

# UTRGV Legislative Interns Recognized

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**Austin, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio** (D-Brownsville), collaborated with UT Brownsville, a legacy institution of UTRGV, in 2013 to create a legislative internship program to provide opportunities for students from South Texas. As a UTRGV Program the opportunity has grown to include interns in congressional and legislative offices throughout the Valley. Senator Lucio expresses tremendous pride for the young people of South Texas enrolled in this program. “Several program alumni have turned this experience to full time employment in my office. It gives me great joy to play a role in developing young people into the leaders of tomorrow.”

## **Students intern at Texas Capitol\***

Eleven UTRGV students are serving as interns in the 86th Texas Legislative Session through a program funded by the university.

The Valley Legislative Internship Program gives students hands-on experience with the Texas Legislature, opportunities to learn about the legislative process and to broaden their knowledge about state government, as well as the opportunity to earn six hours of political science academic credits, according to Ruth Ann Ragland, a political science senior lecturer.

The students are political science:

- senior Khalid Aboujamous, interning with Sen. Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo);
- junior Javier Bustos, interning with Rep. Terry Canales (D-Edinburg);
- senior Giovanni Rosas Escobedo, interning with Sen. Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa (D-McAllen);
- senior Jesús Osvaldo Galindo, interning with Rep. Alex Dominguez (D-Brownsville);
- junior Mónica García, interning with Rep. Oscar Longoria (D-Mission);
- senior Jacquelynn Hernández, interning with Rep. Ryan Guillen (D-Rio Grande City);
- senior Bertha Lance, interning with Rep. Eddie Lucio III (D-San Benito);
- junior Erick Longoria, interning with Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr. (D-Brownsville);
- senior Stacie Morales, interning with Rep. Bobby Guerra (D-Mission);
- junior Ylana Robles, interning with Rep. Armando “Mando” Martinez (D-Weslaco);
- and public affairs graduate student Eric Vargas, interning with Rep. Sergio Muñoz (D-Palmview).

Political science junior Sharo López is an alternate.

Duties of the interns include researching bills, preparing bill books, analyzing proposals and meeting with stakeholders.

“Everything from being the meeter and the greeter at the front door to researching bills or proposed bills, compiling bill books for their representative or their senator to take to hearings or to take to floor debates,” Ragland said. “They also work some with the constituent services. ... They answer telephones, of course. ... They record the responses of their constituents. ... They go to lots of meetings and hearings and briefings on various legislation. They meet with lobbyists. They meet with staff from other offices, both full-time staff and part-time staff.”

The program started Jan. 8 and will end when the legislative session adjourns, which is May 27.

Requirements for the internship include being enrolled at UTRGV; having completed 60 undergraduate hours, including 12 in political science courses; a minimum GPA in political science of 3.0 and a cumulative GPA of 2.5. Applicants are also required to be juniors or seniors by the end of the application period.

Interns received an \$8,000 stipend to cover their living expenses in Austin. The program was possible with funding approved by UTRGV President Guy Bailey.

Longoria said he has always been interested in policy-making and decided to apply because he thought the program would give him a valuable tool for his education and career.

“I have had the pleasure of helping the office do bill analysis in order to give the senator a recommendation on how to vote,” he said. “I have had the privilege of being responsible for Senate Bill 1553, which just passed at a committee and I have done so many other things, like meet with the constituents, write speeches, [and] help the senator prepare for the committee and floor hearings.”

Longoria encourages students who are interested in the legislative process to apply.

“Make sure that you have the heart for it because it’s definitely a challenging experience, but it’s definitely a rewarding experience,” he said.

García hopes to one day seek office and decided to apply because of the experience the program offers.

“I’m applying to law school,” she said. “Hopefully, I’m admitted into a law school and, obviously, legislature correlates a lot with law. I’m learning so much in an abundance about law, Texas law, procedure, so I’m learning so much about law and I hope this serves as purposeful when I am in law school.”

García’s message to students thinking about applying to the program is that if they are driven by change, the program is something in which they would want to participate.

“The Legislature will help them understand how policy is implemented and how it really affects the lives of millions, in not only your community, but Texas,” she said.

Lance decided to apply because she wants to go into international relations and wanted to do something different.

“So, legislation is completely different from what I would like to do, so I just decided to gain a new experience,” she said.

Lance said although it is a lot of work, she is enjoying the program and is meeting new people.

“Teamwork is really important in these types of jobs,” she said. “Everybody has to be on the same page, and you have to know what the representative is doing or what each of us is doing. ... It would be really tragic if we’re not all on the same page.”

Lance understands moving to another city can be difficult but encourages students to apply for the program because it is a good experience.

Aboujamous decided to apply to the program because an internship is required for his degree plan and he thought it would be good experience to see how politics works.

“In the beginning, it was kind of, I was kind of nervous, I guess, because a lot of things were new, things I haven’t done before, but the staff is amazing,” he said. “It’s been a lot different than what I expected. I mean, a lot of times you hear about an intern, what an intern does, you think of, you know, coffee runs, scanning papers, copying documents, but I’ve been doing a lot more than that.”

Aboujamous said he has learned that the legislative process is not as straightforward as what one would expect and that there is a lot more background information the public doesn’t see.

“I would say that if it’s something you can do in regards to time ... if you can afford the time, then it’s a really good opportunity and I would suggest that people should go for it,” he said.

Morales said she decided to apply because her goal is to become a lawyer and wanted to explore the political field.

“It has been great,” Morales said about the experience. “I’ve learned so many things, from minor things such as constituent cases, to learning how to rebuild and do analytical casework.”

She said she has learned that the constituents always come first, and they are the No. 1 priority.

Asked what message she would give to students thinking about joining the program in the future, Morales replied, “The first step to do is to apply. You will never know what will happen unless you apply and, hopefully, they get chosen, and they get to be a part of this amazing experience.”

Ragland said students who want to apply for the program in the future should contact her; Richard Sanchez, associate vice president for Governmental Relations; or John Kaufold, internship coordinator for the Career Center.

“It’s a marvelous program for students interested in government to apply for and participate in,” Ragland said. “It is a real-life, hands-on experience seeing government at work at the state level every day for 140 days plus.”

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\* Ortega, Maleny. "Students intern at Texas Capitol." *The Rider*, 29 April 2019, <https://www.utrgvrider.com/students-intern-at-texas-capitol/>