

BIRD IS THE WORD

GRADUATE ROUND-UP



*Leslie Brilliant and Maria Medrano Guillen
at the first annual UTSA Welcome Drive (8.29.20)*

Hello Roadrunners!

With this **inaugural newsletter**, I'm pleased to welcome new and returning students and our graduate faculty to the UTSA Graduate Roadrunner family! We had a banner year last year, with **1,491 students** awarded a graduate degree in the 2019-2020 academic year. This year also brought our largest graduate class in 10 years from across the globe.

We introduced 8 new programs to our offerings. As part of our recruitment efforts, we hosted multiple in-person recruitment events before pivoting to the virtual

environment without missing a beat, where we were able to serve a total of 990 prospective students. We provided almost \$1.2 million to support your scholarship and research activities, including travel to conferences.

As we start the new academic year, we want to highlight key successes from last year and let you know about some fun initiatives coming up. Please take advantage of these opportunities and watch for Graduate School email and social media posts; some may be for fun, but there are many opportunities for professional development, competitions with cash awards, and other exciting offerings!

For future issues, I invite you to share pieces that you have penned or topic ideas for upcoming newsletters. Please send articles or suggestions our way. It's been an interesting year during the COVID-19 pandemic, but together we will make this upcoming academic year even better than the last. Once again, welcome to the Graduate Roadrunner Family!



- Ambika Mathur

Vice Provost of Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate School

A look at last year...

2019-2020 DEGREES AWARDED

Total: 1,491

Master's Degrees: 1,338
Doctoral Degrees: 153

2019-2020 NEW PROGRAMS

- Dual degree in M.Arch & MS Arch
- Dual degree in M.Arch & MS URP
- Dual degree in MBA/MD
- Certificate in Latin American Studies
- Certificate in Mexican American Studies
- Certificate in Medical Device Commercialization and Entrepreneurship
- Certificate in Construction Engineering, Science and Management
- Certificate in Facilities Management

VIRTUAL SUMMER RECRUITMENT EVENTS

- May 12 - GRAD APP: Statement of purpose and Letters of Recommendation
- May 20 - Mechanical Engineering Info Session
- June 2 - Electrical Engineering Info Session
- June 4 - RBCU Info Session
- July 13 - Graduate School Info Session
- July 21 & 22 - Graduate School Summer Showcase
- August 5 - Endeavors Info Session
- August 12 - Preparing for Graduate School: UTSA Dreamer's Center
- August 28 - Welcome Back Event
- August 29 - Roadrunner Days Drive-Through

By The Numbers: Graduate Enrollment and Admissions

2019-2020 APPLICATION NUMBERS

Applications Received: 4,209

Race/Ethnicity by Application:

Hispanic/Latino - 1,572
White - 1,086
International - 811

Gender by Application:

Female - 2,198
Male - 1,950
Unspecified - 61

Black/African American - 347

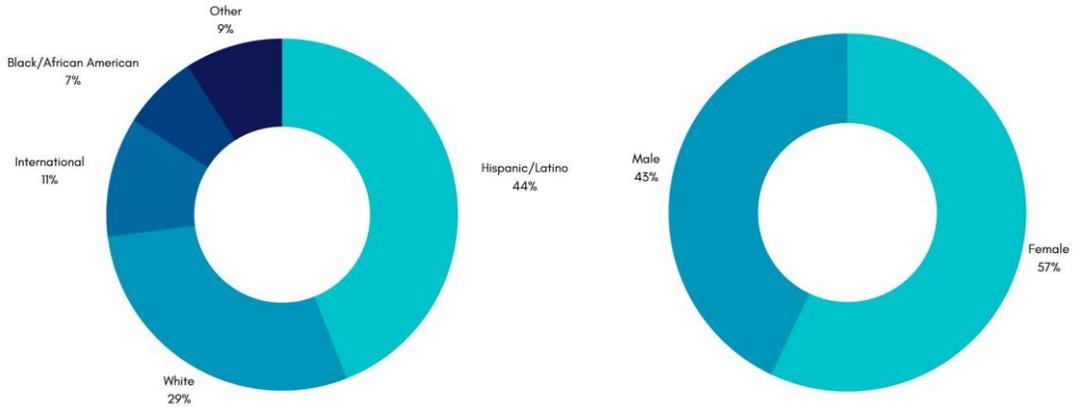
Asian - 231

Unspecified - 162

FALL 2020 ENROLLMENT

Total Enrollment: 4,690

(3,791 Master's, 899 Doctoral)



Recruitment Corner

RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES

- Keep Running With Us: Automatic Admission Program
- VIP Admission
- Test score waiver extended to Spring 2021
- New staff member: International Recruitment
- Virtual conferences for minority students across disciplines
- Upcoming Fall 2020 events:
 - Preparation for Graduate School
 - Collaborations with campus partners such as First-Gen Center

The Graduate School recruitment team will be collaborating with campus partners and hosting many sessions this upcoming semester. These virtual events are designed to assist students in preparing for graduate education. Check out [our calendar](#) for more information!

COVID-19 has created a unique situation for recruitment and admissions. One of our most popular new initiatives has been the [Keep Running With Us](#) auto-admit program, which has brought in 90 newly enrolled graduate students.



VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Friday | 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.



Graduate and Postdoctoral Success

[Graduate and Postdoctoral Success \(GPS\)](#) is here to help master's students, doctoral students and postdoctoral associates navigate their career. To learn

more about upcoming GPS events and offerings, investigate our [Event Calendar](#).
Click on each image below for more information!

DIGITAL BADGING

- Career Builder Badges offered to the public in Summer 2020
- Ongoing offering to UTSA graduate students
- Micro-credentialing in a variety of transferable skills
- Want to partner with us on developing a badge? Contact gps@utsa.edu

GPS SEMINAR SERIES

- Over 300 student attendees at events since Summer 2020.
- Previous programming available on Graduate School YouTube channel.
- Career Stories on GPS blog
- First and Second Friday fun on social media and Kahoot! trivia.

GRADUATE SCHOOL ORIENTATION

- Roughly 600 new graduate students attended our virtual orientation
- Goal: welcome students in online environment without sacrificing programming of an on-campus event
- Faculty, staff, and students participated in panels, presentations, and more
- Breakout sessions and info fair can be found on our YouTube channel

GTA ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

- 127 students attended the virtual live training session on August 19
- Guest speakers discussed classroom pedagogy, diversity and inclusiveness, and more
- Students who attended the session can earn a Teaching Philosophy digital badge
- Click to register for the self-paced Blackboard Learn TA training course

Competitions

The Graduate School hosted a variety of competitive opportunities in the 2019-2020 school year, with numerous financial awards granted to our students. **Click each box for more information!**

DISTINGUISHED RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

- Designed to provide aid to Ph.D. candidates, allowing them to work full-time on dissertation completion
- 38 doctoral candidates were nominated
- 6 doctoral candidates were awarded the inaugural 2019 Distinguished Research Fellowship
- This support program will now be offered annually

COVID-19 TRANSDISCIPLINARY TEAM GRAND CHALLENGE

- In collaboration with VPREDKE
- Students formed teams across disciplines to address challenges related to the pandemic
- Winning teams received cash awards and travel funds
- If you missed out on participating, don't worry - we will be announcing a new team challenge soon. Stay tuned!

GRADUATE SCHOOL RESEARCH DAYS

- Inaugural event is coming in October
- Featuring 3MT, Posters and Pints, and more!
- Keep an eye on your email and our social media channels for more information

GRADUATE SCHOOL FELLOWSHIP INCENTIVE PROGRAM

- Pilot program for Fall 2020 will focus on NSF GRFP
- Program will incentivize students who submit competitive research applications
- We want to encourage a culture that prepares student researchers to pursue highly valued fellowship opportunities
- Keep an eye on our website for future opportunities!

Graduate Student Success (GSS) for Faculty Excellence Task Force

For the past eight months, Dr. Mathur led the GSS Task Force in the completion of Phase I of this initiative. The goal is to recruit, mentor, and prepare a diverse student population for success across a wide variety of careers. The complete report and recommendations can be viewed [here](#).

Phase II of the initiative will involve feedback collection and developing a collaborative plan to establish timelines and implementation steps. These recommendations will be initiated and implemented in phases beginning in the Fall 2020 semester. Please feel free to send any feedback on the report or Phase II to Graduate.VPDean@utsa.edu.

Spotlights

Jaime Crosswhite

Doctor of Philosophy in English



Did you receive support from The Graduate School? How did it help?

The Graduate School is much to thank for my success. Since I was awarded the Graduate School Research Fellowship, I was able to write and defend my dissertation in less than twelve months, which enabled me to graduate a year early. Having an entire year free from the time constraints of outside work was a tremendous gift.

What advice do you wish you would have known before starting your program?

Expect that (almost) everything you think you know will change. But remember *why* you started the program; write it down in the first week, and when you are hindered by details or frustrated by shortcomings, read that note and remember *why* you're here.

Can you tell us a little bit about your dissertation?

My project synthesizes work in rhetoric and composition on place, with narratives that emphasize region, to produce an understanding of ways in which narratives reveal tensions and silences at the micro, meso, and macro levels. I argue that critical regionalism as a rhetorical approach enables actors to communicate realities, act on interconnections, and navigate tensions between identity and place. I explore how regional narratives foster generative relationships within local landscapes and conceptualize new ways of troubling local-global networks. Through close analysis of such narratives, we learn how notions of place inform, ignore, and intersect with coded perceptions of gender, racial difference, sexuality, and environmental agency. Ultimately, my dissertation contends that place(s) shape worldviews, circumscribe positionalities, and influence our connection with others.

Any words of wisdom?

Find a writing ritual that works for you, and make friends with those who are “suffering” through the same or similar process. Consistency and laughter are what kept me sane. Ha

Alejandro Quirino

M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration

What advice do you wish you would have known before starting your program?

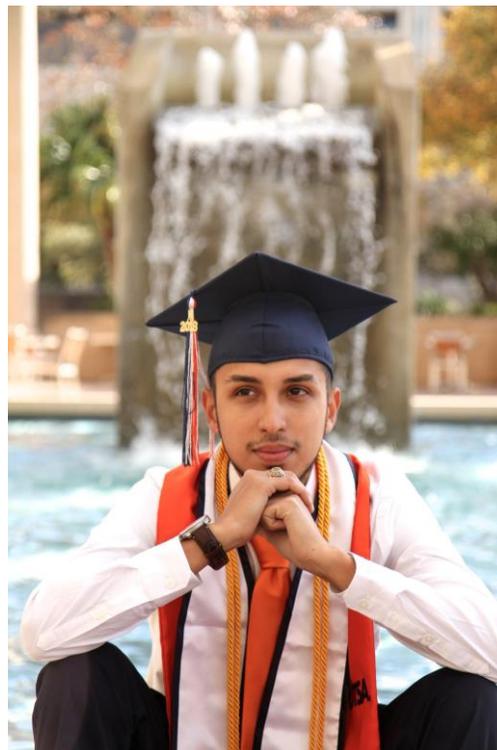
There were moments of self-doubt whether I could obtain a masters. As a first-generation Hispanic student, finishing my undergraduate degree was a milestone, but going on to graduate school is unheard of in my family. I looked deep in my heart and recognized that I had passion for what I wanted to study. I want to make a difference in the lives of first-generation students like myself. Looking back, if there was one thing I could tell myself it would be this: *You are where you belong.*

How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed how you operate as a student?

The pandemic has made me reflect on my humanity and recognize the importance of family. As students, we get pushed so much to maintain our grades, but making sure you spend time with your loved ones should be at the top of your obligations. As long as your family and friends are safe, that is all that should matter.

What was the most helpful part of The Graduate School’s Career Builder badge series?

The Career Builder Badge series encouraged me to find mentors for my journey in student affairs. After completing the Mentoring 101 portion of the Leadership Series, I was able to



understand what makes a great mentor-mentee relationship. Having clear expectations and always actively listening with one another can improve the bond that is being formed.

Any words of wisdom?

Don't be afraid to fail, be afraid of not trying.

Dhiresha Kudithipudi, PhD

Professor in ECE & CS

Director of MATRX, AI Consortium

Robert F McDermott Endowed Chair in Engineering



What do you think is the biggest challenge facing researchers in the pandemic era?

Keeping the team motivated, connected, and engaged while continuing to strive for excellence in research has been a challenge while working virtually. My team thrives in collective brainstorming coupled with independent exploration. The pandemic has handicapped us in one of these key elements. We had to think quick, pivot and come up with a practical solution. To keep everyone motivated and engaged, we identified broad reaching topics that cut across most members research in the lab. We were constantly in touch through video chats or messaging, because everyone was excited about the work. This united the team at a deeper level and the experiment had resulted in some of the best work from the lab. In parallel, we also

had daily web outings to discuss ongoing topics outside research. All these have helped us in the short run and to be in the moment.

Can you tell us about your development of predictive models concerning social distancing impact?

The MATRX consortium at UTSA is focused on developing solutions for human well-being. The COVID19 pandemic has disrupted our way of life in unprecedented ways and science has become an important part of identifying a solution in the process. Our team, comprising of

students and researchers from UTSA, UT-Health, and SwRI, has used AI to understand how the social distancing strategies, non-clinical interventions have impacted the COVID19 spread and minimize societal collateral damage and control mechanisms for an extended period of time. We used categorized cell phone mobility data from Google, Apple, and Oxford response tracker in our hybrid AI-model, which includes tracking activity at grocery/pharmacy stores, parks, retail/recreation, residential, train stations, and workplaces globally. The tracking activity is provided in an aggregated format at the country level, state level, and at the county level offering regional insights at fine granularity which were also reported to the city on a regular basis.

At the onset of AI model development, there were challenges where data was inconsistent, non-uniform, sparse, error-prone and unreliable. Added to that we had no standard frameworks for rapid access. Thanks to the amazing commitment of the graduate students on this project, the model was built in a short time. Our team recently presented this work at the flagship ICML conference, Machine Learning for Global Health workshop and opensourced the code (available here: <https://github.com/Nu-AI/Livid-About-COVID>).

How do you think AI tools will shape how we move forward in the post-COVID-19 society?

Even prior to COVID-19, AI was expected to increase global GDP to nearly \$16 trillion by 2030. Today it has the potential to revolutionize how we live, work, learn, discover, and communicate. It will be an integral digital fabric and we are at a defining moment in the AI technological revolution. Unlike any other technology, 23 nations across the world have already developed a national AI strategic initiative as it drives profound economic impact. It is extremely rare in research fields to see the transformative power of basic research in real-time. AI is offering this opportunity and most organizations have installed or will install an AI arm in the very near future. The solutions can span from real-time predictions and containment strategies for natural disasters, curated digital-learning shells, diagnosis for rare diseases, boosting human capabilities, operationalization of challenging space missions, large scale human computing, and many more. You might already be experiencing parts of this future in distributed ways. COVID-19 has only motivated AI researchers to collaborate and accelerate the pace of discovery. MATRIX, the AI consortium at UTSA (ai.utsa.edu) is right at the heart of it, in developing the solutions for human well-being.

What advice do you have for new researchers?

Research is multifaceted and building a culture of open-dialogue in our labs goes a long way in doing high-quality research. Also, keep the communication with the research team(s) reciprocal and adaptive. Invest selflessly in the success of every member in the team and do not be afraid to learn from your students. Above all - *Be grateful.*

Maria Medrano Guillén

Senior Graduate Recruiter

How long have you been with The Graduate School?

I just had my 5 year anniversary last month.

What's your favorite part of your job?

I love learning about our prospective graduate student's needs and developing programming to meet them.

Tell us a little known fact about yourself:

I like long-distance running and hope to qualify for the Boston marathon one day.

Favorite place to eat on campus? Starbucks!



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