



SWUSITT Symposium 2025

Welcome, hello!

We are looking forward to hosting you in our community.

About The Valley

The Lower Rio Grande Valley (The RGV) is situated along the north banks of the Rio Grande River from Brownsville on the coast to Rio Grande City in the west. It is situated on the traditional lands of the Karankawa, Lipan Apache, and Coahuiltecans. The region was colonized by the Spanish explorer Juan de Escandón in 1749, who named it Nuevo Santander. The area was strategically important during the Mexican American War and Civil War. Formerly a series of small towns and a farming and ranching community, the Valley has grown in the last thirty years into a metropolitan area of 1.2 million people. As the small towns of the Lower RGV have grown, they have grown together into one city. Despite exponential population growth in the late 20th century, it is in many ways the breadbasket of Texas and the state's largest producer of onions, kale, and organic vegetables. This thriving community also has a long tradition of interest in the arts, particularly independent music. It is also a world-famous bird watching destination.

The Valley is not what you see on the news.

About the University

UTRGV was founded in 2015 by combining the legacy institutions UT Pan American and UT Brownsville. UTRGV has a medical school and over 30,000 students enrolled in campuses in Edinburg, Harlingen, and Brownsville. It was rated in 2024 the #1 university in Texas according to Washington Monthly. <https://link.utrgv.edu/numberoneintexas/>

UTRGV is a Hispanic-serving institution. It is most famous for its engineering programs, mariachi, and its chess team.

About UTRGV's Theatre Department

UTRGV's theater department has 9 faculty and five staff. We mount a four-show season, plus a Latino Theatre Initiatives season of original, devised productions and touring shows. The department offers a NAST-accredited BA in theater with concentrations in performance, design/tech, theater education and film production.

Theater Department performance venues are The Robert L Jeffers theater, a 300-seat thrust, and The Marian Monta studio, a black box which seats about 90.

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Map of university

https://www.utrgv.edu/_files/documents/admissions/visit/utrgv-edinburg-map.pdf

Getting here

Flying in: MFE, McAllen International Airport or HRL, Harlingen International Airport, are the two closest airports. MFE is about half an hour away. HRL is about 45 minutes to an hour, depending on traffic.

Driving in: In south Texas driving south of San Antonio, the gas stops get fewer and far between until you get to the McAllen Metro area. Please note that there is no gas between Falfurrias and Edinburg — about 65 miles of distance.

Coming from the north, as you arrive on Hwy 281, take the exit marked University of Texas Rio Grande Valley onto University Drive, follow the signs around the courthouse and proceed to the intersection of Sugar Rd and University Dr. and turn right to get to lots E7/E8.

We are located at ELABS (building 34 on the map). It is closest to Parking lots E7/E8 but take care to avoid parking in residential parking—look for Zone 3 parking to avoid being ticketed.

Leaving the Valley

Please note there is a border checkpoint south of Falfurrias (and also going north from Brownsville, south of Sarita) that you must pass through to get further north. Border Patrol officers will stop each car to verify citizenship. Non-citizens must show their documents. There are drug detection dogs (reminder, marijuana is not legal in Texas). There may be small delays going north at the end of the holiday weekend.

<https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/border-patrol-sectors/rio-grande-valley-sector-texas/falfurrias-station>

Staying here

The Symposium hotel is Tru by Hilton.

Phone Number: 956-386-9088

Address: 407 W Trenton Rd Edinburg TX 78539

There is a discounted rate for a limited number of rooms:

[Booking Link.](#)

<https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/mfeebru-swn-14ac2307-40bf-491f-ac98-8b1e1cc94d21/>

Other nearby hotels — La Quinta, Comfort Inn Edinburg, Holiday Inn Express are all good hotels here. Be advised that there are two Holiday Inn Express on the same street but in different towns

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— there is one in Edinburg and one in Pharr. The one in Edinburg is about 1 mile closer to the campus.

Be aware that the winter is prime time for tourism in the RGV, so book your rooms early if possible.

Local favorite restaurants

Coffee

- Beary Boba 2506 W Freddy Gonzalez, Edinburg, boba shop
- The Grind. 315 W University Dr Edinburg. Coffee.
- Moonbeans 5524 N 10th McAllen. Coffee and pastries.
- Anita's Café, 2102 N McColl Edinburg. A bit of a drive but very good Mexican breakfast options
- The Stripes gas station breakfast taco. If it has a Laredo Taco Company sign, there will be excellent breakfast taco options. It is a pretty good breakfast option.
- Shipley's, Starbucks, 7Brew, and Dunkin all have stores on University Dr)
- Labyrinth, 1009 W Maple Ave, McAllen — excellent bagels and coffee. Get there early before they run out (20 minutes away by car)
- Commonsplace, 2901N 10th St Suite F, McAllen — coffee, lunch, excellent brunch. (15 minutes away by car)

Good lunch or dinner options

Walkable from campus:

- Taquiza 319 Sugar Rd. Edinburg, good, inexpensive Mexican food
 - Khans 1346 W University Dr Edinburg, Mongolian barbeque
 - The Pizzeria, 1318 W University Dr Edinburg
- On University Dr are also the usual suspects for Texas fast food: Taco Palenque, El Pato, Whataburger, McDonald's, Sonic, Schlotzky's, Taco Bell, Jack in the Box, Jason's Deli, DQ, Starbucks, etc.

Within easy driving distance:

- Nuri Fusion Street Kitchen, 7600 n 10th St McAllen Korean and northern Mexican fusion
- Treviño's 1500 N Closner Blvd Edinburg. Mainstream Tex-Mex, a longtime local favorite
- University Draft House 2405 W University, Edinburg, bar and grill with collegiate themed sandwiches.
- The Coffee Zone 1108 S McColl Rd Edinburg, good lunch with sandwiches, quiche, soup. Closed on Sunday.
- Aces BBQ 601 S Tenth Ave suite b Edinburg south Texas style barbeque.
- Foodamed, 4108 N 10th St McAllen. Vegan and health food.
- Castlehill Bistro, 2113 W Trenton Rd, Edinburg. Restaurant by Chef Graham Campbell, youngest Michelin star chef. Good place for dinner.
- Jerusalem: 1601 W Trenton Rd. Edinburg. Mediterranean and Halal food, excellent, somewhat close,

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but slow.

- Kabob Guys 137 W Nolana McAllen. Buffet and menu, excellent N. India/Pakistan food, vegan options.
- City Café, 2901 N 10th St McAllen—excellent food, dessert. (in same plaza as Commonsplace)
There are tons of good restaurants up and down Trenton, 10th St in McAllen, and on Nolana between McColl and Bicentennial Blvd.

Attractions

- Museum of South Texas History
- Gelman Stained Glass Museum
- IMAS, McAllen.

The RGV is a world-famous birding region, and lots of national wildlife refuges are located here.

- World Birding Center, <https://edinburgwbc.org> (locations across the valley, but the closest is the Edinburg Wetlands birding center 714 S Raul Longoria in Edinburg and Quinta Mazatlán on S Tenth street in McAllen.)
- National Butterfly Center <https://www.nationalbutterflycenter.org>

Fabric Stores

There are several good fabric stores downtown. If you drive downtown, bring quarters for the parking meter. Fabric stores are open on Saturday and closed on Sunday.

- Rio Bravo Fabrics — upholstery and for some reason, a lot of silks. Some suiting behind the counter. Has had an excellent sale bin with high end silk but that seems to be tapering off.
- Dos Rios Fabrics — fine fabrics and trim.
- La Campana Fabrics — has a lot of trimmings, garment and upholstery fabrics
- Discount Fabrics — chaotic but lots of deadstock fabrics, rock bottom prices, and no fiber content anywhere. It's an adventure to go there. Prepare to haggle.
If you are a knitter, there is a local yarn shop open Friday and Saturday called the Lamb's Loom, off Tenth St and Upas in McAllen.

Art Supply stores

- Michaels is the closest to the school — at 281 and Trenton in the shopping center close to Penney's and Big Lots. There is a second Michaels on HWY 83 and McColl to the south about half an hour — it's the larger of the two.
- Hobby Lobby at the 10th and Trenton shopping center
- Joann Fabrics — on Jackson Road about half an hour south of the campus.