July 2015 -- Sam Rodriguez - Coordinator of Student Development, Student Engagement & Leadership Center (SELC)

Now that summer is in full swing at UTEP, student organizations have been lining up the Union Breezeway in an effort to recruit new, transfer, and returning students. Student organizations at UTEP offer opportunities for students to become trained in leadership, educational, personal and social skills that helps them develop into productive leaders in their community, place of employment, and their personal lives. One of UTEP’s many fine staff members, Sam Rodriguez, helps in these efforts as a staff member in the Student Engagement & Leadership Center (SELC).

In the nine years Sam has worked for UTEP, he began as an intern working for the Campus Activities Board (CAB) by planning events and creating a wide array of graphic designs for the office. Then in 2012, he earned and landed a spot as a full time staff member in SELC as the Coordinator of Student Development. Since then, Sam has been assigned with helping increase the number of student organizations. In the 2014-2015 school year there were 234 registered student organization and the goal is to increase that number to 400. "This goal is really important to me. I would like to hit the 400 mark because I enjoy student affairs since our work here is important and impacts a lot of people,” Rodriguez said. In regards to providing students with assistance in creating organizations, Rodriguez stated the following, "What we do is ensure that students get what they need while they are here on campus so that students in the organization can develop by providing them with leadership opportunities as well as the opportunity to develop their personalities." Sam's duties also entail helping plan the Student Organizations Leadership Retreat which just wrapped up its 6th year. This is an event Sam helped initiate while he was a senior level undergraduate student here at UTEP, which he says "initially began with 30 students and has since grown to include over 1100 students."

Of the many things with which Sam has been involved, one of the most enjoyable are the commencement ceremonies. Sam says of how his most enjoyable experiences have evolved, "Initially, it was planning events through CAB. But I get to know and work with people (students) being able to work here, and the reason why the commencement ceremonies are my most enjoyable experience is that I know that person walking across the stage is different from the person who arrived at UTEP" The journey many now know all too well from having attending college is that it is comprised of positive and negative experiences. The positive experiences are more effortless to reinforce or commit while the negative experiences can be easy to ignore. "I like to tell students that college is the perfect lab to make leadership mistakes, so that you can learn from them in this setting. And student organizations provide that opportunity because they will learn new skills that only become fine-tuned after being engaged and participating in them." This journey is halfway complete for Sam as he attempts to obtain his second degree by pursuing a Master of Arts in Communication.

"My long-term goal is to work for the International Olympic Committee because this is the largest event in the world to plan and I would love the opportunity to be involved with planning an event of this magnitude." Planning large events and impacting people is something Sam has poured his heart and soul into while also helping to develop student leaders on campus who will be the leaders of tomorrow. He exemplifies Dr. Natalicio's goal of having a diverse group of staff employed who serve as role models and mentors to the students in an effort to achieve the University's goal of being a Tier One institution with a 21st Century Student Demographic.