

UTB graduate receives valuable experience as HACU intern in Houston

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS – JULY 1, 2015 – Vanessa Sandoval, a graduate of the final class of [The University of Texas at Brownsville](#) on Saturday, May 9, is thankful that her older sister encouraged her to apply to the [National Internship Program](#) of the [Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities](#) (HACU).

Sandoval is a summer intern at the [Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center](#) in Houston, Texas. One of 236 HACU interns selected out of 1,271 applicants, Sandoval is among the 102 field interns placed throughout the country, and the only one assigned to a post in Houston.



Vanessa Sandoval

"I got the good news just two weeks before graduation that I was accepted," she said. "At first, I was a little shocked because I was assigned as a field intern in Houston. My sister had done her internship in Washington, D.C., which is typical of most HACU internships. But, I was eager to get experience, and Houston sounded like a great place to gain that."

A month after receiving her bachelor's degree in government and psychology, Sandoval was off to Washington, D.C. for HACU orientation.

"Being in Washington and meeting the other interns was exciting," she said. "We started getting to know each other right away at the Friday dinner, then had a packed program all weekend."

The program included exploring the nation's capital, visiting monuments, and for many, including Sandoval, taking their first ride on a subway, the DC Metro.

"I flew straight from D.C. to Houston, and started my internship with Veterans Affairs the next day," she said. "My supervisor has been so welcoming – everyone has been – making sure I'm comfortable at work and the extended stay hotel where I've been staying. I immediately felt at home here."

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Sandoval's internship is in the Equal Employment Opportunity office at the DeBakey VA Medical Center, with more than 5,000 employees.

"In the EEO office, our focus is to ensure that employees are able to provide the best care to the patients, which is the mission of the medical center," Sandoval said. "With this many people under one roof, employee issues are bound to occur. I'm learning about employee disputes and workplace claims; and if an employee has a disability, we find ways to provide reasonable accommodation."

Sandoval said her double major of government and psychology has prepared her well for the on-the-job training she is receiving.

"This is such a fabulous opportunity for me; I have been here just a short time, but I am learning so much," she said. "Something else I am learning came first as culture shock. I am experiencing true diversity for the first time in my life. Here at the VA Med Center we have people of all ethnicities – from other states as well as countries all over the world. As a Hispanic, I am not in the majority anymore, as it is in Brownsville, and I was at first a little out of my comfort zone, but I've adjusted to the environment."

Sandoval credits the three years in her student employment with the Office of Student Engagement for helping prepare her for her internship.

"It was my first job ever so it was all new to me," she said. "I started off as a shy person, but by my final semester I was on stage with a microphone being the master of ceremonies for university events; plus, I was overseeing all the student organizations on campus. That job took me out of my bubble and made me want to do that for other college students. I wouldn't trade my first job for anything!"

A graduate of Brownsville's Porter High School, Sandoval was selected as a UTB University Scholar.

"My financial aid wasn't going to cover all my classes," she said. "Being a University Scholar allowed me to receive an education in four years in the two fields I really enjoyed."

As a University Scholar, Sandoval lived on campus at Casa Bella student residence.

"Living at Casa Bella allowed me to grow up," she said. "I had to learn how to wash, cook real food – not just cereal or sandwiches – and manage my time wisely. That prepared me for my internship and living on my own in a different city."

The University Scholars program will continue at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley with its new name, UTRGV Scholars.

Created by the Texas Legislature in 2013 in a historic move that combines the resources and assets of UT Brownsville, The University of Texas Pan American in Edinburg and the Regional Academic Health Center in Harlingen, UTRGV will open its doors for the first day of classes on August 31.

For more information on The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Scholars, contact Griselda Castilla at 956-665-8942 or griselda.castilla@utrgv.edu.

For more information on the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, call 210-692-3805 or hacu@hacu.net.

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