**News Release**

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**UTEP Engineering Students Awarded USDA Graduate Fellowship**

Karla Gutierrez and Olivia Moreno, Environmental Science Ph.D. students at The University of Texas at El Paso, were awarded United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Graduate Fellowships. The fellowships will be fulfilled at the Career Preparation Institute organized by the USDA.

The fellows were announced during the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) Annual meeting in Costa Mesa, California March 7-10. The purpose of the meeting was to promote, network and prepare USDA Latino fellows for doctoral programs and or work force in the food and agricultural sciences within the USDA.

Olivia Moreno said of the meeting, “We learned opportunities for community-based engagement in the Latino community, negotiating our identity and developing a sense of identity in policy formulation and implementation of those policies in our communities.” She adds, “It was extremely gratifying to exchange ideas and identify potential advancement opportunities for Hispanics in USDA.”

The fellowship program attracts top talent to focus their studies and research on USDA priority areas in Food Safety, Climate Change, Sustainable Energy and Childhood Obesity. USDA Fellows participate with senior faculty researchers and USDA agency representatives in the Career Preparation Institute. During the Institute participants use the development of leadership plan compatible with USDA priority areas to gain insight into USDA challenges.

The fellowships are part of the Connecting Underrepresented Latinos To Integrate Values and Academic Resources (CULTIVAR) program. CULTIVAR addresses the need to attract
outstanding, underrepresented students and prepare graduates capable of enhancing the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional workforce.

“The opportunity to become a USDA fellow, being part of the first generation of the CULTIVAR project and the ability to interact with a diversity of people who have the same interests but different points of view was invaluable,” said Karla Gutierrez “This interaction exposed us to real world problems with real world solutions proposed by Engineers, Scientists, Food and Animal Specialists.”