

LAREDO MORNING TIMES

TAMIU'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

TEXAS A&M INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



PART 5 OF 12: THE FIFTH DECADE

TAMIU 50th Anniversary

TAMIU's 50th anniversary The Fifth Decade

Editor's note: This is Part 5 of 12 in Laredo Morning Times' special look at Texas A&M International as it celebrates its upcoming 50th anniversary in 2020. LMT will be counting down to that momentous occasion with a monthly look at the university's past, present and future.

By Jason Mack
Laredo Morning Times

After beginning the millennium with a decade of radical growth and progress, Texas A&M International University continued to expand with new buildings, programs, resources and leadership over the past 10 years.

The university first entered the digital age in 2006 with the launching of its website, and its digital presence flourished this decade. Multiple upgrades and redesigns of the main website, the creation of an athletics website and the campus-wide expansion of the wireless network highlighted a wide-array of innovations and improvements.

The fifth decade of the university's existence saw the departure of its fifth president as Dr. Ray Keck III shifted within the Texas A&M University System, accepting the same position with Texas A&M University-Commerce. Keck's vacancy was quickly filled by Dr. Pablo Arenaz, who still holds the position today.

Continuing to grow the university physically, digitally, in staffing and in educational offerings – aided by a wide array of funding and donations – helped TAMIU reach record enrollments.

While it has been a decade of addition, TA-

MIU also suffered notable losses. The most was also the most recent with the Nov. 2019 passing of Sue Killam.

A challenging start to the decade

In the same year it twice celebrated its highest enrollment to date, TAMIU faced significant obstacles in sustaining its growth amid substantial budget cuts. State budget cuts announced in 2011 hit Texas higher education institutions hard. TAMIU faced an 18% reduction in its biennial operating budget, which equated to around \$9.2 million total and \$4.6 million per year.

Keck was outspoken and blunt in addressing the budget reduction in June 2011. He pointed to the university's relative youth and its mushrooming enrollment as causes for concern compared to more established institutions facing the same reductions.

"We are bloodied but unbowed," Keck said at the time. "Like all of Texas' public universities, we are deeply concerned with the reductions in state funding and the potential for lasting damage that we believe they may represent. All universities are thriving engines of community change and betterment: driving growth, business investments and quality of life enhancements. That engine has been effectively slowed by this legislative session.

"It's important to realize that this young university, more than older institutions, is dependent on so-called special item funding, a misnomer for funding that actually represents base funding



DR. RAY KECK



DR. PABLO ARENAZ

and supports the bulk of faculty salaries and degree program delivery. Despite valiant efforts by our legislative team of Sen. (Judith) Zaffirini, Rep. (Ryan) Guillen and Rep. (Richard) Peña Raymond, these cuts have been sustained."

The two areas hit hardest by the cuts were fi-

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nancial aid provided by the state and operations costs. TAMIU worked to avoid staff reduction, but salaries were frozen, employees' share of insurance costs rose and expenditures such as employee travel and professional education, growth and development programs were cut or significantly reduced. The university also declined to fill 11 positions, which included several planned to manage dramatic enrollment growth.

Despite these limitations, enrollment continued to thrive. Prior to the announcement of the cuts, TAMIU posted its highest spring enrollment to date increasing by 7.49% with 6,544 students. With financial aid from the state impacted, the university helped students identify alternatives such as scholarships and loans. TAMIU grew again in the fall surpassing 7,000 students for the first time. It grew by 2.71% over the previous fall with an enrollment of 7,039 students.

"We lived through it and came out of it a much stronger institution," Arenaz said. "Even with the budget cuts, we were able to do some things I'm very proud of. We enhanced our first- and second-year programs. We have some of the highest retention rates of any four-year institution in Texas. We're very proud of that. We've tried really hard."

TAMIU gains its sixth president

Keck served as TAMIU's fifth president for nearly 15 years as he was officially appointed on Sept. 1, 2001 and left in May 2016 before being named the Interim President at Texas A&M University-Commerce. He held that position until Aug. 31, 2018 when he stepped down with plans to take a year off before returning to teaching.

Upon Keck's departure, Arenaz immediately succeeded him as TAMIU's interim president after serving since 2008 as the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The interim half of the title was removed in November 2016 as the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents appointed Arenaz as TAMIU's sixth president.

"The transition has been relatively easy," Arenaz said. "We have moved a little bit from where we were into some new directions, and it should make us even stronger."

The shift in presidents was highlighted by a stark contrast in backgrounds. Keck earned his doctorate in romance languages and literature from Princeton University. Arenaz earned his doctorate in genetics and cell biology from Washington State University and his master's in biology from the University of Nevada at Reno.

"We each have our own sets of goals. My goals are certainly different than Ray's were," Arenaz said. "I talk about it in terms of ships and rudders. You want to move that rudder ever so slightly because you want to move it in the direction you want to go. It has been a great transition. Ray left a wonderful administrative team. We work well together and have a common vision. That helps us to move the university forward. Part of it is we want to add new programs, not only in the sciences but all areas. I want us to stay a comprehensive university."

With his background in the sciences, Arenaz has been instrumental in securing funding for the university. He has authored or co-authored more than 25 publications and more than 115 abstracts with much of his research focused on cell cycle regulation of DNA repair gene expression. Arenaz has assisted in securing research grants exceeding \$35 million from organizations

such as Carnegie Corporation of America, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation and the National Institute of General Medical Sciences.

"The broader picture has been improving what we do on this campus. The carryover has improved the scholarship in science and engineering and has had an impact across campus," Arenaz said. "We have people that we've brought in who are becoming well known because of their scholarship both nationally and interna-

tionally.

"We've tried to build that culture of becoming a research teaching institute, kind of a mid-level institute where we value and expect high-quality teaching, but we also value good scholarship. We have brought in a lot of outstanding faculty in the last 10 years who embrace both of those. We have people publishing books and great articles whether it's in sociology, history, biology or education. They are getting recognition nationally for their research."

Expanding fields of study



TAMIU INTRODUCES KEVIN ZAMORA AS ITS 8,000TH STUDENT ENROLLED IN FALL 2019.

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and programs

Whether serving as provost or president, Arenaz has helped the university steadily expand its fields of study and its programs offered over the past decade. He has stayed true to the mission of maintaining a comprehensive university with majors and minors added across a wide-array of disciplines. However, some of the most significant additions have been expanding the university's presence in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

TAMIU was recognized in January 2010 for

its efforts in a study by the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education. The study – financed by the National Science Foundation – named it among the nation's top 25 universities considered exemplars of good practices leading to the graduation of more Latinos in STEM.

A year later in January 2011, TAMIU added a new robotics competition called "FIRST Tech Challenge" aimed toward high school students eyeing a future in engineering or science. Tournament participants were mentored by TAMIU's

engineering faculty and local STEM teachers. In the same month, the university also held the first TAMIU STEM Day at the Lamar Bruni Vergara Science Center and Planetarium, an event sponsored by Congressman Henry Cuellar and the Office of Academic Affairs.

Cuellar also influenced the STEM presence at TAMIU as he announced the awarding of five federal grants which totaled more than \$49.9 million. The funding went to the university's diverse educational initiatives. The second of the grants was for increasing

the number of Hispanics and low-income students earning STEM degrees. The first grant was for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. The third helped migrant students or children of migrant

farm workers earn degrees and gain employment. The fourth provided scholarships to low-income nursing students, and the fifth drove science research by granting funds for an Applied Bio-

System 3500 Genetic Analyzer for the Molecular Ge-

netics Core Facility.

The advancements in STEM brought in additional funding that October as TAMIU received a US Department of Education Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program three-year grant for \$749,120 for its STEM Minority Outreach and Retention Enhancement Program.

TAMIU advanced its science research again that October using funds from a US Department of Education Title V PPOHA Program called "Graduate Retention Enhancement at TAMIU." The funds were used to purchase a JSM-6610LV high-performance, low-vacuum Scanning Electron Microscope. In announcing the acquisition of the microscope, Arenaz said, "this provides students with opportunities usually only available at much larger universities and enhances their competencies for further graduate or doctoral study.

In September 2013, the National Science Foundation provided more than \$1.5 million to TAMIU's STEM program increasing financial support for minority STEM students.

One of the biggest advancements in the program came in April 2014 as TAMIU announced a fall launch of a university-level academy on campus for high school juniors and seniors focusing on STEM and in-

ternational studies. The Texas Academy of International and STEM Studies was made possible by legislation authored by Senator Zaffirini and approved in 2005 by the 79th Texas Legislature.

"When I came in 2008 as provost, I think one of the reasons Ray Keck brought me in was my background in science," Arenaz said. "The thought was we needed to expand what we're doing in science. We were on the cusp of starting engineering. We'd just gotten the systems engineering off the ground, so the idea was how do we build and expand our engineering? How do we expand our biology and chemistry and really set into motion a different focus in the sciences and engineering?"

"Those fields provide universities like TAMIU with options you don't traditionally have in other fields for extramural research grants from the federal government and other companies. Part of the idea for building the infrastructure for engineering and enhancing the sciences was it would generate a bit more extramural funding for us as a university. We've done a good job of that. We've seen the research expenditures increase quite substantially over the last decade."

STEM advancements are just the tip of the iceberg for TAMIU. In 2011 it began offering minors in English-



TAMIU ANNOUNCED IN 2014 THE LAUNCH OF A STEM AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES ACADEMY.

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Spanish translation and in theatre. A Master of Science in Nursing Administration was approved in 2013, a master's in communication was approved in 2014 and a Master of Science in Mathematics-Applied Statistics was added in 2016. Also added in 2014 were the Haven, Green Dot and Safe Zone programs along with an artist in residence mariachi program.

TAMIU began offering a minor in women's and gender studies in 2017, and in 2018, its Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology was accredited through 2022. The university also added a new nursing program in partnership in 2018 with UT Health San Antonio, which was then known as the University of Texas Health Science Center. TAMIU also emphasized continued growth in 2018 by creating the Imagine 2045 Committee formed to help guide the university into the future. That future includes a bachelor's degree in public health which is likely to be available in 2021.

"That's part of the reason I came to Texas A&M International because I saw an opportunity for moving TAMIU forward and changing the course slightly to become a different institution than we were in 2008 when I came," Arenaz said. "When I first took over as president, I talked about how we're a

diamond. Diamonds become more brilliant when you cut more facets. We've tried to cut more facets so we become a more brilliant diamond."

Educational partnerships

As its available programs and fields of study have expanded, so to have TAMIU's educational partnerships. The partnerships range from within the city to across the globe.

A local partnership was established in July 2011 as TAMIU signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Laredo College, which was then called Laredo Community College. The agreement allowed students to have joint admission between the two schools.

The expansion of the engineering program was enhanced in 2014 thanks to an agreement within the Texas A&M University System. TAMIU and Texas A&M University-Kingsville signed an agreement which facilitated the transfer of pre-engineering students to TAMUK's Frank H. Dotterweich College of Engineering.

Arenaz signed a Memorandum of Agreement in February 2015 with the Governor of Tamaulipas. It allowed for faculty and student exchanges and for collaborative research and activities with universities throughout the state of Tamaulipas.

UT Health San Antonio agreed in September 2017 to a Memorandum of Understanding with TAMIU for an early acceptance program known as the Laredo Early Acceptance Program.

In May 2018, Arenaz and Carolina Zaragoza, the Consul General of México in Laredo, signed a Memorandum of Understanding that reestablished the Institute of Mexicans in the Exterior Becas Program at TAMIU.

"We are an international university, and we're the only one in Texas that has international in our name," Arenaz said. "I thank Senator Zaffirini for that. She's the one that put it in the legislation and fought for it. We've embraced the idea. We have the ability to develop joint and dual degree programs with international universities. We look into those opportunities. We're

always looking for partnerships in Mexico and beyond where we can develop relationships for student exchange and opportunities for faculty to engage with each other.

"It's a wonderful opportunity we have. We also push our students to have an international experience. We have expanded our study abroad programs. It helps our students because it gives them a very different perspective. It's all part of the international aspect of our institution that we're trying to build on."

Embracing the digital age

Part of establishing an identity as an international institution has been embracing technology and the digital age. Along with enhancing the university's global presence, advancements in technology have also made international partnerships

and collaborative research easier than ever.

TAMIU's venture into the digital age took a pair of steps forward in 2011 as it debuted its app and produced a digital version of its annual president's report for the first time. The godust-devils.com athletics website launched in 2012, and any students interested in checking it out could easily get online thanks to the expansion of the university's wireless network to cover 100% of the campus.

The university took several steps forward in 2013 starting with the business school adding online programs. The College of Education launched an online master's program, and TAMIU discussed online programs with 40 Mexican universities. TAMIU also improved the student experience by adding Microsoft



Upcoming Schedule

TAMIU 2020/Vision of our Past	Jan. 30
Spirit Week	Feb. 3-8
Presidential Lecture Series presents Dr. Jerry Thompson	Feb. 6
Discover TAMIU	Feb. 29
Homecoming & Tailgate	Feb. 2020*
TAMIU athletics BBQ Party & Car Show	March 21
Residential Lecture Series	March 25
The Big Event	March 28
TAMIU Alumni Golden Celebration	March 28

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365 to student email and getting dynamic scheduling prepared for the upcoming spring semester.

The library went digital with a cloud-based system in 2014. In 2016, TAMIU redesigned its website with a “Go Beyond” theme. It also made all four Masters of Business Administration programs accessible online.

A technological enhancement in 2017 also improved the campus and made TAMIU more environmentally conscious. A “smart” irrigation system was created in a collaboration between campus’ maintenance partner SCC Services for Education and Weathermatic, a leader in water conservation. Later that year, TAMIU launched an online portal called Uconnect which allowed web-based access for students, faculty and staff to a variety of functions.

“The ability for us to create electronic access to student records for each individual student was a huge transition for us,” said Dr. Minita Ramirez, TAMIU Vice President for Student Success. “One of the greatest things we’ve done is moving into the modern technology world, and that’s happened over the last decade. We’ve been able to transition all of our documents and records and everything to digital formatting.

“As a student today, you could log in and it would say your degree is completed 70% or 80%. At a glance, you know where you stand and what courses you need to graduate. So that was a huge transition for us.”

Following its redesign of the website earlier in the decade, TAMIU turned its focus to social media in 2019 launching an Instagram TV channel. With the added focus to

producing video content, the “txamiu” Instagram account was up to 2,199 posts and 5,332 followers as of Jan. 16.

“We’ve embraced technology,” Arenaz said. “Like a lot of companies, we continue to try to reinvent and redevelop our website. We’ve pushed into social media much more than we were 10 years ago, and we’ll continue to do that. We’re always looking for ways to get our message out to young people not only in Laredo but across the region and across the state.

“We have been very lucky with grants from the National Science Foundation, NASA and the Department of Education. We’ve been able to build some network clusters, neural clusters and computer clusters so we can do big-time data analysis and big-time calculations. That has been very good for us. We’ve improved our Wi-Fi multiple times over the last 10 years. We’re trying to make sure this campus is keeping up with trends. We make sure the faculty and students have the technology they need to do their job or get their education and be successful.”

Campus construction

Technological advancement and improving the student experience have been at the heart of construction around campus this decade. The clearest example is also the most recent with the opening of the Academic Innovation Center.

The \$68 million project broke ground in 2016 and was unveiled on Aug. 26, 2019, a day before the first classes of the fall semester. The three stories of the building feature 21 educational labs and classrooms which includes a two-story design lab. The building is approximately

90% glass allowing people passing by to see engineers designing and biology and chemistry students working in laboratories. The classrooms have several features geared toward collaboration including arrangeable tables, writable walls and monitors where students can project their work.

“The Academic Innovation Center, when we designed it working with the architects, we really wanted to build a state-of-the-art teaching and research facility,” Arenaz said. “We were able to achieve that. It really is a magnificent building. If I were to go back into the classroom, I’d want to spend all my time teaching in that building. It makes it a great learning and teaching environment.”

At the start of the decade, TAMIU had another pair of additions. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held in February 2010 for an Autism Interventions Center. In July, TAMIU opened the University Success Center. The \$25 million building centralized previously separated units to allow current and prospective students to access all essential service areas under one roof.

The university dedicated its Dual Language Lab in May 2012 which provided a facility to help with research, studying and training in dual languages. The communications field also received a boost in 2015 with the dedication of the TAMIU KLRN Studio. The studio is a digital learning laboratory which created an opportunity to work collaboratively



TAMIU PRESIDENT DR. PABLO ARENAZ IS JOINED BY SENATOR JUDITH ZAFFIRINI AND OTHERS FOR THE ACADEMIC INNOVATION CENTER RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY.

with KLRN Public Television of South Texas.

Expanding enrollment

The continued progression in programs, partnerships, technology and facilities has aided TAMIU in routinely reaching new heights in enrollment.

Following the new benchmarks set in 2011, the university’s student body dramatically increased again in 2018. Boosted by a record freshman class of 1,351, TAMIU set a new mark in the fall of 2018 with 7,996 students. That record lasted only a year as enrollment surpassed 8,000 for the first time with 8,455 students in the fall of 2019.

“I’m really proud of the impact the university has had on this community,” Arenaz said. “We are seeing more second- and third-generation students coming. We are now becoming the institution of choice for local students because they realize they can get a quality education here. That all speaks to reputation.

“We’re going to give students

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the education, but we're also going to give them the intangibles, things that make them stand out like our co-curricular activities, our leadership programs and our study abroad programs. We make sure they get the skills they need to be successful. That's what I'm most proud of is that our graduates are competitive. They are making an impact."

A decade of loss

In a decade of rapid growth, TAMIU also featured notable losses

through both deaths and retirements. One of them was the loss of Sue Killam -- who along with her husband Radcliffe Killam significantly impacted the university -- as she died Nov. 18 at 100 years of age. The Killams had a wide impact including helping get the university launched in 1970 and helping get the land for TAMIU's 300-acre campus.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of one of this university's most enduring friends and partners,"

Arenaz said. "Sue Spivey Killam was a true force for the betterment of higher education in South Texas. She championed this university singly and alongside her husband Radcliffe Killam and their family. As a member of the Board of Regents of the University System of South Texas, the governing body for the former Texas A&I University at Laredo and Laredo State University, she provided keen insight and cultural awareness

that greatly influenced the university's initial years and subsequent growth. With Radcliffe, both built a truly astounding legacy now known as Texas A&M International University."

TAMIU had several additional losses in its fifth decade. In February 2013, the university honored its 3,000th student to enroll in 1998 dedicating a memorial scholarship in the name of beloved local science educator Esther Buckley. A memorial was held in June 2014 honoring the memory of 30-year faculty member and Professor Emeritus Dr. Rafael A. Lecuona and dedicating a scholarship in his honor. Another memorial was held in August 2017 for Robert "Bob" Batey, a former employee within the College of Arts and Sciences.

In 2018, a memorial concert was held to celebrate the legacy of E.H. Corrigan. A passionate supporter of the arts, Corrigan gifted the Sharkey Corrigan Organ to TAMIU in 2012, and it was played during his memorial concert.

TAMIU also saw this decade the retirements of two employees who had been with the university since at or near the beginning. David Vermilyea joined the university in 1970 and retired in June 2012 after 42 years of service. His last post was as the director of international student services. In January 2018, Dr. Julio F. Madrigal wrapped up a 45-year career retiring as the executive director of TAMIU Special Programs.

"It feels like family here," Arenaz said. "It is a very different atmosphere here than other places I've

been. I attribute that to some extent to Ray Keck. He tried to create that kind of environment and we've tried to keep it. It is important. One of the things that is different about Texas A&M International is we are committed to mission here. We are committed to ensuring the people of this region, Laredo and Webb County and beyond, have access to quality higher education. Our faculty and staff are committed to that."

Thanks to that commitment, a summary of the accomplishments and noteworthy events of the past decade for TAMIU could go on even longer than the extensive list on the university's 50th anniversary website. As the relatively young university embarks on its sixth decade, its sixth president is confident the exponential growth will continue.

"We are on the precipice of doing even greater things than we've done," Arenaz said. "We have an outstanding faculty. We have the largest student body we've ever had. Our students are competitive. I would put our students up against anybody. They are getting jobs with Fortune 500 companies and are getting into outstanding graduate schools. Our nurses are all employed, often even before they graduate. Our teaching candidates are highly sought after.

"We are on the precipice and are going to see a huge leap in the next two or three years. We already are receiving national accolades for lots of things, and a lot of them are things I'm very proud of like upper mobility and return on investment. That says a lot about the quality of the graduate we produce."

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TEXAS A&M INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
A World of Difference



SHARE YOUR STORY!

Your story is our story – and now it's time to share that story! We're inviting individuals who have been impacted by the University to share a memory or moment that's forever changed their lives.

 **VISIT** us at <http://50.tamiau.edu/yourstory>.

 **UPLOAD** your story, photos, and videos.

 **SUBMIT** your story.

 **FOLLOW TXAMIU** on our official social media channels.

For more information on TAMIU's 50th anniversary, follow TXAMIU on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Spotify, use the hashtag #TAMIU50 and visit the school's website at 50.tamiau.edu.



[TAMIU.EDU/50](https://tamiu.edu/50)

From a study carrel on a shared campus to three name changes and an inspiring home on 300-acres in northeast Laredo, TAMIU has quite a story.

And with over 29,000+ graduates worldwide, odds are you or a member of your family have shared in our story. Our 50th Anniversary theme, “A World of Difference,” affirms how we’ve impacted our community, region, and world... and will do so for generations to come

Join our Celebration and share in our story.

*It's a story 50 years in the making.
It's the story of a lifetime.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan. 21 • First Day of Class
tamiu.edu

Feb. 29 • Discover TAMIU
tamiu.edu/discover/tamiu

March 28 • TAMIU Alumni Golden Celebration
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go.tamiu.edu/golden

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