

LIGHTS OF SUMMER CHRISTINE VEGA MEMORABILITY



Christine is a First Year Medical Student at UTRGV. She recently completed her Masters of Science in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Spring 2025. She has worked as a research assistant at UTRGV where she learned different experimental techniques including subcloning and overexpression using heterologous expression systems.

“I am working with Dr. Melgarejo and Cristian Maestre, Architect, researching how memorability and imageability apply to landscapes and urban planning, and how taking advantage of this inherent cognitive ability can assist those with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias. By identifying what is considered to be memorable or imageable by various research methods and statistical analyses, this qualitative data that is processed by the human brain can be transformed into objective quantitative data that can then be used to drive further research.”

LIGHTS OF SUMMER KENNEDY CALLOWAY DIGITAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Kennedy is studying Biology at UTRGV and will become a senior in the Fall 2025. She is originally from Harlingen, Texas. She has completed internships with UT Health Houston in Public Health Informatics and Technology, as well as Get PHIT Bootcamp. Kennedy has also volunteered at Driscoll's Children's Hospital. Currently she is the Secretary of the HOPE Project, a student organization at UTRGV that support education and healthcare efforts.

"I am on the Digital Community Engagement team. I am working with my mentor Neyra Garcia to build a digital platform where people can access resources to support better aging. In my first real work week I was reading and typing summaries on scientific articles pertaining to Alzheimer's disease and the platform we use which is Social Pinpoint."

LIGHTS OF SUMMER CAROLINE DE LA GARZA COMMUNITY BRIEFS



Caroline is pursuing her Masters of Fine Arts in English from UTRGV and hopes to graduate 2026. She completed her Bachelors at University of North Texas. She was an intern for Brownsville Health Department where she helped educate the community on health programs to promote healthier lifestyles.

“I am happy to join the Alzheimer’s Research Team to create Community Briefs that are engaging, informative, and memorable. The community brief deliverables are related to scientific articles and public health. My goal is to transform research articles from the team into accessible flyers that are distributed throughout the community. So, if you know a good spot that has a lot of foot traffic, let us know. I’ll be utilizing my graphic design skills to create materials that are aligned with UTRGV branding. In addition to flyers, I can make miniature magazines and post cards to make an engaging experience.”

LIGHTS OF SUMMER ANDREA RAMIREZ VASCULAR CONTRIBUTIONS TO COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT AND DEMENTIA



Andrea graduated in the Spring 2025 from UTRGV with her Bachelor in Health Professions in Integrated Health Sciences. She recently completed an Student Experience Internship (SEI) Program at UTRGV where she developed and implemented a program called Memoria Sin Fronteras to integrate expressive arts and social workshops to increase social engagement of older adults in Brownsville.”

“During my summer internship, I will be learning how to assess cognitive functions, such as memory, attention, language and others, and understand how cardiovascular risk factors such as hypertension and diabetes affects them. I am part of a project that is a collaboration with many centers in the country called facilitating Diverse Vascular Contributions to Cognitive Impairment and Dementia (DVCID) and led by Dr. Charles DeCarli in Davis, but locally led by Dr. Silvia Mejia-Arango.”

LIGHTS OF SUMMER SHANA GARZA GENETICS AND THE BRAIN IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE



Shana will be starting a PhD in Human Genetics at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) in Fall 2025. She graduated with a Bachelor's of Science in Chemistry from UTRGV in May 2023, and continued her education at UTRGV earning her Master's of Science in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology in 2025. She is the founder and co-president of the National Alzheimer's Buddies at UTRGV, allowing students the opportunity to volunteer with person(s) with dementia living in nursing homes

across the RGV.

"I am working on finishing my Master's thesis entitled: Association and Shared Genetic Variants Between Alzheimer's Disease Blood-Based Biomarkers and Brain's Magnetic Resonance Imaging Signatures in Mexican Americans. Now that I defended my thesis, my main task is to submit a manuscript for publication, sharing all the interesting findings that I was able to gather during my studies."

LIGHTS OF SUMMER LESLIE MARTINEZ CLINICAL RESEARCH



Leslie Martinez is a fourth-year Biomedical Sciences major. She serves as President of the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) and member coordinator for A Step Ahead. She will support the Clinical and Engagement Cores, developing skills in time management, NIH resource navigation, and coordination.

“I support the Clinical Core and the Outreach, Recruitment and Engagement Core of the South Texas Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center with participant appointments. I assist with scheduling and ensure that all appointments proceed smoothly without any disruptions. I also handle the organization and maintenance of necessary documentation, including the medical supply inventory and NIH informational materials for lobby display. My goal is to improve my time management and coordination skills, enhance my ability to retain details efficiently, and gain valuable experience to better understand and contribute to my role at the Center.”

LIGHTS OF SUMMER BRENDA PORTILLO CLINICAL RESEARCH



Brenda will be graduating with the Class of 2027 with a major in Biological Sciences. She plans to apply to medical school. In her role, she will support the Clinical Core, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the research process and documentation.

“My role as a student assistant primarily involves providing support and assistance to faculty and staff. In my case, I am responsible for supporting the Clinical Core Team of the South Texas Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center. My main assignments include reviewing and updating documentation records. My goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the research process, particularly to enhance my skills and knowledge in preparation for medical school. This role also provides an opportunity to seek guidance and advice to support my professional development.”

LIGHTS OF SUMMER ESTRELLA PALOMO CLINICAL RESEARCH



Estrella is currently in her second year as a Neuroscience major at UT Austin. In her role, she will be working closely with our faculty, aiming to learn more about neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's disease and their impact, understand clinical data, and recognize patterns in cognitive decline.

"Through this experience, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the disease and learn how to interpret clinical data to better understand patterns in cognitive decline. One of my goals is to help bridge language and cultural barriers in healthcare, specifically for Spanish-speaking patients."