

Spring 2014

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MINERO

MAGAZINE

Volume XVIII / Spring 2014

WILL
LEARN
FOR
FOOD



26 | NOTICIAS
EL PASO

Yo, Estudié en UTEP

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-Reportero Noticias 26

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Gaby Perez
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Victor Acosta
-News Anchor
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Brenda Reyes
-News Anchor
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FROM THE EDITOR

It's 6 a.m. and keys jingle, unlocking chained windows and doors. Generators power up and sidewalk stoves begin to heat up oil and and cook dough for empanadas. The slowly rising sun glints over multicolored murals of the Virgin Mary, crucifixes and street art.

By 8 a.m., morning traffic piles up on the César Chávez Border Highway, and beyond that a steady line of cars progresses on the Bulevar Juan Pablo II in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Taxis line up just outside the entrance to the Paso Del Norte bridge, buses turn on their engines, and men put on their construction gear while sitting on the curb, eating breakfast—waiting for an opportunity to work. Street vendors cry out “*venta, venta!*,” while residents from El Paso and Cd. Juárez shop for clothes by the pound.

This is Segundo Barrio—the poorest zip code in the nation. Residents from Cd. Juárez commute to El Paso on a daily basis, whether to shop, go to work or attend school.

For many, Segundo is not one of the poorest zip codes in the nation, but rather an extension of their home and a reminder of why they cross the border.

With a \$1 bus pass, students who live in Cd. Juárez can take the city bus after crossing over the bridge and zigzag through the busy streets of



Downtown to get to the University of Texas at El Paso. They will attend classes, maybe work at a Starbucks across the street, and make the journey back home to Mexico. This happens every day.

Up until recently, the hardships and struggles that most of these students faced were not a part of the conversation when it came to the criteria of ranking colleges.

On Aug. 23, 2013, UTEP was ranked seventh nationally by The Washington Monthly and first for social mobility. Washington Monthly rates schools based on their contribution to the public good in three broad categories: social mobility (recruiting and graduating low-income students), research (producing cutting-edge scholarship and PhDs), and service (encouraging students to give something back to their country).

As addressed in Amanda Guillen's story, UTEP received this national recognition because it enrolls a large majority of students who are from low-income families. The university has geared their efforts to make education accessible for all students of the region, and the majority of students receive Pell Grants and financial aid or student loans—but we strove in this issue of the magazine to address what this really means and what it looks like.

Students from the borderland face the reality of state and federal funding declining and tuition prices and student loan debt skyrocketing.

While UTEP strives to address the challenge of educating an increasingly diverse mix of students at a reasonable cost, Andrés Rodríguez introduces us to two students who are in this position and who use some of their financial assistance they receive to pay for school to pay bills or help their families.

Being recognized nationally is quite an honor for UTEP, and El Paso in general, but is it because of the opportunities that are provided to students across the region or the lack of them in the nation as a whole? The answer is much more complex.

Through this issue of Minero Magazine, we hope to provide a more in-depth look at what our student population looks like and the realities of their situations.

From Edwin Delgado and Aaron Montes' portrayal of art students, who grew up in Segundo Barrio and were influenced by their upbringing, to Kristopher Rivera's profile of students, who chose the military as their route to pay for an education, these stories attempt to put a meaningful face to the what the No. 1 ranking in social mobility means for the student population of UTEP.

Lorain
Watters

Lorain Watters



EDITOR IN CHIEF/Lorain Watters
ART DIRECTOR/Fernando Enriquez
COPY EDITOR/Edwin Delgado
WRITERS/Aaron Montes
/Amanda Guillen
/Andrés Rodríguez
/Edwin Delgado
/Kristopher Rivera
PHOTOGRAPHY/Aaron Montes
/Fernando Enriquez
/Kristopher Rivera
/Michaela Román
PHOTO EDITOR /Michaela Román

DESIGNERS/Damian Balderrama
/Fernie Enriquez
/Yvonne Aceves

ADVERTISING DESIGNERS/Damian Balderrama
/Edgar Hernandez

ACCOUNTING SPECIALST/Isabel Castillo
ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY/Marcela R. Luna
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DIRECTOR/Kathleen Flores

MINERO MAGAZINE
Department of Student Publications
The University of Texas at El Paso
105 Union East
500 West University Avenue
El Paso, Texas 79968-0622
minero@utep.edu
mineromagazine.com

Cover by
Fernando Enriquez
Photography by
Michaela Román

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#7 = $\frac{25\%}{67\%}$ of El Pasoans live below the poverty level
of UTEP students receive Pell Grants

National ranking comes from unconventional standards

Story by Amanda Guillen

Design by Fernando Enriquez

UTEP ranked No. 1 in social mobility for the second year in a row in The Washington Monthly's annual national college and university rankings. This led the university to receive an overall national No. 7 ranking out of 284 colleges in the nation—sandwiched between No. 6 Stanford and No. 8 Harvard.

The Washington Monthly is a bimonthly nonprofit magazine that focuses on politics and government in Washington D.C.

According to its website, the publication's mission is to provide truth to the public by believing in American traditions of civic responsibility and giving the average person a break.

Robert Kelchen, assistant professor at Seton Hall University, conducted the university national rankings for The Washington Monthly. Kelchen was adamant when saying that this ranking system does differ from others. "The ranking highlights commitment to serving a broad group of students and working to help them succeed at a low price," Kelchen says.

Kelchen believes that The Washington Monthly's rankings will not impact college students who may be looking for prestige or which colleges to attend. "These rankings do more to inform policy than inform students," Kelchen says. "The Washington monthly rankings are designed to reward colleges who are doing more to serve the public good. For example, the U.S. News rankings are focused much more on the characteristics of the incoming students. These are recruits that are high school seniors with really high ACT or SAT scores and if you did that and have a lot of money to spend, you will do very well in the U.S. News rankings regardless of what these colleges do to actually help these students."

Measuring the success of a university for The Washington Monthly was primarily sought through graduation rates, comparing a prediction of the

graduation rate—by taking location and the makeup of the student body into account—with the actual graduation rate.

"UTEP is serving a large number of low-income students whose success in college was far from guaranteed. Even though the actual graduation rate may not be that high it is better that what we'd expect given the student characteristics," Kelchen says.

Kelchen said it was important to understand that the graduation rate that is listed on the national ranking—37 percent—only covers about three in 10 students at UTEP. "Graduation rates do not cover a lot of students at UTEP because (it) only (applies to) first-time students that are going full time. This excludes transfer students and part-time students, which there are a lot of at UTEP," Kelchen says.

Although social mobility was not the only criterion that was taken into consideration for the ranking, this was the only category in which UTEP ranked in the top 10. Kelchen explained that a high score in social mobility can make up for lower scores in research and service, in which UTEP didn't fare as well.

Social mobility is defined by The Washington Monthly as "recruiting and graduating low-income students." The publication notes that 67 percent of UTEP students receive federal Pell Grants to attend school. Census data shows that 25 percent of persons in El Paso County live below the poverty level, compared to 17 percent of Texans overall.

Martha Cardona, sophomore pre-business major, has worked to help her financially unstable household since the age of 16. Hard work and a strong vision of a bright future is what Martha, now 20 years old, says has pushed her to see past the hardship and work toward earning her bachelor's degree.

"When I entered UTEP, I had to keep on working, because if it weren't for financial aid there is no way that I would have been able to pay for

college,” Martha says. “Just because I got financial aid that doesn’t mean that everything I had to pay was paid off, so I kept on working and it has been hard trying to keep that GPA up and having to choose to be involved (with school organizations/activities) or working. Many students have to work while they are in college. It is hard and everyone thinks that it is cheap and you get a lot of financial aid, but people don’t understand that a lot of these students help their parents out, which is my situation.”

Martha also says that by having to grow up at an early age, she discovered that she wanted more than working for minimum wage and experiencing more poverty than what she has endured her entire life. She is grateful to her parents, who always try to give her the best that they can. Although they couldn’t necessarily give her material items, she does say that she never lacked support and love from either of them.

“I don’t blame my parents for coming from a low-income family, I actually thank them, because thanks to them, I am the person I am now and that is what has pushed me even harder to do even greater things,” she says. “I know I have potential, so money has never stopped me from going to school. I know who I am and I know the potential that I have and as soon as I graduate I plan on achieving my goal.”

Martha is one of the estimated 15,400 students at UTEP who receive Pell grants along with other financial aid. She says that although she has struggled the past few years she is grateful to have received this assistance, and thanks UTEP for making an education possible.

Upon graduation, Martha plans on landing a job with a major company like Microsoft. She says she then plans on returning to school and earning her master’s degree in international business. She says her ultimate dream is to become a CEO of a prestigious company, but her most important goal is to overcome the barriers that she says have been put in front of many minorities, lower classes and women in the industry. “You can’t let something like money stop you from becoming that person you want to be,” she says.

UTEP President Diana Natalicio expressed her excitement with this ranking system because it differs from other national rankings, in that it

took a different approach to how universities were being ranked, by adding categories such as social mobility, where UTEP ranked number one.

“It was very encouraging to see Washington Monthly develop this alternative and think about ranking in a different way, and to think about what does matter and what is the impact of higher education on this country,” Natalicio says. “When you start asking that question you have to think about large public universities because they are educating far more students than small private universities.”

Natalicio says it is important to recognize that social mobility exactly measures the university’s mission of access and excellence. “You have to have both. It is not just serving low-income students, it is also making sure that the educational experience they have provides them with that competitive edge when they graduate and that is what UTEP does especially well,” she says. “We have access—we are very committed to that—but we are also committed to the idea that once we admit students they have to work hard and we have to work hard to make sure they are ready to go out and compete with anybody, that’s social mobility.”

When looking at the data, it is clear that The University of Texas at El Paso serves a large influx of low-income students. When looking at the location of the university and the city of El Paso’s poverty rate, it easily translates into a large number of local students, who fit into that category and attend UTEP. With UTEP being a commuter campus, a lot of students have been home-grown in El Paso and a majority of them fall under the poverty category.

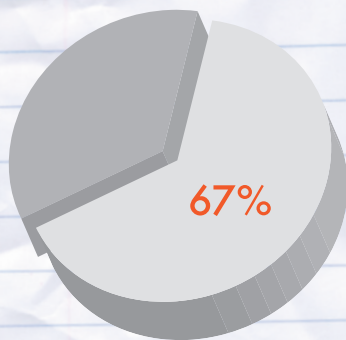
UTEP political science professor Richard Gutierrez says that a student coming from a low-income background should in no way be looked at as inferior. He also says that this has long been a crutch that the university and its students have leaned on. “Sometimes UTEP uses this as an excuse by claiming that our students are nontraditional, I think we rely way too much on saying our students are poor,” he says. “I think we need to look more at how we can make a difference in their lives, but they have to work at it. I have to work at it as a professor, and the institution has to work at it to provide the students with many opportunities that we can afford on this campus.”

Social Mobility

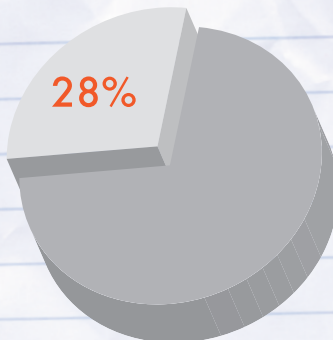
RANK

1

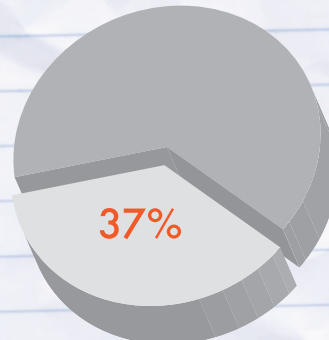
Students receiving Pell Grants



Predicted graduation rate



Actual graduation rate



(PERCENTAGE OUT OF TOTAL NUMBER OF UTEP STUDENTS 2013)

Gutierrez also says UTEP students often underrate themselves and that cultural factors often make it difficult to get them out of that mindset. "You can't measure them, but we know they do come into play. It is getting students to know that they can move from point A to point B, but that it takes work and effort," he says. "It can be frustrating because it is not easy. For some it won't be as difficult, but for others who have to contend with a lot of other issues, it can be."

Natalicio says the university has made efforts to change the mindsets of students who are plagued by poverty and who believe that their lack of money leads to a lack of obtaining an education. "We have worked really hard, over the past 10 years especially. We worked with the schools and made sure that the students who were coming at least had the readiness to attend a university and to encourage schools that hadn't been sending us students," she says. "Graduates of certain high schools in the El Paso area never came, and what we learned early on was that they were being told that they weren't college material and that was only because they were poor."

Political science professor Kathleen Staudt says she is excited about the recognition of the university and the opportunities it provides for students. "I'm glad to see alternative criteria and ranking organizations make their analyses visible," Staudt says. "Traditional ranking systems often overrate schools that mainly admit privileged students or—as former Texas Governor Ann Richards phrased them—people born with a silver spoon in their mouth. In a country that has seen alarming rates of inequality in the last decade or two, social mobility is a worthy factor, among many."

Junior criminal justice major Emilio Magdaleno says he is glad he chose UTEP when selecting a university. "I think I invested my money really good being here," he says. "I am close to home and now I know that it is one of the best universities in the state and country."

For more information on the 2013 National College rankings, visit washintonmonthly.com.

Research

RANK

Research expenditures, in millions
Bachelor's to PhDs
Science & engineering PhDs
Faculty receiving significant awards
Faculty in national academies

140
188
152
157
156

Service

RANK

Peace Corps
ROTC
Federal work-study funds spent on service
Community service participation and hours served
Service staff, courses and financial aid support

249
140
72
86
36

National Overall Ranking

(out of 284 colleges in the nation)

- 1 University of California-San Diego
- 2 University of California-Riverside
- 3 Texas A&M University-College Station
- 4 Case Western Reserve University
- 5 University of California-Berkeley
- 6 Stanford University
- 7 University of Texas-El Paso**
- 8 Harvard University
- 9 Georgia Institute of Technology-Main
- 10 University of California-Los Angeles

En Breve

En el 2013, la revista bimestral Washington Monthly colocó a UTEP en el lugar número 1 en cuanto a movilidad social, y 7 en general. La clasificación incluyó 284 universidades de todo el país.

Gran parte de esa clasificación se explica por el hecho de que el 25 por ciento de los habitantes de El Paso viven por debajo del índice de pobreza y una gran cantidad de estudiantes que asisten a UTEP provienen de esta misma área.

Entre el 67 por ciento de estudiantes que reciben ayuda financiera se encuentra Martha Cardona, estudiante de segundo año de administración de empresas. Ella, como muchos estudiantes, proviene de una familia de

escasos recursos y ha trabajado desde que tenía 16 años para ayudar a su familia y poder pagar por su educación.

La presidenta de la Universidad de Texas en El Paso Diana Natalicio dice que le agrada la clasificación de Washington Monthly por tener un enfoque diferente al de otras publicaciones además de que reconoce la movilidad social, ya que esa es la misión de la universidad—acceso y excelencia.

A pesar de caer muy abajo en otras categorías como número de estudiantes con posgrados y fondos dedicados a investigación, estudiantes como Emilio Magdaleno, de tercer año de justicia penal, cree que UTEP es una buena inversión por su bajo costo y cercanía a casa.

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Students who live on campus tend to:

- have a higher GPA
- be more satisfied with their college experience
- participate more in student activities
- graduate in a faster time frame





IMÁGENES DEL SEGUNDO BARRIO

R E T R A T O D E L O S E S T U D I A N T E S

ARTÍCULO POR AARON MONTES Y EDWIN DELGADO
DISEÑO POR DAMIAN BALDERRAMA / FOTOGRAFÍA POR MICHAELA ROMÁN



Murales que representan a César Chávez, rostros de inmigrantes que se establecieron en El Paso e imágenes de la Virgen María se pueden encontrar en muchos de los callejones del centro de la ciudad. Cada mural no solo representa la vibrante cultura de una ciudad que ha tenido un papel histórico en los Estados Unidos, sino también captura el conflicto en el que viven más de 50 millones de personas en el país.

Datos del censo más reciente indican que El Paso es una de las ciudades más pobres del estado de Texas. Entre 2010 y 2012, un 25 por ciento de la población paseña vivía en condiciones de pobreza, comparado al 17 por ciento en el resto del estado.

El Segundo Barrio, cómo se le conoce en El Paso, es una de las comunidades más pobres del condado. Actualmente 63 por ciento de sus habitantes viven debajo del índice de pobreza.

El centro de la ciudad y el Segundo Barrio son el núcleo de la escena artística paseña. Es ahí donde los artistas no solo se expresan a través de su obra, sino también expresan sus sentimientos, historias y experiencias.

“Yo crecí en el Segundo Barrio y crecí en medio de mucha violencia”, dice Beatriz Cruz de León, estudiante de cuarto año de diseño gráfico. “No era un buen entorno, pero me crié alrededor de él”.

La pintura y el arte han sido parte de la vida de Beatriz desde que tenía 7 años de edad. Su vida estaba rodeada por un entorno colorido, pero también enmarcada en la pobreza, la violencia y las guerras territoriales entre pandillas.

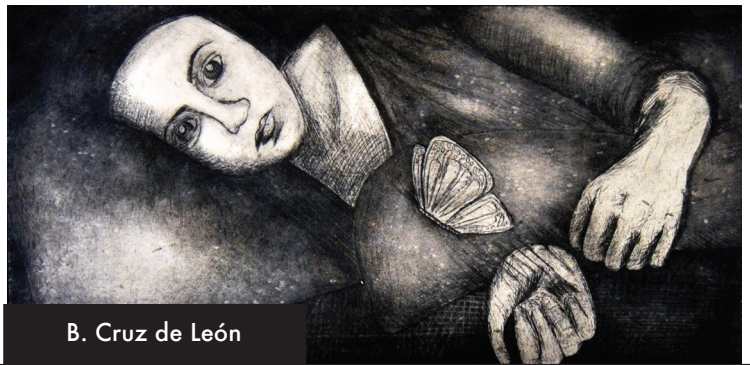
Al salir de su casa cada día, Beatriz admiraba los coloridos murales pintados en las paredes de diversos edificios. En muchos casos, los murales representaban pandillas, pero también algunos llamaron su atención con su ingenioso simbolismo.

Para mantenerla fuera de problemas, los padres de Beatriz la inscribieron en un programa de arte llamado Creative Kids (Niños Creativos), una organización sin fines de lucro que enseña arte a niños provenientes de familias de escasos recursos. Este programa fue reconocido el 22 de noviembre de 2013 con el premio del programa juvenil del Comité Presidencial para las Artes y Humanidades y les fue otorgado por la primera dama Michelle Obama.

A través de este programa, Beatriz aprendió a dibujar y pintar. Ella dice que le hacía sentir bien el tener a alguien que le dijera que tenía talento y que iba a lograr algo en su vida. A través de sus obras, Beatriz busca darle un mayor significado a la sociedad y utiliza el arte como una forma de expresión.

Jorge Murillo, estudiante de cuarto año de arte, también creció en el Segundo Barrio, donde el arte callejero es la forma predominante de expresión, además de ser una influencia importante. En su camino a la escuela o a la iglesia, Jorge siempre estuvo expuesto a las muestras artísticas que se encuentran en el área. Dice que desde que estaba en el segundo grado y hasta que se inscribió en UTEP, supo que quería dedicar el resto de su vida al arte.

“Mis padres siempre me alentaron para seguir haciendo arte”, dice Jorge. “Al llegar aquí, mi experiencia mejoró mucho con los profesores y otros artistas que he conocido y me han ayudado”.



B. Cruz de León

The opposite of life is not death; it is indifference

Jorge dice que el estar expuesto al arte y vivir en la frontera entre El Paso y Ciudad Juárez, fortaleció su vocación, la cual describe como un llamado.

Ya en UTEP, Beatriz y Jorge se dieron cuenta de que no había buenas oportunidades para los jóvenes para exhibir su trabajo. Con frecuencia, los estudiantes exhiben su trabajo en cafés y bares, pero Beatriz y Jorge querían ayudar a otros estudiantes a mostrar sus obras de manera profesional en una galería. Así fue cómo a principios del 2013 formaron Maximo Art Society (Sociedad de Arte Máximo), la cual se encuentra en el Centro de las Artes Visuales Gerald and Stanlee Rubin en UTEP.

La sociedad es dirigida por estudiantes que se proponen establecer redes creativas entre los jóvenes artistas en UTEP y la comunidad al alojar galerías y participar en eventos como “Chalk The Block”.

En el pasado, la mejor opción para mostrar el trabajo de los estudiantes era a través del Centro Rubin, en dónde artistas locales e internacionales exhiben sus obras. Ahí se muestran obras contemporáneas, incluyendo dibujos, pinturas, esculturas, proyectos con audio y video. Muchas de las obras reflejan la impresión que tienen los artistas de vivir en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos.



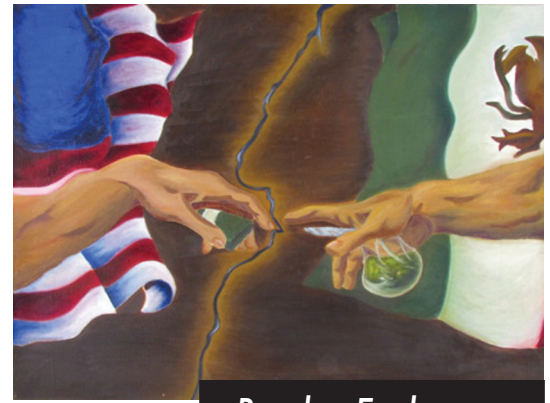
Kerri Doyle, directora del Centro Rubin, dice que ella y otros miembros del centro están tratando de apoyar el desarrollo de artistas emergentes en El Paso y Ciudad Juárez. “Hay muchos artistas jóvenes que utilizan su arte para señalar conflictos sociales y políticos y cambiar el mundo que los rodea”, dice Doyle. “Ellos hacen murales, proyectos conjuntos de arte, incluso interpretaciones de arte contemporáneo para llamar la atención a problemas en la región fronteriza como pobreza, violencia y problemas de identidad en la frontera”.

Doyle también trabaja con artistas en el Colegio de la Frontera Norte en Ciudad Juárez, un centro de investigación que estudia la importancia de cuestiones regionales, socioeconómicas, culturales, geográficos, políticos y ambientales.

Artistas como Estefania Robles Conde, estudiante de cuarto año de arte, dice que El Paso necesita un enfoque más serio en cuanto a galerías de arte y está satisfecha con el esfuerzo que la sociedad artística está haciendo.

“Yo soy una de esas personas que quiere una escena artística seria aquí en El Paso, porque hay bares y cafés que te permiten mostrar tu trabajo, pero termina siendo más una fiesta que una exhibición”, dice Estefania. “La sociedad de arte está enfocada en apoyar a artistas en formar un curriculum, hacer contactos y conocer gente involucrada en la escena artística”.

La naturaleza y diversidad de la ciudad han sido la inspiración para muchos artistas locales para perseguir el arte, no para vivir de ello, pero más que nada se han convertido en una herramienta para expresarse y comunicarse.



Border Exchange

J. Murillo

Nebula

IN BRIEF



The Segundo Barrio in El Paso is one of the poorest communities in the county, with more than 63 percent of its inhabitants living below the poverty level. However, this ward is also known for its colorful murals across downtown El Paso.

Despite not being the best environment in which to grow up, the second ward was where UTEP art students Beatriz Cruz de León and Jorge Murillo were raised, and they say the murals and other displays of art encouraged them to become artists themselves.

As a child, Beatriz was part of a non-profit art program called Creative Kids, where she developed her talent in art.

Realizing that there weren't many opportunities for UTEP artists to display their work in a professional manner, both Beatriz and Jorge founded the Maximo Art Society, to create a network of local artists in order to make connections with people who are already part of the art scene and are fellow artists. The main goal of the society is to help young artists to display their work in professional galleries.

Beatriz will be graduating in May 2014 and will continue her education abroad in Barcelona, Spain.

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Mis padres siempre me alentaron para seguir haciendo arte.

Al llegar aquí, mi experiencia mejoró mucho con los profesores

y otros artistas que he conocido y me han ayudado.

- Jorge Murillo

Su dedicación hacia al arte ha dado frutos para Beatriz, ya que ella se graduará de UTEP en mayo de 2014. Ella planea continuar estudiando y anhela que se le abra una oportunidad de ir a Barcelona, España, donde podría experimentar una escena artística tan importante como la de otras grandes ciudades como Nueva York.

Su futuro la tiene emocionada, pero dice que siempre se mantendrá humilde y siempre recordará de dónde vino.

“Puedo decir orgullosamente que crecí en Segundo Barrio. No me da pena, me hizo quién soy ahora”, dice Beatriz. “De alguna forma, me hizo darme cuenta que no se trata de lo que un posee, por que cuando creces sin nada, aprendes a apreciar tus logros aún más y te hace sentir un gran orgullo por lo que has logrado”.

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TOO POOR FOR SCHOOL

MILITARY OFFERS
A GATEWAY
TO AN EDUCATION

STORY BY KRISTOPHER RIVERA
DESIGN BY YVONNE ACEVES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRISTOPHER RIVERA
FERNIE ENRIQUEZ
AND MICHAELA ROMAN

Before the slivers of sunlight seep into the city, Grisel Davila, 19, begins her day at 4 a.m., making the long drive from her home in the Lower Valley to participate in physical training by 6 a.m. at the University of Texas El Paso throughout the semester.

“(My family) moved to a lot of houses, we didn’t have anywhere to stay. Right now, we’re staying with my grandparents,” says Grisel, sophomore criminal justice major and cadet in the UTEP Reserve Officers’ Training Corps program.

Grisel is among many students in the El Paso region, who chose the military as a means to an education and a better life.

Like many UTEP students, she was born in El Paso, but raised in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. At the age of 7, Grisel, along with her mother and sister, moved back to El Paso when their father abandoned the family. “My dad, he would physically hurt my mom. He beat her up a lot of times to the point (that) she was in the hospital many times,” Grisel says. “My mom finally decided this was not going to keep going. One of the times, he beat her up so bad she fell down the stairs and she lost the baby she was expecting. He didn’t come home for about a week. That’s when my mom decided it was time for us to take off. So we took off with the help of my grandparents and my uncle.”

Once in El Paso, Davila went to different schools. She ended up settled at a school in the Lower Valley—Presa Elementary School. “I was super depressed, but I wanted to be the strongest one since I’m the oldest one,” Grisel says. “Seeing my mom crying every day in her room, it was just

really hard for me. I didn’t grow up in a childhood, where I could say it was perfect—I struggled a lot.”

Fortunately for Grisel, she had a teacher who was able to motivate her to endure the adversity. When she reached Del Valle High School, she joined the Junior ROTC program, which she said helped distract her from her personal troubles at home.

“Honestly, at first, my goal wasn’t to be military,” Grisel says. “It was just ‘I’m going to try this to see if it’s fun.’ I ended up staying and they helped me.” She graduated in the top 10 percent of her high school class—13th out of 458 students. She then joined the ROTC with a full scholarship at UTEP.

Lt. Col. Alfred Roach, professor of military science at UTEP, said the program has a few students who are first-generation college students. Several cadets can get a full four-year scholarship at the national level, but Lt. Col. Roach can only grant two-year and three-year scholarships. About 25 percent of the 110 cadets he has in the program are on scholarships, he says. If cadets go through four years of military science with satisfactory grades, pass their evaluations, along with training, then they can earn an officer’s commission in the U.S. Army, Army Reserve or the Army National Guard.

“After four years of college—if you go regular Army—from day one you’re now a salaried worker at one of the biggest employers in the United States,” says Lt. Col. Roach.

As of now, Grisel is still working hard to improve her situation. “I have to also work a full-time job at Little Caesar’s Pizza. Sometimes I come (to work) and I’m just tired. I want to go home and sleep because I’m a full-time student and full-time ROTC,” Davila says. “Even though it does get tiring, this is what I want to do as a career. I want to keep going. Even going to law school in order to be a JAG officer, which is the Judge Advocate General corps in the military.”

Robert Oropeza, 34, came from a lower-middle class family, and at one point was homeless when he was about 10 years old. “Of course, growing up we didn’t have much money,” he says. “After high school there was no way I was going to be able to pay for college.”

His father was a locksmith, but lost his job. His mother was a hairdresser. “For her to raise this family by herself, and with another kid coming on the way—she was pregnant with my little brother—it was very, very difficult to juggle that on herself,” Robert says. “I guess they were just going through some tough times. We were homeless. People get homeless.”

For a while, however, it seemed possible for Robert to go to college after high school. He received a grant and went to a community college, then enrolled at UTEP for about a year, he says. “I knew there was no way I was going to be able to pay for college just on that grant, doing what I wanted to do,” he says. “I wanted to be a police officer. I wanted to have all these other opportunities. I thought maybe police officer, maybe FBI, you never know.”

At the age of 23, Robert joined the Marine Corps in 2002, after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. “I came from a poor family and that was the only way I could pay for college,” he says.

Robert says being in the Marine Corps was an interesting experience, but mainly due to the people he met. “As far as the hazing and a lot of the other aspects—not the friendly people—but the bullies, I hated that so much,” he says. “Some of the training was horrible because it was in the middle of the desert.”

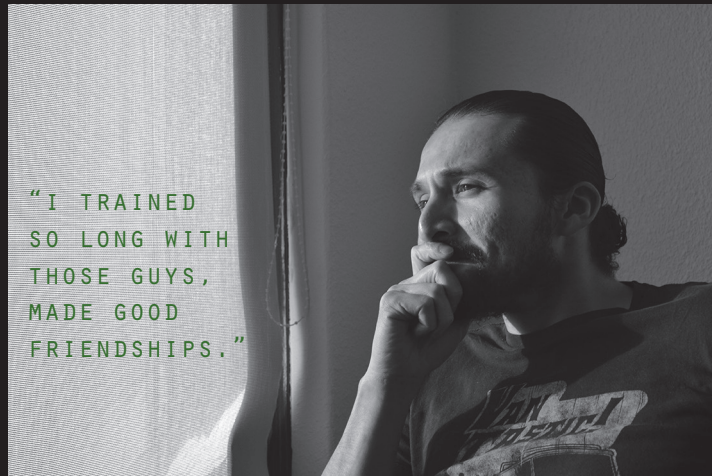
Robert eventually became a Marine, but was discharged in 2004 after a physical injury that left him unable to remain in service. He suffered a ruptured eardrum after shooting a special application scoped rifle—a 50-caliber sniper rifle. This happened right before he and his platoon were about to deploy to Iraq.

“I talked to the guys (from my platoon) after they came back. One of our sergeants got killed—Sergeant Davis. In fact, I have his last picture ever



Grisel Davila

taken of him with his children,” Robert says. “A lot of stuff happened to some people there. I just really wish I could have been there with them. I trained with these guys and to just leave...at the time I thought, ‘I’m going to get out, hell yeah’ ...and now thinking back on it, maybe I should have stayed with them because I trained so long with these guys, made good friendships.”



Robert Oropeza

Upon returning, Robert had a hard time transitioning back into civilian life and did not enroll in school immediately. He said he got “lazy for a few months.” Eventually, he got himself together, returned to his old job at Red Lobster, went to the Veterans Affairs office and got everything he needed to return to school again.

Robert earned a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and went on to graduate school. He is expecting to complete his master’s degree in May 2014. He says he wants to continue his education and earn a Ph.D. in philosophy.

THE MILITARY’S PROMINENCE IN EL PASO

Data from the public affairs office of the 8th Marine Corps District shows that during 2013 fiscal year, the Marine Corps recruited one African American recruit, 18 European/Anglo recruits and 67 recruits of Hispanic descent from the El Paso region.

Of these 86 recruits, 83 were high school graduates. Four had some college credits, but did not yet have a degree. Nationally, 99 percent of Marine recruits are high school graduates. For citizenship, 83 of the 86 recruits were U.S. citizens.

The chief analysis branch of the G3 Ops Division of the U.S. Army recruiting command found that from the El Paso area, for the 2013 fiscal year, there were 376 recruits. Out of that total, 229 were Hispanic, 77 Caucasian, nine Asian/Pacific Islander, one Native American and 60 African-American.

Of the 376 recruits, 310 had a high school diploma, 24 had some college, six had an associate’s degree, 21 had a bachelor’s degree and two had a master’s degree.

According to public affairs at the Air Force recruiting service, from the El Paso area in the 2013, there were a total of 130 recruits. Of that total, 117 had an associate’s degree, five had a master’s degree and the remaining had some sort of high school diploma or GED.

Christopher Martin, 31, is a U.S. Army veteran who served from 2002–06.

He was an air rescue flight medic and served one combat tour in Iraq in 2005. He is currently a senior multidisciplinary studies major and works at the Military Student Success Center at UTEP. “Historically, especially here in the El Paso region, the military has been a very viable option for people who want a way out of whatever economic or social or family level issues or environment that they exist in,” Christopher says.



“THE MILITARY
DOES OFFER AN
OPTION OF
STABILITY.”

Christopher Martin

The Army built and sustained a lot of El Paso over the years, going back to the days of the horse cavalry and General John “Black Jack” Pershing’s command of the 8th Brigade at Fort Bliss, Texas, in 1914, says Martin,

who comes from a family that has a long history of military service in the Marine Corps and Navy.

“You have a lot of males, not just whites, but historically a lot of Hispanics joining the military out of the El Paso region for those better options—to get out of whatever it is—to break away from farm life or from manual labor,” Christopher says.

Christopher also says that the military developed education and home loan benefits—an opportunity for them to get a college degree, when they wouldn’t have had it before, and a job with benefits. Some benefits include the military health care system, which takes care of the member and their family. “The military does offer an option of stability,” he says.

As a peer leader at UTEP, students have approached Christopher with thoughts of joining the military. “I also tell them to believe about a third of everything the recruiter tells them,” he says. “(As) recruiters, their job is to put feet in boots and they’ll tell candidates just about anything that will get them to sign that paper.”

He says one reason the military is so appealing is because of the small-town syndrome, and he has come across college students at UTEP, who have never been on a commercial airplane. “I make sure they have a real idea of what they’re potentially getting into to as well as weighing the benefits, gains and the cost,” Christopher says. “Whatever you do in life always ask yourself, ‘at what cost?’”

EN BREVE

El servicio militar se ha convertido en una opción viable para aquellos paseños que buscan obtener un título universitario.

Grisel Davila, de 19 años de edad, se levanta todos los días a las 4 a.m. para prepararse y llegar a su entrenamiento físico a las 6 a.m. en UTEP.

Grisel se unió al programa ROTC cuando asistía a la preparatoria Del Valle, lo cual la ayudó a olvidar sus problemas domésticos.

Actualmente, Grisel trabaja y estudia tiempo completo además de realizar su labor con ROTC.

Robert Oropeza, de 34 años de edad, también proviene de una familia de bajos recursos y como forma de pagar sus estudios se inscribió en los Marine Corps en 2002. Oropeza logró convertirse en un Marine, pero fue dado de baja después de sufrir la ruptura del tímpano justo antes de su despliegue a Irak en el 2004.



Christopher Martin, de 31 años de edad, es un veterano del Ejército que sirvió a las fuerzas armadas entre el 2002 y 2006. Hoy en día es un estudiante de cuarto año de estudios multidisciplinarios.

Christopher dice que el servicio militar le brindó importantes beneficios como préstamos para educación y vivienda, lo cual le dio la oportunidad de conseguir su título universitario.

El dice que el servicio militar ofrece estabilidad para los jóvenes y cada vez que un estudiante le pregunta acerca de los beneficios del servicio military, le sugiere que analice bien sus opciones.

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AL BORDE DE...



ESENCIA DE LA VIDA ESTUDIANTIL



Artículo por Andrés Rodríguez . Diseño por Fernando Enriquez . Fotografía por Michaela Román y Flor Flores



Daniel Correa, de 21 años, obtuvo su primer préstamo antes de cursar su primer semestre de verano en UTEP. “Lo tuve que sacar porque prácticamente pague por todas las clases que tomé”, dice.

Daniel, un estudiante de tercer año en sistemas de informática, ha contemplado obtener un segundo empleo para poder solventar sus gastos. Aunque actualmente trabaja en UTEP como asistente de oficina y recibe una cantidad por concepto de préstamos, tiene dificultades para mantenerse estable económicamente. Además le ayuda a sus padres al mantenimiento del hogar.

“La mayoría del préstamo va para ayudar a mis papás. Los dos trabajan duro pero apenas ganan lo suficiente para cubrir los gastos de la casa”, dice Daniel. “El préstamo lo gasto en fracturas, mandado y una cita de vez en cuando para mis papás porque nunca tienen la oportunidad”.

La realidad de muchos de los estudiantes en El Paso—donde según cifras del Censo el 25 por ciento de la población vive bajo el nivel de pobreza—es parecida. El 75 por ciento de estudiantes en UTEP reciben algún tipo de ayuda financiera gubernamental y la mitad reciben la Pell Grant, de acuerdo con cifras de University Communications.

Diana Natalicio, presidenta de la universidad, ha dicho que proveer acceso a la educación es una de las funciones más importantes de UTEP. En septiembre, la revista *Washington Monthly* reconoció los esfuerzos de

UTEP y la colocó en séptimo lugar entre las universidades estadounidenses por categorías como movilidad social, investigación y servicio comunitario.

Los hispanos en la frontera texana ganan menos que los no-hispanos, de acuerdo al American Community Survey 2009-11. Hispanos con educación a nivel universidad gana en promedio \$50,300 anuales, mientras los no-hispanos ganan un promedio anual de \$71,000.

“Lograr acceso y educación de alta calidad en un lugar de bajos recursos como lo es la frontera de Estados Unidos y México requiere un compromiso profundo de parte de todo el personal para asegurar que los estudiantes, quienes ponen sus ambiciones en nuestras manos, se les den todas las oportunidades”, dice Natalicio en un comunicado.

Gina Nuñez-Mchiri, profesora adjunta en antropología, dice que UTEP, por su ubicación y compromiso con la región, desempeña un papel importante en la formación de sus estudiantes. La universidad no solo los prepara para prosperar en sus carreras, sino también para fortalecer los lazos de esta región, aún si deciden mudarse, dice.

“Por el hecho de que han estado aquí y porque vienen de esta comunidad, están conectados a esta comunidad, y tienen un compromiso con ella, salen y donde quiera que van dan fruto. Crecen, florecen”, dice Nuñez-Mchiri.

La experiencia fronteriza, compleja y difícil de definir, es sin embargo un experiencia valiosa, dice Nuñez-Mchiri. Estudiantes de aquí se llenan de lo que ella llama fondos de conocimiento.



“LA MAYORÍA DEL PRÉSTAMO VA PARA AYUDAR A MIS PAÑAS. LOS DOS TRABAJAN DURO PERO APENAS GANAN LO SUFICIENTE PARA CUBRIR LOS GASTOS DE LA CASA” -Daniel Correa



“Nuestros estudiantes salen curtidos”, dice Nuñez-Mchiri. “Muchos de ellos trabajan, tienen problemas familiares, algunos cruzan la frontera, algunos tienen problemas de transportación y además se involucran. Eso es crear resistencia en nuestros alumnos, ayudándoles a competir y a encontrar soluciones a sus retos. Yo sé que no van vacíos”.

Este semestre, Laura Flores, de 21 años, se dio cuenta de que no tenía la línea de crédito necesaria para pagar sus clases con su tarjeta de crédito. Ya no tenía la beca con la que pagó los primeros tres años de su carrera en UTEP y estaba haciendo pagos a la tarjeta de crédito de sus padres que utilizó para pagar el semestre pasado. Así que primera vez pidió un préstamo.

Laura, estudiante de cuarto año en inglés, trabaja medio tiempo en Best Buy para pagar sus estudios y poder mantenerse. Lograr un balance entre sus estudios y el trabajo se le hace difícil, dice. “A decir verdad, es muy difícil priorizar y batallar tratando de hacer demasiadas cosas a la vez”, dice Laura.

Pero maneja su tiempo bien, dice, y hace pagos de 150 dólares mensuales a la tarjeta de crédito de sus padres. “Aunque batalle, amo mi trabajo y lo veo como una distracción de la escuela y mi vida personal”.

Daniel dice que también limita sus gastos. Durante los semestres de primavera y otoño, obtiene aproximadamente 700 dólares por semestre, y en el verano 2,000 dólares. Pero lo que gana trabajando en UTEP, es apenas suficiente para vivir día a día.

“Exprimo cada centavo de mi cheque para pagar por mi carro, la aseguranza, gasolina, mantenimiento—la factura del teléfono y lo poco que queda para mis papás y yo”, Daniel dice.

Laura dice que si le cuesta trabajar, estudiar y además mantenerse, pero vale la pena. “Si hay días que se me hacen extremadamente difíciles, pero al final del día amo mi trabajo y mis estudios”, dice Laura. “Amo trabajar duro para cumplir mis metas”.

Daniel también sabe que su trabajo dará fruto. “Por el momento, solo intento limitarme hasta que me gradúe y ojalá consiga un trabajo que pague mejor”, el dice.

Para Nuñez-Mchiri, el ascenso social no solo significa subir un peldaño en clase social. “Es mucho más que eso. Porque cuando tienes educación puedes hacer mucho con ella. Te abre puertas,” dice. “Te da la decisión de quedarte o irte y regresar si quieres. Si no tienes ascenso social significa que estás atrapado”.



IN BRIEF

The reality of many students in El Paso—where 24 percent of the population lives below the poverty level, according to the U.S. Census 2008-12—is similar to Daniel Correa’s.

Daniel, a junior computer information systems major, has a job as an office assistant at UTEP, but says he is forced to take out financial aid loans to pay for school and to remain economically stable while helping his parents out.

“The money I earn as a UTEP employee leaves me living paycheck to paycheck, having to squeeze every penny out of them to pay for my car, phone bill, and whatever little remains for my parents and myself,” he says.

Seventy five percent of UTEP students receive some sort of financial aid and more than half receive the Pell Grant, according to University Communications.

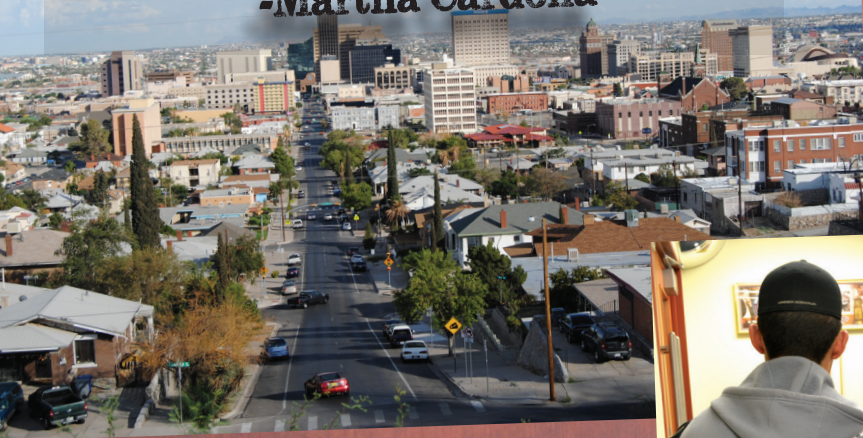
Struggling to make ends meet is part of the regional experience, says associate professor of anthropology Gina Nuñez-Mchiri, but she says this makes them stronger and reinforces their ties to the community.

“Our students *salen curtidos*,” she says, meaning they are hardened. “So many of our students work, they have family challenges, some cross the border, some are dealing with transportation issues and getting involved, *pues ¿sabes qué?* That’s building resilience amongst our students, helping them compete, find solutions to their challenges.”

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“ I know who I am,
and I know the potential I have ”
-Martha Cardona



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President Obama meets with college leaders, expands access for the poor



Story by Gavin Stern, SHFWire

Design by Fernando Enriquez

Photography by Gavin Stern

Editor's Note: This story was previously published by the Scripps Howard Foundation Wire Service. Spanish translation of this article is available at www.mineromagazine.com

WASHINGTON – Troy Simon grew up poor in New Orleans. He couldn't read until he was 14. But with a little help, he's now a student at Bard College in New York – and got to introduce Michelle Obama at the White House on Jan. 15, 2014.

The first lady praised his perseverance. “We must remember that education is a two-way bargain. And while there is so much more we must do for our kids, at the end of the day, as Troy described, the person who has the most say over whether or not a student succeeds is the student him or herself,” she said.

Leaders of more than 100 colleges and 40 nonprofit organizations met at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next door to the White House, where they announced commitments to improve college access for the next generation of students. Universities represented at the event included elite schools such as Yale University and those that serve primarily minority populations, such as El Paso Community College.

“We are here for one purpose: We want to make sure more young people have the chance to earn a higher education,” Obama said. “In the 21st century economy, we all understand it's never been more important.”

Americans without a college degree experience one-third more unemployment – and receive half as much income – compared to those who do, Obama said.

A third of adults over the age of 25 have bachelor's degrees, according to the U.S. census. Low-income children are much less likely to attend college than the rest of the population, often because they drop out of high school. Obama underscored efforts to help children stay in school

long enough to even consider college. “We've set a goal of training 100,000 new math and science teachers over the next 10 years, and the private sector has already committed to help train 40,000,” Obama said. “Today, the high school dropout rate is the lowest it has been in 40 years – something that's rarely advertised.”

Low-income high school graduates still face disadvantages during the college application process because they lack standardized test preparation, advanced placement opportunities and counseling.

Obama cited several universities that have taken steps to help underprivileged students – including adults who missed out the first time around – pursue higher education. The University of Minnesota is expanding financial literacy programs. Oregon Tech is strengthening communication between advisers and students who need encouragement and support. A program in the South Bronx, called iMentor, will match 20,000 students with mentors in more than 20 states over the next five years.

The Obama administration has doubled the amount of federal investments in Pell Grants and college tax credits and reformed the student loan program to lower interest rates.

Gavin Stern is the 2013-14 post-graduate fellow for SHFWire. Stern is an alum of New York's Stony Brook University School of Journalism (M.S. '13), with a concentration in multimedia and science journalism.



Top left: First lady Michelle Obama praises Troy Simon, who couldn't read at age 14 and is now a college student, at a White House conference for education leaders.

Above: President Barack Obama urges education leaders to increase access to college for low-income Americans. He spoke Jan. 15 at a White House conference for education leaders. SHFWire photos by Gavin Stern.

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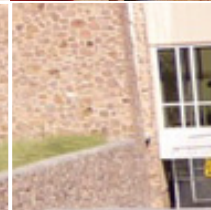
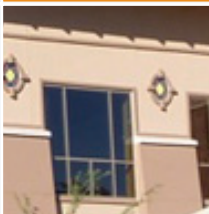
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