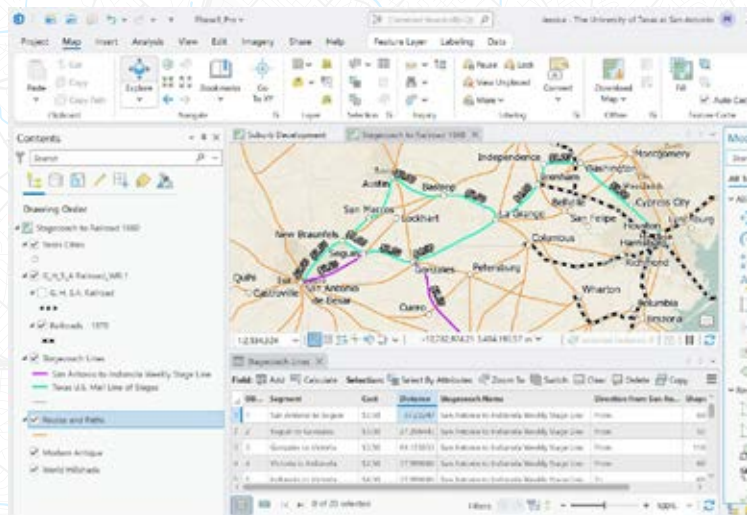
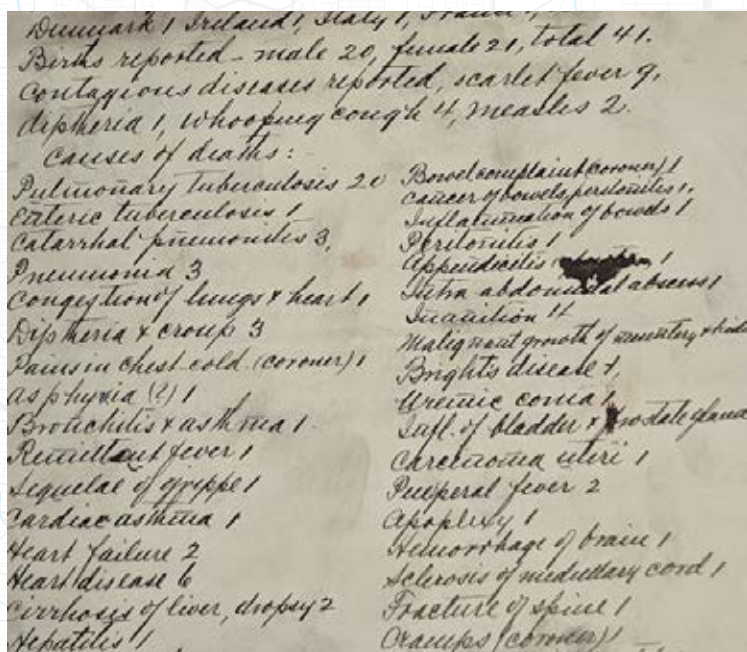
Using the project's website, users can visually track all sorts of data compiled by the team. For example, one could track the arrival of the railroad in 1877. Another map illustrates the terrain, and the specific route travelers took on a stagecoach from San Antonio to Austin to Houston, with the module even detailing the financial costs of stagecoach travel. Once the train arrives, the project uses census data to demonstrate the resulting population and industrial boom. Charts display how occupations shifted alongside the emerging brewing industry. The connections within the data are near endless and provide an insightful deep dive into how communities evolved in the San Antonio region.

A Collaborative Effort

Building a digital atlas of this magnitude requires an extensive collaboration of experts passionate about local history. The Seed of Texas project relies on guidance from a dedicated Advisory Committee that identifies key themes to develop and offers historical expertise. The committee features scholars from UT San Antonio, including Daniel Gelo, Mario Salas, Gabriela Gonzalez, Melissa Gohlke, and John Philip Santos. They are joined by Texas A&M University's Alston V. Thoms, Amy Porter, Philis Barragan Goetz, and Lawrence Knight. Additional academic guidance comes from Texas State University's Jesús F. de la Teja and Louie Dean Valencia-García, St. Mary's University's Gerald Poyo and Lindsey Wieck, UT Permian Basin's Ana Luisa Martinez-Catsam, the University of Washington's Rebecca Walter, and Pomona College's Char Miller.

For the upcoming work on Phase IV, the Seed of Texas is working with a network of community organizations and institutions to actively support the project. The platform will integrate resources from the San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum (SAAACAM) alongside materials from the American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions (AITSCM). Additional archival data comes from the Bexar County Spanish Archives and the City of San Antonio's Office of Historic Preservation. Technical and academic collaboration extends to ESRI and the University of the Incarnate Word. The UTSA John Peace Library's Special Collections, with assistance from librarian Thomas F. Shelton and Archivist Melissa Gohlke, provided access to hard-to-find historical records.

Several students have also played an active role in building the Seed of Texas platform. Graduate students Gabe Rios and Jennifer Campbell collaborated with UT San Antonio faculty member Andria Crosson to create interactive lesson plans for the project. Sarah Vegerano and Daniel Max Orta authored specific historical modules. Orta began his work on the project as an undergraduate medical humanities major before transitioning into a data science master's program after discovering his passion for data and its visualization. Jessica K. Ceeko and Thomas Holdsworth assisted in the research and design of the early modules in the project, as did Mary F. Ledbetter. Sophia Mendez, a current history master's student, is digitizing records concerning the 1960s urban renewal program and the HemisFair site. Additionally, Jeromey Franklin contributed to the project during his time as an undergraduate student.



From top: A screenshot of the GIS software that makes the Seed of Texas project possible; February 1898 City Physician Report, City of San Antonio, Office of the City Clerk, Municipal Archive & Records Center; The 1890 Don Milo train wreck of the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway Company.



Mapping Public Health

Archival data on the Seed of Texas helps paint a vibrant picture of public health across Bexar County's history. Maps reveal geographic patterns of disease and unequal resource allocation spanning decades. Martinez-Catsam's work on the Public Health Movement module pinpointed the historical location of the infirmaries and clinics. Mortality rates by area help indicate commonalities in medical concerns impacting specific neighborhoods. The team even discovered creative civic interventions, such as the installation of bat coops designed to combat malaria.

A review of San Antonio death records from 1881 to 1901 uncovered localized epidemics of cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis, and malaria. GIS mapping showed the outbreaks of tuberculosis primarily affected local residents rather than travelers or immigrants fueling the spread of infection. Data indicated that tuberculosis cases clustered heavily in Wards Two and Three on the city's West Side. Records indicate that community advocates like Carmelo Tranchese fought back; he recognized the transmission trends and organized local residents to push for improved housing standards to slow the transmission rate. With access to visual mapping and consolidated data, response time could have improved and potentially saved lives.

Presenting historical health inequities visually allows modern researchers to identify geographic patterns in healthcare access. The same geographic areas affected by early infectious diseases experience similar modern challenges with diabetes and heart disease, signaling how they may disproportionately impact different areas of the city. Curating and presenting this data may help influence public policy in the future, and visualizing the data gives civic leaders a better workflow for improving resource distribution.

"I would hope that public policy officials could see the ways in which their actions have helped communities in the past by looking at patterns in these data sets and then use this information for affecting change today," said Nowlin.

Looking Forward

Phase four of the project secured funding last December. The team plans to complete the final modules by January 2029. These modules will reach into contemporary data sets and should provide insights into what sort of information we gather today and potentially areas we could improve upon in collection for the future.

During this final phase of the project, Nowlin wants to push the boundaries of digital history by bringing in students from other academic colleges. She plans to use this data to generate 3D models of historic homes, allowing users to virtually walk through historic neighborhoods. Bringing in future partners in the College of AI, Cyber and Computing and the Klesse College of Engineering and Integrated Design's Architecture program could elevate the Seed of Texas's visual capabilities.

For students looking to be involved, they can directly impact how San Antonio remembers its past. Nowlin is set to teach a Historical GIS course in the spring of 2027. Enrolled students will learn advanced mapping techniques while actively building new content for the Seed of Texas platform. For more information, contact Jessica Nowlin at jessica.nowlin@utsa.edu. Visit the Seed of Texas project at heritage.bexar.org

Top, from left: Miss E.F. Robinson, nurse, demonstrates during a Red Cross class in home nursing; Mrs. Wood and Nurse Wallace tend to a polio case in Robert B Green Hospital.

The Impact of Your Support: SOSA



The pride of UT San Antonio is the Spirit of San Antonio Marching Band (SOSA). Last year, generous donors stepped forward to fund new uniforms that honor our heritage and give the band a sharp, unified look. Three major donors—longtime friends of the University, Chris and Sara Bunch, David and Jennifer Spencer, and Alamo Music Company—each contributed \$25,000, totaling \$100,000 toward this effort. The remaining funds were raised by hundreds of supporters during the Giving Day campaign, demonstrating the powerful collective spirit of our community.

“For SOSA, the Heritage uniform connects us to the history, culture, and distinctive character of San Antonio while also reflecting the pride we have in being UT San Antonio’s most visible performing ensemble,” said Director Ron Ellis. “The goal is always to give our students a strong sense of identity and belonging, and it helps them represent the university with the kind of presence and distinction that our students and our community deserve.”

UT San Antonio™
GIVING
»»»
DAY

BIRDS OF A FEATHER
Advocate TOGETHER

Each year, Giving Day has a major impact on the College of Liberal and Fine Arts and our students. This past year we were able to support thousands of students with internship placements, scholarships, program support, and study abroad opportunities. We are only able to accomplish all of this through the generosity of our supporters. On Giving Day 2026, we had over 600 donors give to the College of Liberal and Fine Arts raising over **\$55,000!** We also had 17 Matches and Challenges reached during that time frame to increase our funds even more. Thank you to all who created a match or challenge to increase overall giving, and to all who made a gift during that time. We are so grateful for your support throughout the year.

Please save the date for next year’s Giving Day from **April 6-8, 2027.**

\$55,000
RAISED

Whether you endow a scholarship, hire an undergraduate student for an internship, make a Giving Day Challenge, or create an estate gift, you are supporting our students on their educational journey.

If you would like more information on how to make an impact on our students through a tax-deductible gift, please contact Jessica Hernandez, Director of Development, at Jessica.hernandez@utsa.edu



Unearthing History in Fossombrone

COLFA Expands Global Partnerships



In the middle of the Italian countryside, the ground in the tiny town of Fossombrone holds secrets that have remained buried for centuries. Trowels scrape against compacted earth as students carefully expose hidden artifacts that date back to the second century BCE. Across the site, conversations flow back and forth between languages. A question delivered in English is quickly met with an Italian response with both parties practicing their multilingual skills. As the UT San Antonio students and faculty integrated into the daily life of the town, the excavation has become a permanent bridge between the university and the local community.

The foundation for this active dig began two years ago. Susan Rosenberg, an Associate Professor of Practice in the Department of Philosophy and Classics, and Molly Zaldivar, a Professor of Instruction in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, were teaching at the COLFA in Urbino summer study abroad program. They wanted to design a classical studies course rooted directly in the Marche region of Italy.

During a ride through the Italian countryside, the two spotted a sign for an archaeological park and decided to investigate further. With some quick research and the help of a mutual connection, they were quickly introduced to the director of the archaeological museum in Fossombrone. Rosenberg and Zaldivar visited his office to propose a collaboration. Within minutes, Site

Director Doctor Oscar Mei of the University of Urbino met with the team to discuss the possibilities.

This meeting led to the first joint archaeological project between UT San Antonio and the University of Urbino. The initiative highlights the expansive potential of international collaborations. Establishing partnerships with foreign institutions provides students with distinct, hands-on learning environments and exposes them to experiences they could not experience back at home.

“This collaboration expands COLFA’s global footprint through a partnership that benefits both our faculty and our students,” said Dean Glenn Martinez. “By establishing formal ties, the team has created pathways for our college to engage in meaningful fieldwork while working to set a standard on how we collaborate with international communities.”

This is not the first field school to be developed at COLFA. Faculty lead several active initiatives across Latin America. Rebecca Bria works alongside local communities in Peru to uncover the history of ancient agrarian villages. In Ecuador, Michael Cepek partners with the Cofán Nation to navigate environmental changes. The college also sponsors an established summer program in Belize, where Jason Yeager and Kathryn Brown guide students through the excavation of Classic Maya settlements. These programs offer a distinct advantage by turning coursework into applied fieldwork.

Left: The Ponte della Concordia bridge over the river Metauro in Fossombrone, **Top:** Archaeology students Tanya Campbell, Nicholas Castro, Eva Fountain, Mia Kaepp, Hayden Rockov, and Angelica Perez excavate the central area of the Roman building at Forum Sempronii



In Italy, building a field school for over 16 students required extensive coordination and proved to be quite the logistical challenge. Fossombrone is a quiet municipality lacking dormitories or large hotels. Local officials from the Chamber of Commerce worked closely with faculty to secure accommodations. They identified an unlikely, but functional solution in a family-run restaurant with available rooms upstairs. This setup allowed them to comfortably house 16 students for the duration of the trip.

“Being surrounded by a different culture truly opened my eyes in a refreshing way and helped me to appreciate the welcoming community around me. The people around us were patient and kind, which really helped the students to assimilate into a life that was similar yet very different from our home country,” said UT San Antonio student and participant Eva Fountain. “I cannot stress enough how amazing this trip was for me as it exceeded all of my expectations from learning to social interaction to experiencing the beauty of Italy.

The field school attracted participants from various academic backgrounds. From within COLFA, students from the Departments of Philosophy and Classics, Anthropology, and History joined the excavation. Engineering and computer science majors also participated. The program welcomed anyone willing to learn, though the directors prioritized students who had a specific academic need for the experience.

“In addition to the excavation itself, [the directors] organized meaningful and engaging side trips that enhanced our understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of our fieldwork,” said Anthropology Graduate student Tanya Campbell. “These experiences were intentionally researched and designed to build upon our coursework and to deepen our learning in ways that could never be replicated in a traditional classroom.

While Rosenberg managed the excavation, Zaldivar handled daily operational planning. With her background in languages, Zaldivar served as the primary Italian translator and cultural liaison. Zaldivar also took groups of students out to dinner at a communal table multiple nights a week.

Left from top: Comprising 16 UT San Antonio students, two faculty members, and archaeologists from the University of Urbino, the 2025 team was led by field director Professor Susan Rosenberg; Aerial view of Forum Sempronii showing the large baths, street-facing shops, and the lower excavation zone; The town of Fossombrone was the perfect home for the UT San Antonio team; The Mancinelli family hosted our entire team at their family restaurant and hotel for four weeks. Molly Zaldivar is seen at the head of the table.



Top: Scenes from La Fano dei Cesari, a weekend of Roman reenactments in Fano, Italy. In the central scene, UTSA student Eden Olguin learns to blow the Cornu, the Roman war horn.

During these meals, students had the opportunity to actively practice their conversational Italian which could be put right to use the very next day at the dig.

In her Italian Immersion course at the UT San Archaeological Field School at Forum Sempronii course, Molly Zaldivar required each student participating in the dig to: 1) keep a notebook with Italian vocabulary and phrases learned and used each week both on site and in daily dealings with locals around town; 2) eat dinner with her once per week to discuss experience with Italian language, as well as ask questions about vocabulary and phrases; and 3) Provide a final response paper where they wrote about how learning Italian and using the language enhanced their experience in this small town where not everyone spoke English.

The immersion into Italian history and culture extended beyond the excavation site through weekend field trips helped provide students with additional context for the local history. The cohort traveled to Rome to explore historical landmarks, to Rimini to tour Roman sites there (a physician's house, a Roman arch and a bridge built by the Romans. During one excursion to Fano, Rosenberg and the students even had the opportunity to attend a traditional Roman festival, "Fano of the Caesars."

La Fano dei Cesari is an annual festival celebrating the Roman origin of Fanum Fortunae, the ancient city of Fano. For several nights, the city is transformed into a Roman city with markets, parades, shows, and traditional foods. UT San Antonio students attended in 2025 and learned the Roman methods for making fire and blowing the Roman war trumpet but also got to meet with

Roman enthusiasts who taught them about ancient perfumes and sandal making. The experience brought to life the very world that they were excavating in Forum Sempronii. For a day, Roadrunners got to be ancient Romans and thus their cultural knowledge increased which improved their analysis skills on site.

The relationship between the UT San Antonio group and the Fossombrone community grew significantly over the summer. Local archaeologists were initially unsure of what to expect from the visiting cohort. Lorenzo, an archaeologist on the site, was highly protective of the excavation area at the beginning of the term, but by the end of the program, the entire team were hosting karaoke nights together. Rosenberg continues to communicate with the local partners on a regular basis.

UT San Antonio has been invited back to Fossombrone to continue work with future cohorts. Building on their initial successes, Mei has already proposed that the next cohort shift their focus to excavating a nearby amphitheater.

In 2027, UT San Antonio will have its second season of the field school at Forum Sempronii, with Professors Rosenberg and Zaldivar continuing to teach field archaeology, Roman history, Italian language and culture. The project will start approximately June 19 and run through July 21. Students with any major can apply through the UT San Anton Study Abroad portal. Interested students can also stop by the Study Abroad Fair on September 8 and give their name and email address to the faculty member, who will send them an email regarding an information session for the project to be held later in September. Both faculty members can be contacted via email, susan.gelb@utsa.edu and molly.zaldivar@utsa.edu



ART, JUSTICE, & COMMUNITY

UTSA Arts sparks reframing the dialogue on incarceration and justice with San Antonio community partners

Last spring, **UTSA Arts** brought together artists, writers, educators, students, and community partners for **Arts & Incarceration**, a citywide series exploring the many ways the arts intersect with incarceration. The series invited San Antonio audiences to encounter incarceration through the perspectives and creative work of people who have experienced it. Through performances, writing workshops, conversations, professional development for teaching artists, and other public programs, the Arts & Incarceration series created opportunities for community to listen, reflect, make, and talk together about what the arts can reveal about lives and experiences that are often kept out of public view.

The series placed incarcerated and formerly incarcerated artists at the center of these conversations. Their work offered more than testimony about the experience of incarceration; it offered ways of thinking about identity, belonging, memory, justice, and repair. This approach reflects UTSA Arts' larger commitment to cultural participation, creating opportunities for people to contribute to the cultural life of San Antonio not simply as audiences, but as artists and knowledge-makers.



Texas has one of the largest and most expansive carceral systems in the country. Nationally, more than 1.8 million people were incarcerated in jails and prisons in 2024, with people of color continuing to experience incarceration at disproportionately high rates. These numbers offer a glimpse of the scale of the carceral system, but they cannot convey the human lives behind them. It is within that larger context that *Arts & Incarceration* asked what might become possible when those stories are heard through the arts. One highlight was the presentation of poet and artist Reginald Dwayne Betts' production of *Felon: An American Washi Tale* at the Carver Community Cultural Center. Betts also spent time at Dominguez State Jail with members of the UT San Antonio Philosophy and Literature Circle. The series was made possible through partnerships with the Carver Community Cultural Center, Contemporary at Blue Star, the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, Gemini Ink, the Majestic-Empire Foundation, and the San Antonio Book Festival, whose collaboration helped bring the series to audiences across San Antonio. UTSA Arts is grateful to the Texas Commission for the Arts for its generous support of this work.

- Emilie Amerin, UTSA Arts Executive Director



EXPANDING THE SPOTLIGHT:

UTSA Arts Broadens Community Arts Programs Through the Performing Arts

UTSA Arts & UT San Antonio Professional and Continuing Education (PaCE) are creating a stage for everyone with the expansion of the Community Art Program into the performing arts.

Community performing arts classes create welcoming opportunities for people of all ages and experience levels to explore creativity, build skills, and connect with others through the arts. Through music, dance, theater, and other performance practices, participants develop confidence, expression, and a sense of belonging in a supportive community environment. These classes celebrate the joy of making and performing together while fostering meaningful connections among participants and the broader community. The performing arts classes also collaborate with community partners such as Turnip Ensemble Theater, The Foreign Arm, Culturingua, the Silk Road Cultural Heritage District, National Association for Latinos, Abode Contemplative Care for the Dying, and Northeast School of the Arts.

Classes and programs are at the Amy Shelton McNutt Historical Arts Center on the UT San Antonio Southwest Campus unless noted.



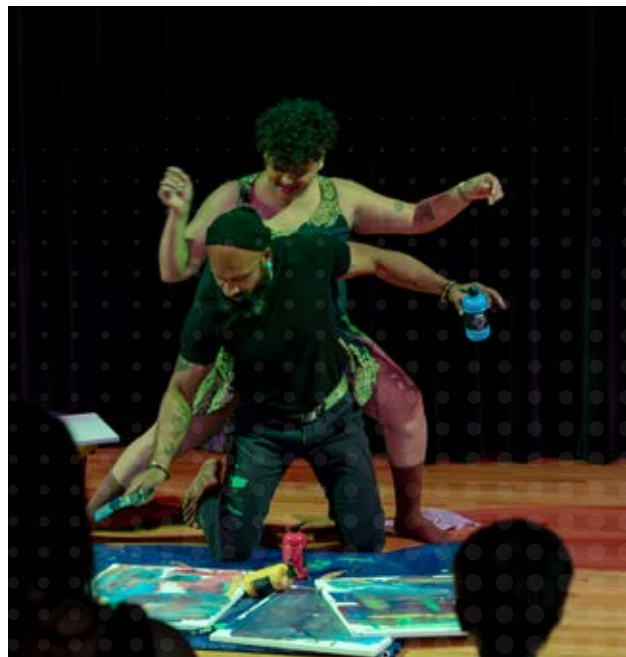
www.utsa.edu/communityart



communityart@utsa.edu



(210) 458-7223



FALL 2026 EVENTS



ART

Aug 28 - Oct 3: Exquisite Entropy: Photographs by Trish Simonite, 1972-2025

Opening Reception: Aug 28, 6 - 8 PM
Russell Hill Rogers Galleries, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus

Sept 3 - Oct 10: Antithesis in Contemporary Collage

Opening Reception: Sept 3, 10 AM - 1 PM
Art Gallery, Arts Building, UT San Antonio Main Campus

Sept 12: Antithesis in Contemporary Collage Artist Talks

Art Gallery, Arts Building
UT San Antonio Main Campus, 1 - 3 PM

Sept 26: Exquisite Entropy Artist Talk with Trish Simonite

Russell Hill Rogers Galleries
UT San Antonio Southwest Campus, 1 - 3 PM

Oct 24 - Dec 4: Debbie McMahon Fiber Symposium Exhibition Featuring Anna Evans, Coulter Fussell, and Julia Gabriel Weber

Opening Reception: Oct 24, 1 - 4 PM
Panel Discussion: 2 PM
Russell Hill Rogers Galleries
UT San Antonio Southwest Campus
Presented by UT San Antonio Professional and Continuing Education

Nov 4: Art Sale Opening and Artists Reception

Coates Chapel & Gardens
UT San Antonio Southwest Campus
5:30 - 7:30 PM

Nov 5: Gala in the Garden \$

Coates Chapel & Gardens
UT San Antonio Southwest Campus
6:30 - 11:30 PM

MUSIC

Sept 14: Bomba Puertorriqueña: Raíces y Ritmos with Tambores del Pueblo

Recital Hall, Arts Building, UT San Antonio Main Campus, 7:30 PM

Sept 27: Strings of Tradition: Exploring Conjunto's Fiddle \$

Institute of Texan Cultures, Rotating Gallery, 12 - 2 PM
Free with museum admission

Oct 9: Brass Classics & Bold New Sounds with Boston Brass & Kevin Day

Recital Hall, Arts Building, UT San Antonio Main Campus, 7:30 PM

Oct 20: An Evening with Jonathan Scales Fourchestra

Recital Hall, Arts Building, UT San Antonio Main Campus, 7:30 PM

Oct 27: North Indian Flute Across Traditions with Maestro Deepak Ram

Recital Hall, Arts Building, UT San Antonio Main Campus, 7:30 PM

Nov 3: Chiaroscuro with SA Harmonie Wind Ensemble

Recital Hall, Arts Building, UT San Antonio Main Campus, 7:30 PM

Nov 12: Liederabend: Songs of Evening, Twilight, and Night featuring Danielle Talamantes & Kerry Wilkerson

Coates Chapel, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus, 7:30 PM

Dec 6: Grand Finale Concert featuring Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán & National Competition Winners \$

Lila Cockrell Theatre, 900 E. Market St, 7:30 PM
Presented by Mariachi Extravaganza



DANCE, THEATRE, AND FILM

Sept 13: sumRset Movement presents MESH: Dance in Creative Conversation

The Little Carver Civic Center at Carver Cultural Center
226 N Hackberry St, 6:33 PM

Sept 30, Oct 2-3: Actors From The London Stage present William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* \$

Recital Hall, Arts Building, UT San Antonio Main Campus, 7:30 PM
Sponsored by UT San Antonio Department of English

Oct 16: *Sing Sing* Film Screening and Dialogue with Brackenridge Visiting Fellow Clarence Maclin

McNutt Co-Lab, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus,
Film Screening at 6 PM, Dialogue at 8 PM

Oct 17: *Beyond* Film Screening and Dialogue with Brackenridge Visiting Fellow Clarence Maclin

McNutt Co-Lab, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus
Film Screening at 6 PM, Dialogue at 8 PM

Oct 23-24: Grief Dialogues presents In Honor: A Tribute To Those Who Served \$

Radius Center, 106 Auditorium Cir #120, 7 PM
Presented in partnership with Abode Contemplative Care for the Dying

Nov 15-16: Turnip Ensemble Theater presents Inheritance: A Staged Reading

McNutt Co-Lab, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus
Nov 15 at 2 PM & Nov 16 at 7 PM
Presented by Turnip Ensemble Theater

COMMUNITY ARTS

Aug 15: Voz de la Paloma

Buena Vista Theatre, UT San Antonio Downtown Campus, 5 PM
Presented in partnership with the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center and the López Family

Oct 10: With a Shared Vision Artist-in-Residence Program Exhibition Opening

Bihl Haus Arts, 2803 Fredericksburg Rd, 6 PM
Presented by UT San Antonio Professional and Continuing

Oct 10: *Pet Sounds* Play-Along: Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Iconic Beach Boys Album

North East School of the Arts, 1400 Jackson Keller Rd, 1 PM
Presented in partnership with North East School of the Arts Instrumental

Oct 17: With a Shared Vision Artist-in-Residence Program Exhibition Artists Panel

Bihl Haus Arts, 2803 Fredericksburg Rd, 2 PM
Presented by UT San Antonio Professional and Continuing Education

Oct 25: Songwriters Showcase with The Foreign Arm

The Josephine Theatre Cabaret, 339 W Josephine St, 3 PM
Presented in partnership with Majestic-Empire Foundation

Oct 29: Michael Jackson's *Thriller*: A Community Dance Experience

McNutt Co-Lab, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus, 6 PM

Dec 12: On-Corps Veterans Band

Recital Hall, UT San Antonio Main Campus, 11 AM
Presented by UT San Antonio School of Music

CREATIVE WRITING

Sept 9: LitMinds Book Club: Stephanie Elizondo Griest's *Art Above Everything*

Gemini Ink, 1111 Navarro St, 6:30 PM
Presented by Gemini Ink

Oct 14: LitMinds Book Club: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Gemini Ink, 1111 Navarro St, 6:30 PM
Presented by Gemini Ink

Nov 20: *Good Citizens Need Not Fear: A Conversation with Fiction* Author Maria Reva

McNutt Co-Lab, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus, 7 PM

Dec 3: *Between You a River*: Kim Garza Book Launch

The Josephine Theatre Cabaret, 339 W Josephine St, 6:30 PM
Presented in partnership with Majestic-Empire Foundation & Nowhere Books

ARTS & ECOLOGY EVENT SERIES

Aug 27: Seasonal Insights: Looking at Leopold with Andrew Brei

McNutt Co-Lab, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus, 6:30 PM
Presented in partnership with Gemini Ink

Sept 9: *Nuestra Delta Mágica: Reclaiming the love for our hometowns on the South Texas border*

with Nansi Guevara
La Villita Room, UT San Antonio Downtown Campus, 1:15 PM
Presented in partnership with Digital Humanities

Oct 23: *Birds and Barrio Ecologies* with Marisol Cortez

McNutt Co-Lab, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus, 6:30 PM

Nov 17: Artist Talk: Being For Others with Violette Bule

McNutt Co-Lab, UT San Antonio Southwest Campus, 1 PM





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