Dear Friends,

An unexpected public health crisis caused by COVID-19 has fundamentally altered the world. The response to the pandemic called for a great deal of improvisation from leaders. Decisions were made with empathy and humility despite the lack of a clear road forward. In a time of crisis, the most challenging task is to readjust when conditions change.

Access to quality and affordable education is more important than ever for full-time working professionals. At the University of Texas at El Paso, we serve a traditionally underserved population. With that in mind, we are proud to support first generation students, minority students, and men and women who serve our country in the public and private sector. We walk with them in the journey of pursuing a Master’s degree.

Our commitment is to continue building a culture of Leadership for UTEP, Fort Bliss, and the El Paso-Juárez metroplex. We envision for our students to be leaders who are resilient and quickly adapt to change. Leaders with a global vision but protective of their local community. Above all, a massive systemic change requires a level of inclusivity – one that may bring discomfort and conflicting points of view but in the end, the outcome will be greater than the addition of each individual effort.

Finally, as I welcome you to El Paso, UTEP, and to the MLS Program, I invite you to review the second issue of our newsletter. Have a wonderful academic year.

Stay safe and take care,

Areli Chacón Silva, Ph.D.
The MLS program is designed to stress the knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors essential to successful organizational leaders. Our goal is not only to change our students' lives, but also the lives of those around them.

The curriculum was developed to expose students to the challenges of today’s world like organizational change, complex organizations, and ethics.

The curriculum components are designed to produce professionals capable of intelligent and creative analysis, communication, and action in leadership functions.

Flexibility is permitted in the curriculum to meet the needs of our diverse student population, who come from varied backgrounds and are often at different points in their careers.

We envision a society in which those in leadership and management positions affect changes that benefit individuals, groups, communities, and organizations through the application of time-tested practices, innovative problem solving, and the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to anticipate and embrace change.

Alumni Testimonials

"I was deployed to Romania and PCS to Germany and the online courses allowed me to achieve the requirements for the MLS and without any disruptions for course work."

"The professors and staff were very flexible as I had to complete my capstone paper once deployed to Iraq."

"The MLS program offered an entirely different view on the concepts, theories, and applications of leadership."
The Master of Arts in Leadership Studies degree is an 11-course, 33-semester credit hour program. Most students take 8 core courses and a 3-course concentration in another area which deals with their individual and professional goals. The approved concentrations for the MA in Leadership Studies are as follows:

**COMMUNICATION**

Students take courses from the MA in Communication degree. These courses expose students to the complexities of communications within and external to an organization. Some of the courses offered are COMM 5337, Seminar in Organizational Communication, COMM 5347, Communication and Positive Deviance, and COMM 5362, Organizational Communication.

**INTELLIGENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES**

Students who might be interested in working in the Intelligence field can take courses as varied as INSS 5303, Legal Issues in Intelligence and National Security to INSS 5308, Propaganda and Influence Operations, to INSS 5335, Transnational Criminal Organizations.

**PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

For people who wish to lead organizations in the public sector, the Public Administration concentration provides a background in how government and not-for-profit organizations work and are regulated. Courses can include PAD 5310, Public Policy Process and Institutions, PAD 5342, Risk Analysis, and PAD 5365, Policy Analysis and Decision Making.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

A concentration that was newly developed and will be available Spring 2021, which will include courses such as Sports Leadership, Leadership in Diverse Cultures, Border Leadership, Internship in Leadership Studies, and Special Topics in Leadership.
M E E T  T H E  T E A M

STEPHEN E. TELLESS, M.A.
PROGRAM MANAGER
Steve grew up outside of Plymouth, Massachusetts. After graduating high school in 1976, he joined the U.S. Army as an Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Operations and Intelligence Specialist. He served for more than 27 years in a variety of assignments in the U.S. and overseas including classified documents clerk, top secret control officer and document custodian, and first sergeant. Steve retired as a command sergeant major in November of 2003.

He attended the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) from 2004 to 2008, earning his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in Political Science. He has worked with the program since August 2007. When the Army decided to move the Air Defense Artillery School to Fort Sill in September 2009, Steve helped to create an online version of the courses required to complete the degree. In his almost 13 years with the program, Steve has helped almost 1,000 students earn their graduate degrees.

MATTHEW REY LEAL, M.A.
PROGRAM ADVISOR
Matthew graduated with a Master of Arts in Leadership Studies from UTEP in May of 2018. He attained the part time Graduate Research Assistant position at the Leadership Studies program upon his entry into graduate school and, one year later, attained the full time position of program advisor. He has traveled to Fort Sill, Oklahoma and to the 2019 College Council on Military Educators Conference held in Austin, Texas as part of his efforts to better understand and serve our Military Student population.

He received a Bachelors degree in Organizational and Corporate Communication with a minor in Theatre Performance from UTEP in 2016. He is a former Olympic-style Taekwondo fighter, holding a black belt and previously competing at a national level. He is a member of The ManKind Project, a non-profit organization that seeks to help men worldwide gain emotional self-awareness and a positive mission in life.
MEET THE TEAM

MARI YSELA NOOPILA, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF INSTRUCTION

Dr. Noopila grew up in Southern New Mexico and graduated from New Mexico State University with each of her degrees. She spent seven years overseas where she lived in Braunschweig, Germany and Helsinki, Finland. Dr. Noopila enjoys spending time with her husband Mikko and two daughters Maija and Mila. During the year, she has a pretty busy schedule traveling with her daughters who are competitive gymnasts.

Outside of the classroom and travel, she is very much into fitness, and enjoys running, working-out, bicycling and playing tennis. One goal that she is working towards is completing a half-ironman triathlon. Professionally, she continues to work in the classroom and performing research on Hispanic Serving Institutions and Leadership Education.

ARTHUR A. AGUIRRE, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF INSTRUCTION

Dr. Aguirre received both his Bachelor’s (2007) and Master’s (2011) of Arts in Communication from the UTEP and his doctorate in Communication from the University of New Mexico (2015). His research has focused on a variety of topics within communication and leadership including intercultural communication, organizational communication, public relations, conflict management, sports leadership and communication, and interpersonal communication.

He just started his third year teaching in the program. He has a chapter on pedagogy and military affiliated learners that’s forthcoming and is currently working on turning his Teambuilding/Leadership Communication workshop into a book. Outside of academia, Dr. Aguirre frequently works as a photographer for local businesses in El Paso and recently launched his new podcast The Forefront with Art Aguirre. He loves spending time with his family, his girlfriend, Karla, his dog, Poppy, and is looking forward to participating in his second powerlifting competition in 2021.
M E E T  T H E  T E A M

ZALMA HERNÁNDEZ, GRADUATE ASSISTANT

Zalma earned her bachelor's degree in Health Promotion with a minor in Community Health at UTEP. She is currently completing a Master of Science in Mental Health Counseling to follow a path to become a clinical Psychologist. During her undergraduate experience, she conducted research in the areas of HIV and Hepatitis C prevention, substance use disorder, and nutrition education. She has worked at the Leadership and Community Engagement program since fall 2019 as a graduate assistant.

NAYLA BEJARANO, RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Nayla recently started her Master of Public Health at UTEP. She has worked at the Leadership and Community Engagement program since 2017. She serves as a research assistant and conducts interdisciplinary research. Her current project seeks to address Latino mental health through advocacy and information. Outside of MLS, Nayla serves as the Social and Health & Wellness chair of Medical Professions Organization. She plans to attend medical school after completing her MPH.

MARISOL CHÁVEZ, UG RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Marisol is a senior majoring in Multimedia Journalism at UTEP. She has worked at the Leadership and Community Engagement program since 2018, and one of her main responsibilities is creating the program's newsletter. She is The Prospector's web editor, a student of the New York Times Journalism Institute, and a freelance border correspondent for the Dallas Morning News. She will be attending law school in the fall of 2021. She likes to call herself a poet.
LEADERS ARE FORGED IN CRISIS
AN ESSAY BY ASHLEY GRZEBENIAK

I had no choice but to step up and be a leader for my family. During the summer of 2018, my mother, who is also my best friend, was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. It came as a shock to my entire family as my mother is forty-five years young, and also the glue that holds my family together.

From when I can remember, my mother had always been the informal leader of our team, she took care of not only my little brother and I, but my dad as well. However, the day we got the diagnosis, our leadership roles changed. I emerged as a temporary leader.

This diagnosis began to hinder how our team functioned, and our common goal even changed; we went from happiness to survival. The decisions we made as a team, began to revolve solely around my mother and her health, nothing else mattered anymore.

The result of this change was sudden and shocking. However, I stepped up and was able to keep my family afloat that summer. Although I had to go off to school in the fall, I made sure to educate both my father and brother on how our team needed to function in my absence. At that time, I was not aware of the different aspects of senior team leadership but, looking back, we exemplified all of Ruth Wageman’s conditions to create an effective team.

We became a great team not only because we are blood related, but because we emerged stronger in the event of crisis. We also had a very compelling team purpose—to ensure my mother had nothing to worry about while she was fighting her battle. We used our individual strengths to ensure the household was organized and ran smoothly.

In the end our team was successful, it has been over a year now that my mother has been cancer free. This experience showed not only my family but myself that I truly do have the capabilities to be a great leader, and also changed the team dynamic of my family forever. We now appreciate my mother more, our great leader, and strive on a daily basis to help her as often as possible which has only bettered us as an effective team.

This was the toughest, most challenging year of my life but also the time I stepped up as a leader in my family when they needed me most.
Each fall and spring UTEP graduation, the Master of Leadership Studies gives Outstanding Student Awards to students within the program. Some of these students are online only students who may be anywhere in the world during the duration of their exemplary performance in our academic program. The other students are hybrid/in class students who have taken the majority of their MLS classes face to face with their instructors and peers.

The criteria for being selected as an MLS Outstanding Student is first a 4.0 GPA. Once the list of 4.0's has been completed, it is sent out to all MLS Faculty so that they can vote on their top selection. Once the votes have been submitted and the top Outstanding Students have been confirmed, official letter's notifying and congratulating each of the recipients will be drafted and signed by the MLS Program Director, Dr. Areli Chacón Silva, and sent by mail or handed to them in person.

The recipients are notified in the letter that if they choose to attend the College of Liberal Arts Awards and Hooding Ceremony they will be recognized onstage specifically for being chosen as one of the MLS Outstanding Students. To be chosen as an MLS Outstanding student is a great achievement that a student can be proud of for the rest of their lives.
Ryan Metz was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. 

Even though he is only 25 years old, he has accomplished quite a lot. 

He earned his bachelor’s degree in Mathematics with a concentration in Secondary education from the University of Texas at El Paso. 

Last May, he graduated from our program with a master’s degree in Leadership Studies. 

During his time as a student, he was also an athlete on the UTEP football team, where he was a starting quarterback during his four years of eligibility. 

He was part of the Leadership and Community Engagement staff, working as a Graduate Assistant during his first year as a master’s student. 

He is currently a Graduate Assistant for the UTEP football team, where he guides young athletes in their development to become professionals. 

Ryan aspires to become a football coach and use what he has learned during his time at UTEP to shape a new generation of student athletes. 

We are certain he is prepared to face his latest professional challenges and all that he will face in the future.
CARLA ROSETE, M.A. 2019

A native of Durango, Mexico, Carla migrated to the United States in 2012 to attend The University of Texas at El Paso.

Even though she could not speak English, she was able to pick up the language and receive a bachelor’s degree in marketing and management with a concentration in human resources four years later with UTEP’s PASE program aid, which offers financial assistance to students who are Mexican nationals.

She quit her job as a health care HR coordinator to enroll in UTEP’s Graduate School. As a graduate student, she served on multiple campus committees as a representative from UTEP’s Center for Community Engagement. She also coordinated the center’s community work-study programs.

Off campus, she has volunteered for programs such as Villa Maria, Power of the Purse and the Juvenile Probation Department.

She was featured in the 2019 Winter Commencement Ceremony during Dr. John Wiebe’s address to students as interim provost.

Although her time as an MLS student has concluded, Carla did not leave campus. She accepted a position as a recruiter in UTEP’s Human Resources Department.

We are certain she is prepared to face her latest professional challenge and all that she will face in the future.
Our program director, Dr. Areli Chacón Silva is hosting coffee hours every Monday and Friday at 12 p.m.

Join her here: https://bit.ly/35zwQ4c to talk about leadership, our program, and all you can do with an MLS degree.