

AcademiCast Transcript
Texas Tech University
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Pierce: This is AcademiCast—Texas Tech University’s podcast series from the Office of the Provost. I’m Rachel Pierce, and I’ll be covering the top academic and research stories on campus. Later in the program, we’ll spotlight Student of Integrated Scholarship Graysen Ortega. First, the news...

University scientists are investigating West Texas’ quail population. The region’s quail numbers plummeted in 2010, sparking a research collaboration among Texas Tech, Texas A&M and Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch. The ranch is funding nearly \$3 million in studies by the universities, which began their work two years ago. Initial work by the ranch found high levels of parasitic worms prior to and during the population decline. Researchers have examined more than 600 birds on ranches and wildlife preserves in West Texas and western Oklahoma. So far, scientists have found lead, mercury and pesticides in quails’ tissues, which could weaken immune systems and make the quail more susceptible to parasites and viruses.

In other news, Texas Tech is named a wise investment for its graduates. Landing on the list of “Affordable Colleges with High Returns,” the university was recognized for offering four years of tuition at less than \$40,000, and it boasts a 30-year return on investment of about \$330,000.

The university’s National Wind Institute has also attracted acclaim. Popular Science listed NWI among the 10 Most Awesome College Labs in the U.S.

To learn more about these stories and others, visit our website at academicast.ttu.edu. And now we turn to Texas Tech’s Student of Integrated Scholarship, featured here by Kristina Butler.

Butler: Food science research has long been part of Graysen Ortega’s life. Ortega is a Lubbock native, and during high school, he began working in the lab with Mindy Brashears, a professor of food microbiology and food safety. Ortega’s sustained interest in the field led him to Texas Tech, where he has majored in food science. Now a senior, Ortega analyzes foodborne strains of *E. coli* and species of *Salmonella* as a fellow of Texas Tech’s undergraduate research program.

Ortega: I’ve been very blessed to have Dr. Mindy Brashears as my mentor since high school. She’s been guiding me through research, and we study foodborne pathogens. My focus has been on salmonella and *E. coli*. Since coming to Tech I’ve been able to present my research at the Institute of Food Technologists’ annual conference. I’ve been able to become a Howard Hughes Medical Institute research scholar. Being involved in undergraduate research definitely takes a lot of time and effort. You definitely have to

balance it with your class and all your other commitments, but it's definitely very rewarding.

Butler: The global reach of food science research has taken Ortega to Costa Rica and Mexico, where he has assisted Brashears and other scientists with their work. Also, he has interned for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture in Washington, D.C. Ortega hopes to be an advocate for food producers and food safety. And he plans to continue his education. AcademiCast applauds Graysen Ortega as Texas Tech's newest Student of Integrated Scholarship.

Pierce: Thanks, Kristina! If you would like to learn more about Texas Tech's Students of Integrated Scholarship, visit our website at academicast.ttu.edu. That concludes this edition of AcademiCast. Join us again in two weeks as we spotlight the top academic and research news from Texas Tech University, as well as profile Student of Integrated Scholarship Jennifer Zavaleta.