



# The Uvalde Leader-News

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## First GeoFORCE group completes program

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**AUSTIN - Four years and 16,000 miles later, the first 80 Southwest Texas high school students to take part in GeoFORCE Texas have completed the summer college preparatory program, making an educational odyssey from Washington, D.C., to Washington state, from the Grand Canyon to the Florida Keys, with stops along the way at geological sites in Utah, Oregon, Texas and Virginia.**

The high school seniors from 21 different public schools now move on to fulfill the program's mission by preparing for college.

Southwest Texas Junior College and The University of Texas at Austin began GeoFORCE in 2005 as a long-term experiment to increase the number of students pursuing degrees in math and science. Starting with 80 students entering ninth grade, the program has grown to 320 students in grades 9-12 from the SWTJC service area and, by 2009, another 320 from Houston.

In 2005, more than 120 students applied for the 40 spots in the inaugural weeklong summer academy □□\* so many that GeoFORCE administrators immediately added a second, two-day component to the program called Young Geoscientists. Student interest has remained rock-solid ever since. Of the original 40 students in the summer academy, only three have left, and none for academic reasons. (Students must maintain high academic standing to remain in the program.)

It's great to see students stay so committed to a program that's all about science and academic achievement, said Doug Ratcliff, director of outreach and international programs for The University of Texas at Austin's Jackson School of Geosciences, which oversees GeoFORCE. It gives you hope, and it speaks highly of the students and the support many receive from their families.

GeoFORCE inspires interest in science by taking students into the field to learn geology in spectacular locations. During the four years of the academy program, members of the inaugural class have studied structural geology while river rafting through Glen Canyon in Arizona, learned about volcanoes while hiking up Mount Saint Helens in Washington and assessed water quality while navigating the Florida Everglades.

Students in the Young Geoscientists program visited Texas quarries, identified sea life from the deck of a research vessel in the Gulf of Mexico, and will participate later this summer in a star-gazing party at the McDonald Observatory.

The ultimate goal of GeoFORCE is to move students into college with a significant number pursuing degrees in math and science. Ratcliff believes the inaugural class will set a high standard with more than 90 percent going to college, many of them seeking math, science and engineering degrees.

Free to students, GeoFORCE Texas depends on significant funding from sponsors. Total cost for all four years of an academy program is \$330,000.

Uvalde area members of the first group to complete the four-year GeoFORCE Texas summer academy program include Marissa Vara, Hillary Prado, Rosy Arellano and Nazarey Ortiz, all of Uvalde; Katie Bales of Sabinal; Michelle Rodriguez, Felipe Villanueva, Schaefer Edwards and Andrew Nunez, all of Uvalde; Carlos de la Torre of Sabinal; and former Nueces Canyon student Victoria Herndon who now lives in Pecos, Texas. The group recently returned from a week-long geological field trip to Florida on June 21-27.

Uvalde area members who participated in the GeoFORCE Texas 10th-grade summer academy trip on June 7-14 include Kelsey Bruce, Anissa Arce, Sierra King, Zenia Garza, Alexis Gonzalez, Cecilia Soliz, Sahera Rodriguez, Sanette Bermudez, Daniel Campos, Bryan Calk, J.T. Morey, Kalia Elrod, Travis Kiesling and Cheyenne Mueller. The group toured Zion National Park, Glen Canyon, the Grand Canyon and other geological sites in the southwestern U.S.



*THE GeoFORCE - Tenth graders who participated in the GeoFORCE Texas 10th-grade summer academy trip on June 7-14 include (front, left to right) Kelsey Bruce, Anissa Arce, Sierra King, Zenia Garza, Alexis Gonzalez, Cecilia Soliz, Sahera Rodriguez, Sanette Bermudez, (back) Daniel Campos, Bryan Calk, J.T. Morey, Kalia Elrod, Travis Kiesling and Cheyenne Mueller. The group toured Zion National Park, Glen Canyon, the Grand Canyon and other geological sites in the southwestern U.S.*

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