**South Texas College**

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***Arrests & Development:* Veteran Police Officer Discovers a New Beat at STC**

The City of Roma Police Department issues every officer the same gun and badge. But when Officer Alvaro Trevino launched his career as a cop, he started with something beyond the standard issue.

A graduate of South Texas College’s Criminal Justice program, Trevino gained not only the knowledge and passion to serve, but also a level of street savvy uncommon to a rookie officer, thanks to the influence of his instructor, Oscar Garza.

“It was the real-life scenarios that he went through as an officer here, at the city I’m working in now, which would grab your attention,” recalls Trevino about classes with his mentor. “That really sets him on top as far as being a good instructor.”

Garza knows his former student’s territory well. He spent most of the 25+ years of his career in the same department where Trevino now serves, and he was pleased to provide a reference for the motivated graduate.

“He’s one of my best students,” says the proud professor, who has seen grads like Trevino go on to serve with local police and sheriff departments, the Border Patrol, and beyond. Many even go on to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees in criminal justice.

Garza regularly gives out his personal phone number to students, compelling many to stay in touch long after graduation. He reflects on a recent call from a former student, now pursuing her bachelor’s degree, who reported that “they are talking about the things that you told us we were going to hear again!”

Teaching future community servants is “a dream job,” according to Garza, who earned his associate degree in criminal justice at South Texas College in 2009 while working as a full-time police officer. He went on to obtain a bachelor’s and later a master’s from the University of Texas-Pan American (now the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley), graduating with honors, all while keeping his precious dream in mind.

“I pursued my master’s degree specifically to teach at STC,” says Garza, proud to be in the position to carry on his South Texas College instructors’ legacy.

He started as an STC dual enrollment instructor for the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo district in 2016, before joining the Starr County Campus as an associate criminal justice instructor. This past January, Garza celebrated becoming a full-time instructor. To hear the professor tell it, “It’s been a blessing to work with so many professionals who dedicate their time to the success of students.”

In the classroom, Garza loves to share his stories and expertise from more than two decades of law enforcement. He regularly calls upon his connections to invite local police chiefs, investigators, state troopers, lawyers, and even officials from Customs and Border Patrol to share on-the-job wisdom in his classroom. From the day-to-day aspects of the job to heart-pumping stories of heroism, the exposure helps foster students’ interest in the unexpectedly versatile field. Hands-on learning also entails field trips to the local courthouse, where students observe actual trials and ask the judge questions after the proceedings.

For Garza, the best part of teaching is helping students land their dream jobs in law enforcement. Often, he says, students from other disciplines start off in his introductory course and end up changing majors to criminal justice. Not long ago, says Garza, a campus administrator called to let him know that since he started teaching, the criminal justice program has grown by a whopping 88 percent.

“I try to make it interesting,” beams the professor, who one day aims to write a book detailing his experiences as an officer, as well as his struggles to earn his degrees. “I love what I do.”

When it comes to real-world learning and resume-boosting opportunities, Garza also sponsors the Starr Campus Criminal Justice Club, where students network with local law enforcement agencies while serving the community.

The club hosts fundraising activities like a tug-of-war with the Roma Fire Department and the annual club carwash, and provides volunteer hours to Casa Amistad, a nonprofit shelter that doubles as a food pantry and soup kitchen. From serving meals to helping the elderly carry groceries to their cars, students connect with their community and gain experience in serving its members.

Club members also assist local law enforcement agencies with the annual “National Night Out” event, a nationwide crime prevention program in which the community mingles with officers who keep neighborhoods safe. Students help do everything from distributing school supplies to children to assisting with fair rides.

Not only is the club a great way to meet potential employers, says Garza, but students also develop a sense of commitment to serve as volunteers in the community.

“Being in the club can go on a resume,” says Garza. “That’s another reason students join.”

Garza’s grads are grateful for the extracurricular experience. Trevino remembers with pride how he helped the professor found the Criminal Justice Club and served as its president for a term. He says being involved in the club helped him feel like he was giving back to the community while also clarifying his future career path.

“We would interact with real law enforcement officers to get a better picture of what we were going into,” recalls Trevino. “We got our feet wet.”

The alum shares that he is “a person who loves action,” and for him, Garza’s classes prepared him for the challenges ahead. For example, the instructor was sure to make students aware of the “roller-coaster” nature of law enforcement careers, preparing them to be ready for anything. Now that he’s in the field, Trevino couldn’t agree more.

“You can be sad or disappointed with a medical call, maybe a deceased person,” says the officer. “And then half an hour later, you are on a vehicle pursuit, and your adrenaline is pumping all of the way.” So, like his teacher always said, “You just have to be ready for the unexpected.”

Looking back, Trevino is grateful for the solid foundation and practical experience his favorite professor gave him to launch his career.

“Now, I can relate to what he was explaining all of the time during class,” shares Trevino, who hopes to one day join the Border Patrol. “I can say: ‘Mr. Garza was right.’”

For Garza, priming students like Trevino to keep the community safe is all the reward he needs to keep on teaching.

“I didn’t get my master’s to join the FBI or Customs or Border Patrol,” says the dedicated instructor. “I wanted to share my knowledge with students for them to move on as law enforcement officers.”

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