Discovery & Impact:
Research & Innovation Quarterly Newsletter

Summer 2025

Summer marks a season of momentum across UTEP's research enterprise. New initiatives are taking root, faculty are being recognized for their leadership, and partnerships are creating pathways for collaboration.

In this issue, we highlight stories of impact and purpose, from behind-the-scenes financial stewardship to bold advances in artificial intelligence. Explore how faculty, staff, and students are helping research matter where it's needed most.

Vision in Action

Lupe Gomez,
Associate Vice President,
Research Administration

Behind every successful research project is a system that allows it to move forward. For nearly 20 years, Lupe Gomez has been building that system at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP).

As Associate Vice President for Research Administration, she leads the Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) and Grants Management Accounting (GMA). These two teams provide comprehensive support from proposal submission to financial management to ensure that research funding is not only managed effectively but also utilized to create meaningful outcomes.

"Our job is to make research possible," Gomez said. "We support the people doing the work, and we take care of what's behind the scenes so they can stay focused on what matters most." In this

newsletter, we will be highlighting GMA. Under her leadership, GMA handles the full lifecycle of post-award financial management, setting up accounts, reviewing expenditures, submitting financial reports, and guiding closeouts. But Gomez is quick to point out this isn't just about process. It's about trust. It's about building a system that faculty can rely on and that sponsors believe in.

"We're not just processing forms," she said. "We're creating a structure that protects research and allows it to grow. When that system works, everyone wins—the institution, the faculty, and the communities we serve."

Gomez believes that research administration isn't separate from research success. It's part of it. When the infrastructure is strong, it creates space for researchers to lead, explore, and make a real impact.

Q&A with Lupe Gomez

How would you explain GMA's role to someone new to research at UTEP?
We ensure that research funding is used as intended. This involves setting up projects in our system, reviewing expenses, handling billing, and ensuring that everything adheres to federal, state, and University regulations. However, at its core, our role is to support researchers so they can continue to move forward.

What changes have you made to better support faculty and staff?
We've put more energy into listening. That's led us to offer more precise guidance, more frequent outreach, and practical tools that make everyday tasks easier. We've also streamlined workflows and automated some processes to reduce unnecessary back-and-forth. Our goal is always to make things more straightforward, not more complicated.

What keeps you motivated in this work?
It's about helping people. I see my job as creating the conditions for others to succeed. When a faculty member can focus on their research because we've taken care of the details, or when a staff member grows into a leadership role—that's what makes this work meaningful.

What do you want researchers to know about GMA?
We're not here to slow you down. We're here to walk with you. Sometimes compliance can feel frustrating, but it's there to protect your work. When questions arise, we want to discuss them. We're partners in the process, not gatekeepers.

Who We Are: Grants Management Accounting
Every funded research project relies on individuals who manage resources responsibly, ensure compliance, and facilitate progress. At UTEP, those individuals create a strong leadership team to include: Yesenia Castañeda, Director of Grant Management Accounting; Alejandra Chavez, Assistant Director; Annette Escudero Cuevas, Cash Management Manager; Veronica Portillo, Grant Accountant Assistant Manager; and Pamela Rios, Support Center Assistant Manager.

To meet the full team or find the right contact for your award, visit the GMA staff directory.

Meet the Team

Innovative Impact: UTEP's AI Institute Builds Bridges Between Research and Community

The AI Institute for Community-Engaged Research (AI-ICER) was established in 2024 through funding from the UT System Regents' Research Excellence Program. Established as an interdisciplinary think tank, the Institute brings together researchers from across UTEP, as well as public, private, and industry partners, to address regional and national challenges through the application of artificial intelligence.

AI-ICER's mission is to catalyze transformative research and education through the development of AI data models and algorithms tailored to community needs. With a focus on trustworthy and secure intelligence, the AI Institute is helping advance solutions in areas such as water security, health disparities, and workforce development, while also ensuring that students and citizens are equipped to use AI responsibly and effectively.

The AI Institute operates through three core research thrusts: responsible AI, AI for community impact, and AI education. It also supports affiliated centers and labs across campus, strengthens interdisciplinary collaboration, and provides hands-on professional development in AI workflows, tools, and high-performance computing.

By uniting research expertise with applied problem-solving, AI-ICER reinforces UTEP's role as a leader in community-centered innovation.

More

ADVANCING RESEARCH TOGETHER
Expanding Regional Research Partnerships

Meaningful research is rarely done in isolation. UTEP is proud to be part of the Southwest Region University Partnership Network, a collaboration led by the University of Texas at Austin. The network brings together researchers from across Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma to address shared challenges and pursue joint funding opportunities.

The goal is to build regional capacity and strengthen competitiveness for external research funding through interdisciplinary collaboration. UTEP faculty interested in joining this effort can explore the program on UT Austin's **Bridging Barriers** website.

Collaboration requests may be submitted **here** or by contacting **researchrelations@utep.edu**.

RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT
Supporting Faculty at Every Stage of Research

Research takes time, planning, and persistence. So does supporting it well. Research & Innovation (R&I) works behind the scenes to ensure faculty have the guidance, tools, and resources they need— not just to secure funding, but to build lasting, meaningful research programs.

Help begins with announcements of funding opportunities, then leading to proposal development, which may involve strategy sessions, internal and external reviews, and individualized planning. Programs like CAREER Club and targeted coaching are designed to build long-term success. R&I also administers internal funding opportunities, including the University Research Institute (URI), the Faculty Travel Incentive Program (FTIP), the Pilot Grants Program (PGP), and the Indio Mountains Research Station Graduate Research Grants to advance promising projects.

In addition to funding, R&I offers professional development workshops (e.g., Lunch & Learns), one-on-one consultations, facilitation for interdisciplinary teams, and guidance for internal and external honorific award nominations.

For inquiries about department or college presentations, visit:

Contact us:

researchdev@utep.edu

For information on the training offered, visit:

MineTracker

Welcome Arthur Valiant

Research thrives when ideas are supported from the start. That's where Arthur Valiant comes in. As the newest member of the Research Development team, Arthur brings a track record of guiding faculty through every phase of the sponsored project life cycle—from the first spark of an idea to the final submission.

A native of El Paso, Arthur sees research not just as scholarship, but as a way to serve and connect with the community. He believes in the power of a well-told proposal to clarify vision, rally partners, and unlock opportunity. At UTEP, he will support internal funding programs, coordinate internal and external honorifics programs, and collaborate with faculty across disciplines to enhance their research and impact. His arrival strengthens the team's commitment to helping faculty pursue meaningful, well-supported work that matters.

We're proud to welcome him home.

Clearing the Path for UTEP Innovations

Every idea has the potential to spark change, but only when the systems behind it work just as hard as the people pushing it forward. That's the thinking behind new updates at the Office of Technology Commercialization. The goal is to make it easier for faculty to transition their inventions from concept to commercial reality.

The first change strengthens the evaluation process. In addition to reviewing prior art, such as patents or public disclosures, the office now assesses whether there is a genuine market need for innovation. This shift from a patent-first mindset to one that considers impact ensures that promising ideas aren't just protected but positioned to succeed.

Second, an interview with the inventor has been introduced. Faculty are invited to describe their innovation in plain terms, helping the office better capture the value and potential of the idea. These conversations shape how technology is presented to partners and ensure nothing critical gets lost in translation.

Together, these updates reinforce UTEP's commitment to faculty inventors and to building a stronger pathway for research-driven innovation.

Questions? Contact the Office of Technology Commercialization at: techtransfer@utep.edu

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TEACHING MINDSET
BEFORE METHODS

Success in today's world requires more than knowledge. It requires initiative, adaptability, and confidence to lead effectively through uncertainty.

That is the foundation of the entrepreneurial mindset —a way of thinking that helps students recognize opportunities, respond to challenges, and drive meaningful action in any field.

At UTEP, this mindset is built around five key areas: identity and self-awareness, leadership and teamwork, growth mindset, creativity and innovation, and critical thinking and problem-solving. These are not just skills. They are habits of mind that prepare students to navigate complexity with purpose and resilience.

In spring 2025, Nicole Aguilar, Director of the Mike Loya Center for Innovation and Commerce, partnered with the Office of the Provost and InSPIRE to lead a two-day professional development series for UNIV 1301 faculty. Through active learning and reflection, faculty were invited to engage with the entrepreneurial mindset as learners first, thereby deepening their understanding before applying it in the classroom.

Beginning fall 2025, every section of UNIV 1301 will fully integrate this framework, helping first-year students begin their college experience not only with information but with the mindset to shape their future.

Recognizing Research Achievement:
2025 R&I Honorific Awards

Research is not just about inquiry; it is also about discovery. It is about people using knowledge to make a difference.

On April 23, 2025, the research community came together to honor faculty members whose work is shaping lives, strengthening communities, and pushing the boundaries of what is possible.

The 2025 Research & Innovation Honorific Awards celebrated those who lead with purpose through research, novelty, teaching, and collaboration.

This year's awardees included:

Innovation Award – Established Innovator
Dr. James Li, for work in biotechnology and nanotechnology that is improving access to healthcare.

Innovation Award – Early Career Innovator
Dr. Yun-Pil Shim, for achievements in quantum computing and theoretical research.

Outstanding Researcher – Mid-Career
Dr. Skye Fortier, for advancements in heavy-metal catalysis and sustained mentorship in chemistry.

Outstanding Researcher – Distinguished Career
Dr. Maria Duarte-Gardea, for her leadership in nutrition science and chronic disease prevention, and Dr. Josiah Heyman, for his contributions to borderland studies.

Rising Researcher Awards
Dr. Julien Chaput (STEM: Physical Science & Engineering), Dr. Michael Harvey (STEM: Life Science & Engineering), Dr. Adriana Dominguez (Arts, Humanities, & Education), and Dr. Yong Qin (UTEP Health & Social Sciences), each recognized for their research contributions and promise.

Have an accomplishment to highlight or a researcher to recognize in the following newsletter? Please email **researchdev@utep.edu**.

Federal Regulations Updates

Stay informed and ensure your research projects stay on track by regularly checking this resource for the latest information and strategic advice on navigating federal funding landscapes.

Click the button below for updates, guidance, and communications on federal funding.

Federal Research Updates

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