



**INSTITUTE for EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE**  
Informing Decisions · Improving Practice · Increasing Student Success



**Caring Campus**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Oct. 16, 2024

**CONTACT:** Katie Emerson

(909) 324-0345

[katharine.emerson@vmapr.com](mailto:katharine.emerson@vmapr.com)

## **Texas A&M University – Kingsville Student Flourishes with Support of Caring Campus**

**LONG BEACH, CA** – At Texas A&M University – Kingsville (TAMUK), establishing a caring and welcoming culture is a cornerstone of the student experience. As a Caring Campus, TAMUK continues to foster an environment where students feel valued, supported, and empowered to achieve their educational goals.

One such student is Amberly Zaragoza, a graduate student in plant and soil science, whose journey at TAMUK exemplifies the impact of this caring culture.

Zaragoza transferred to TAMUK as an undergraduate student, where she began pursuing a degree in animal science, after attending a community college for two years. A class on soils for her major first ignited her passion for plant and soil sciences, and she decided to pursue a master's degree with the encouragement of her dean.

"Everyone at TAMUK is so welcoming, whether it's professors, staff, or even fellow students – there's always someone there to offer help or encouragement," said Zaragoza, who plans to pursue a Ph.D. once she completes her graduate program in May 2025. "They can't seem to get rid of me here, so much so that I want to return as a professor and continue contributing to this great campus."

Caring Campus, led by the Institute for Evidence-Based Change, equips staff and faculty with the tools to engage students in meaningful ways that promote retention, persistence, and success. The focus is on creating a supportive atmosphere where every student feels they belong. TAMUK first began implementing Caring Campus in January 2024.

Zaragoza credits the caring culture at TAMUK for helping her overcome challenges, particularly when she struggled with the demands of graduate school. Her dean stepped in to become her advisor amid his hectic schedule, providing the guidance and support she needed to continue her studies.

"It's a really big thing when staff and faculty go out of their way to help students," Zaragoza said. "There are often campus programs to help students feel connected, but not every student is involved in those programs. Having staff and faculty members who reach out and support students on their own really goes a long way."

Zaragoza said she is excited about the Caring Campus implementation she has seen on campus, including welcome events, first-week greetings, nametags, and cross-departmental collaboration.

**MORE**

“Staff and faculty around campus smile and say ‘hello’ – such small gestures can really make students feel truly seen,” Zaragoza said. “I think Caring Campus will boost retention by showing students that the people here genuinely care about their success. It creates a positive, supportive environment where students can really thrive.”

Zaragoza’s experience reflects the broader impact of Caring Campus at TAMUK, where small yet meaningful actions by faculty and staff create a sense of belonging for students.

“We are proud of the impact that TAMUK’s commitment to Caring Campus has on students like Amberly,” Caring Campus founder and CEO Brad Phillips said. “When faculty and staff show students they care, it not only enhances their college experience but also increases retention and improves academic outcomes. We look forward to seeing this culture continue to grow at TAMUK.”

### PHOTO CAPTIONS:

**IEBC\_TAMUK1:** Texas A&M University – Kingsville (TAMUK) graduate student Amberly Zaragoza has experienced the caring culture at TAMUK, which is growing under Caring Campus. Zaragoza decided to pursue a master’s degree in plant and soil science at the encouragement of her dean.

**IEBC\_TAMUK2:** Texas A&M University – Kingsville participated in Caring Campus, equipping staff and faculty with the tools to engage students in meaningful ways that promote retention, persistence, and success.

###