



UTEP Hosts Border Drug Issues Conference

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Community agencies and researchers dedicated to substance abuse prevention will gather at The University of Texas at El Paso to explore effective prevention strategies in Hispanic populations during the U.S.-Mexico Border Drug Issues Conference, May 22-23.

The event will take place from 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 22 and from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 23 at the Tomás Rivera Conference Center on the third floor of Union Building East.

The event is free and open to the public, and the media is invited to attend.

The conference is being held in collaboration with the U.S./Mexico Border Initiative's 4th Annual Meeting and UTEP's 2012 VIDA Project Conference.

"This event brings together people that normally do not unite to attack the same problem of substance abuse," said Edward Castañeda, Ph.D., professor and chair of UTEP's Department of Psychology and the VIDA Project's primary investigator. "We are either providing interventions or gathering knowledge about substance abuse disorders, and so we need a forum where we can come together and start a cross-fertilization of ideas by teaching others what we know and by being receptive to new perspectives about the same problem."

More than 200 participants are expected to attend the event, which includes panel discussions on topics such as "Federal Perspectives on Drug Use Along the U.S.-Mexico Border," "U.S. Mexico Border Drug Issues," and "Behavioral Health Practice and Science." A panel on "Neuroscience, Modeling Stress and Drug Abuse" will examine how stress can be a factor in developing a drug addiction.

Participants will attend breakout sessions on a variety of discussions, such as "Competency: Effects on Immigration, Migration and Healthcare," "Health Reform and the Effects on Border Prevention Providers," and "Crime Victims Compensation: What everyone needs to know about their rights."

Joe Frascella, director of the Division of Clinical Neuroscience and Behavioral Research for the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), will offer a session on how to successfully apply for a NIDA grant.

A presentation of research posters related to substance abuse and how it impacts the lives of the population on the U.S.-Mexico Border will take place from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday. The best student poster presentation and the best service provider poster presentation will each receive a \$100 prize.

From noon to 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, students will meet with faculty members to discuss different approaches to studying drug abuse issues, including perspectives from social workers and neuroscientists.

In addition to the networking and sharing of knowledge and resources, the event is expected to strengthen the bridge between science and practice, said Christina López-Gutiérrez, project director for U.S. Counties Along the Mexico Border Initiative with Behavioral Assessment Inc.

"This was a golden opportunity to have both researchers and community providers in one setting to create a learning community so that both researchers and practitioners can have an opportunity to dialogue and share perspectives from their individual work," López-Gutiérrez said.

The VIDA Project launched in 2011 with a \$2 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. Led by Castañeda, the interdisciplinary program brings together UTEP faculty from the colleges of Science, Liberal Arts, and Health Sciences to conduct a five-year study on the unique factors that contribute to drug use along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Researchers collaborate in activities that integrate the neuroscience and socio-cultural dimensions of drug use among vulnerable Hispanics.

The pilot projects include: Stress Induced Vulnerability, Sexual Risk among HIV-positive Hispanic men, Juramentos-A Form of Substance Abuse Control, Social and Contextual Vulnerability, and Language Samples Used to Identify Vulnerability.