

## Discovery & Impact February 2026

### Purpose in Action

Research creates momentum when people commit to work that strengthens communities and delivers public value. This February issue of *Impact & Discovery* highlights the research community who embody that commitment. Their leadership, curiosity, and discipline reflect a shared belief that knowledge gains meaning when it serves others.

*Impact & Discovery* is published every other month to provide timely updates on the work shaping **UTEP** research. The next issue will arrive in April 2026.

### In this Issue..

- 2026 Pioneering Researcher Reception
- Where Art Meets Impact
- Leaders Shaping Discovery and Impact
- Institute for Applied AI Innovation
- Office of Sponsored Projects
- Office of Technology Commercialization
- Research Compliance
  - Research Compliance and LARC: Strengthening Support for **UTEP** Research
  - Visiting scholars/researcher new policy
- Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Services
- New Year Greeting

## 2026 Pioneering Researchers' Reception *Emerging Leaders Driving Research with Impact*

Each year, the Pioneering Researchers' Reception celebrates first-time principal investigators. On January 28, 2026, Research & Innovation hosted the reception to recognize 12 first-time principal investigators whose newly funded projects span science, engineering, and liberal arts. These faculty members were honored for their leadership and for advancing scholarship across disciplinary boundaries at a pivotal moment in their careers.

**Elias M. Adanu** - Liberal Arts

**Alexis Maurel** - Engineering

**Md Fashiar Rahman** - Engineering

**Anantaa Kotal** - Engineering

**Aryzbe Najera** - Engineering

**Jayoung Cho** - Engineering

**Enrique I. Ramos** - Science

**Kedron Silsbee** - Science

**Kelly C. Burke\*** - Liberal Arts

**Jaeyoon (Jason) Kim\*** - Engineering

**Nichole Ramirez\*** - Engineering

**Sajedul Talukder\*** - Engineering

\*not pictured



Connect

## Where Art Meets Impact

### *UTEP Artists Commemorate Faculty Achievements*

**R&I** is dedicated to supporting the arts by commissioning artwork by regional artists connected to **UTEP** to recognize faculty achievements. This initiative celebrates both the rigor of research and the creative courage rooted in the University's identity.



#### **Bhutan Thangtong Gyalpo Iron Bridge Print** by Mark Paulda

**UTEP's** bond with Bhutan began in 1917, when the campus embraced a striking Bhutanese-inspired architectural style. At the Pioneering Researcher Reception, new principal investigators were honored with framed prints of vibrant flags strewn across the legendary Thangtong Gyalpo Iron Bridge, a vivid emblem of their industrious and innovative research adventures ahead.

Driven by restless creativity, photographer Mark Paulda has journeyed across continents, capturing the essence of diverse cultures. His artistic journey started with local photography awards, eventually inspiring the We Are Bhutan project, which empowers Bhutanese people to share their homeland's beauty from their own perspective. As the first project in over five years to earn Bhutanese government approval, it stands as a testament to authentic storytelling and public impact, embodying core **UTEP** values. Discover his website, where stunning visuals and powerful stories are ready to inspire you.

Connect

## Leaders Shaping Discovery and Impact

### *Research Development Profiles*

Associate Deans for Research influence **UTEP**'s research environment and foster opportunities that support faculty across the University. Each ADR represents their college, providing unique perspectives and priorities that forward collaboration, innovation, and impact. This edition features ADRs from the College of Health Science and the School of Pharmacy.



**Ian Mendez**

***Research Leadership Built on Effort and Integrity***

As Associate Dean for Research, Ian Mendez, Ph.D., has been a catalyst for transformation at the UTEP School of Pharmacy, guiding it through a defining chapter. His influence is woven into the very fabric of the school. Dr. Mendez played a key role in designing the School of Pharmacy's curriculum, refining workload policies, and setting the standards for tenure and promotion. Dr. Mendez's leadership as Chair of the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences is marked by his commitment to mentorship, fostering a culture where faculty thrive, research flourishes, and students are inspired to reach new heights.



**Emre Umucu**

***Leading with Empathy. Delivering Public Value***

Emre Umucu, Ph.D., infuses the College of Health Sciences with a calm yet visionary leadership style. As Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship, he is committed to ethics, people, and impact. His simple motto reflects his approach: "learn consistently, lead with empathy, and serve with integrity." For Dr. Umucu, research is a force for public value, and his work with veteran populations is among his proudest contributions. Dr. Umucu is dedicated to building a resilient, sustainable, and adaptable research culture. His vision is to create a research environment that uplifts both scholars and the communities they serve.

## **Institute for Applied AI Innovation** *Empowering Research with AI*

**UTEP** Research & Innovation and the Institute for Applied AI Innovation are launching the Spring 2026 **AI & HPC Showcase for Research**, a series of college-specific sessions designed to increase awareness of the high-performance computing (HPC) and AI resources available to UTEP faculty. These sessions feature live demonstrations, guided walkthroughs, and research-aligned examples that show how advanced computing can accelerate scholarly work across all disciplines.



Each session brings together a cohort of *Faculty Champions*—researchers interested in strengthening their computational capabilities and supporting their departments. In addition to the biweekly sessions, dedicated Office Hours will follow on alternating Fridays, offering personalized support for allocation requests, environment setup, troubleshooting, and project-specific questions. Sessions begin February 20 and run through May; all experience levels are welcome.

**Connect**

## **Office of Sponsored Projects**

Congratulations to Raul Chavez on his recent promotion to Assistant Director of the Office of Sponsored Projects at The University of Texas at El Paso. Raul has been a valued member of



the OSP team, providing dedicated support to faculty and staff in both Pre and Post Award services. In his new role, he will continue to strengthen research administration efforts and support UTEP's mission of excellence in research and innovation.

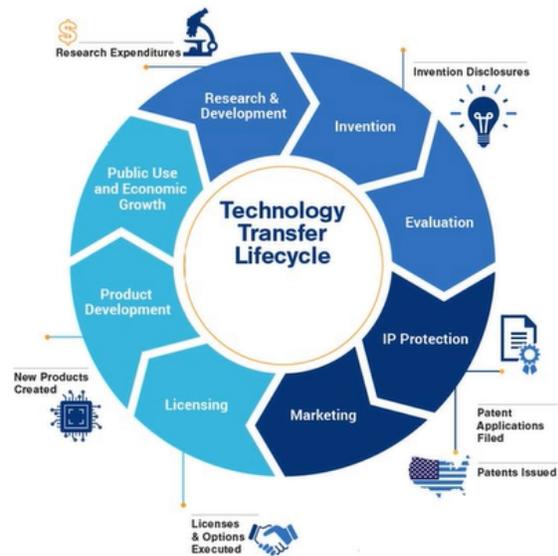
"I'm grateful for the opportunity and look forward to continuing to contribute at a higher level in this role." - Raul

Connect

## Office of Technology Commercialization

AI and Inventorship considerations:

The rise in availability and use of AI has transformed the research landscape on campus and nationwide, but this change raises implications for inventorship and authorship regarding intellectual property. While there have been no clear stances from the US Patent and Trademark Office or the US Copyright Office at this time, there has been some guidance on distinguishing AI use for inventions and authorship in patents and copyrights. With that in mind, here is a helpful tip to ensure that, if AI is used for representation, inventorship, and authorship are not affected. We have updated the SOPHIA disclosure system software to ask whether AI was used in the discovery process.



Next, if this is signaled yes, the Office of Technology Commercialization will reach out to schedule a meeting to discuss which aspects of AI were utilized. For the inventors, one thing that would assist this process is to annotate which portions of your research or software development were generated by AI and which were created by you, the researcher. AI may be a good tool to use for research, but keep in mind that inventorship can only be given to a person, not the AI, so if a technology was fully created by AI, it will not be accepted. As more information is released by the US Patent and Trademark Office and the US Copyright Office, we will ensure it is disseminated to the research community at [UTEP](#).

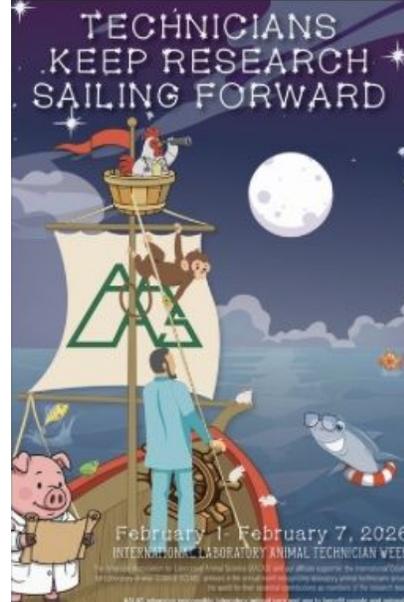
Connect

## Research Compliance and LARC Strengthening Support for UTEP Research

### Animal Tech Week February 1-7th

Animal technicians in research are recognized nationally during the first week of February, and [UTEP](#) participated by expressing appreciation for the LARC team from February 1 to February 7, 2026. Throughout the week, the team received daily acknowledgments, including breakfast, lunch, or other tokens of appreciation. The LARC team consistently demonstrates exceptional dedication to supporting the research community. Efforts are ongoing to enhance customer service and introduce innovative practices within the LARC program. Additionally, the team is strengthened by recruiting individuals who help achieve the gold standard for AAALAC accreditation. We are pleased to welcome Mrs. Emma Rodriguez, who joined in late January as

the new Veterinary Technician and will assist the veterinarian and researchers with veterinary health matters. For questions or concerns, please contact LARC at LARC@utep.edu.



Connect

## Visiting Scholars/Researchers New Policy



### Why It Matters

International travel supports research, teaching, and collaboration. Even routine trips with a laptop can raise export control issues. Knowing the policy protects you, your research, and UTEP from unintentional violations of U.S., foreign, and Texas law, as well as University Policy.

### Key Risks

- **Destination:** Some countries are sanctioned or have heightened restrictions
- **Materials:** Data, software, or specialized equipment you carry, access or present may be export-controlled
- **Collaborators:** Certain individuals, organizations, or entities abroad may appear on restricted lists
- **Purpose:** The nature of your research or presentation can trigger an export control review

### What You Can Take

With an approved **Export Control Certification of Temporary Export of UTEP Property**, you may carry:

- Laptops, tablets, smartphones, USB drives, and smartwatches with standard commercial software
- Presentations, publications, or data that are publicly available or qualify as fundamental research

### When to Contact Export Control

You may need an export license if you travel with:

- Devices using specialized encryption or containing export-controlled data
- Research equipment, pathogens, toxins, or genetic materials
- Defense articles regulated by ITAR (e.g., spacecraft components)



### Did you Know?

UTEP has implemented a new policy in its Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP) for visiting scholars and researchers. Faculty and staff may invite qualified individuals to the university temporarily to engage in scholarly activities or research. The university recognizes the contributions of visiting scholars and researchers, noting that their visits promote collaboration, increase diversity, strengthen professional relationships, enrich the academic environment, and advance the university's mission of excellence and innovation in teaching, research, and community service.

To further its academic mission, UTEP encourages inviting visiting scholars and researchers, recognizing that their expertise benefits the university community. The new HOP policy standardizes and clarifies procedures for inviting experts from various disciplines.

Departments, centers, faculty, researchers, and administrators who plan to invite or host temporary visitors must follow the guidelines in the Handbook of Operating Procedures, **Section IV, Chapter 12: Visiting Scholars and Researchers**. Additional information about policy applicability and related resources is available on the Visiting Scholars / Researchers webpage.

Connect

## Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Services *Expanding Partnerships and Regional Impact*

The Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Services (REAS) center aims to continue advancing its strategic initiatives by expanding evaluation capacity, strengthening regional partnerships, and supporting high-impact research. As part of our ongoing effort to equip faculty and researchers with high-impact strategies to gain measurable results, we invite you to attend:

Session: How Evaluations Can Help Your Proposal

When: May 13, 2026 – 1:00 – 2:00 PM

Register: [utep.edu/research/events/](https://utep.edu/research/events/)

Investing in Professional Growth and Research Excellence: The REAS team continues to prioritize professional development by supporting staff participation in regional and national conferences, including:

- Texas Evaluation Network (TEN) Institute
- American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Conference
- Undergraduate Education at Research Universities (UERU) National Conference
- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Conference



At these conferences, REAS team members present and disseminate evaluation findings, contributing to broader conversations on evidence-based practice and program improvement while increasing the visibility of **UTEP's** evaluation work. To learn more about REAS or explore collaboration opportunities, connect below or contact [reas@utep.edu](mailto:reas@utep.edu).

Connect



## Propelling into the New Year with Shared Purpose

A new year arrives, brimming with energy and possibility. This is our moment to explore uncharted territory and spark innovations that uplift our communities. Your passion for discovery, your mentorship, and your spirit of collaboration ripple outward, shaping lives well beyond our campus. Thank you for championing work that truly matters. Together, we step into the year ahead with purpose, unity, and the shared vision of **UTEP's** research mission to leave a lasting mark.

Thank you for advancing work that brings public value to the communities we serve, and we wish you a productive and inspiring year ahead.

## We Want to Know

Submit your accomplishments, share your research, or highlight a colleague whose work should be recognized in future issues and on the **R&I** website.

[Submit](#)



Research & Innovation  
The University of Texas at El Paso  
500 W. University Ave.  
El Paso, TX 79968

[research.utep.edu](http://research.utep.edu)

The University of Texas El Paso | 500 W. University Ave. | El Paso, TX 79968 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!