

Javier Reyes: Latino leadership impacting higher education



Javier Reyes has received the EXATEC Career Award for his career in public education, from academia to university leadership.

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Alejandro Salazar & AM ESTUDIOS

In July 2023, Tec graduate **Javier Reyes** became **the first Latino chancellor of the [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#)**, one of the most important public universities in the United States.

When he received the **EXATEC Career Award**, his response was: *"What a huge responsibility, but at the same time, what a pleasure to be the one doing it."*

Javier has **almost thirty years of experience working in public education** and thinks **of it as a system**.

This is not only in terms of teaching or research but as a network of relationships between the university, society, the economy, and the future.

Javier Reyes is the first Latino chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Amherst and winner of the 2026 EXATEC Career Award. / Photo: Alejandro Salazar



Thinking about education as a system

Javier Reyes has spent much of his professional life thinking about **education as a system, as a network of relationships between the university**, society, the economy, and the future.

That vision took him from academia to **university leadership** and, ultimately, to head **one of the most important public universities in the United States**.

However, the first few years of his career were focused on **academic research**. That is a very lonely job, he says.

But everything changed when he **started spending more time with students**, professors from other disciplines, and people outside the university.

“There were many brilliant researchers who were frustrated and needed to understand that they were part of a larger system.

“That’s when I realized that my purpose was to help others. I had to help translate, mediate, and connect”.

That discovery gradually led him to holding leadership positions at the university.

Between 2016 and 2021 he served as dean of the **John Chambers College of Business and Economics** at [West Virginia University](#).

Since then, he has instigated **transformation focused on entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic development**, strengthening the link between universities, industry, and the state government.

Reyes later joined the [University of Illinois Chicago](#), where he served as *Provost* and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and later Interim Chancellor.

He oversaw a campus with more than 33,000 students and a research portfolio of over **\$440 million**.

Javier Reyes studied Economics at Tecnológico de Monterrey, a background that shaped his career in public education. / Photo: Alejandro Salazar



Education as a permanent responsibility

“Ever since I was in university, and I suppose even before then and to this day, the Tec has had an interdisciplinary way of thinking”.

Javier **studied Economics at [Tecnológico de Monterrey](#)**, and says it’s where he learned that knowledge isn’t developed alone.

*“The Tec teaches you that **the answer doesn’t lie in a single discipline** but in a team. It teaches you to form an opinion, while also listening and engaging in dialogue”.*

That interdisciplinary approach didn’t stay in the classroom. It became his management style.

*“The education provided by the Tec, based on commitment, sustainability, and innovation, **is applied in all areas. The Tec continues to be an inspiration, and that’s something I carry with me every day**”.*

In the same vein, he believes that the future of education should be as follows:

*"I believe that **universities can't be just research or teaching**. They must reflect their influence in their communities and assume an active role in economic and social development".*

*"The education model is going to change, but **the value of education must increase**; it mustn't be lost".*

From his perspective, **universities have a** clear responsibility: to continue opening doors, continue **developing critical thinking and judgment**, and to continue being spaces where **ideas are discussed without prejudice**.

"Education can achieve anything". He adds that institutions like Tec and the public universities he has led have an obligation to continue fulfilling that role.

"The Tec teaches you that the answer doesn't lie in a single discipline but in a team. It teaches you to form an opinion, while also listening and engaging in dialogue".

Eva María Trujillo and Javier Arturo Reyes are the recipients of the 2026 EXATEC Career Award for their impact on health and education in Mexico and internationally. / Photo: AM ESTUDIOS



The Massachusetts milestone

In July 2023, Reyes assumed office as chancellor of the **University of Massachusetts Amherst**. With this, he became the institution's 31st leader and **the first Latino to hold the position**.

When it's presented to him that way, the moment turns personal.

"That's when you start to reflect. What a huge responsibility, but at the same time, what a pleasure to be the one doing it."

The **EXATEC Career Award** comes at the right time, he says.

*"There are days when you need that extra push, and **that award came at a critical time for public universities.**"*

During his acceptance speech after receiving the award, Javier dwells at length on his family.

He talks about his parents and the sacrifice they made so that he and his siblings could have access to a college education. *“My parents gave us everything,”* he says clearly.

He talks about **his wife, Maritza, who left Mexico to accompany him on his academic journey in the United States.**

“She left everything to follow us, adapting to a new country, a new language, and a life in constant motion”.

“This can’t be achieved alone. The support of a family is always behind success”.

EXATEC Career Award

Since [2020](#), the **EXATEC Career Award** has recognized [Tecnológico de Monterrey](#) graduates whose work has transformed communities and realities.

This year, the award was presented to **Eva María Trujillo** and **Javier Arturo Reyes**, graduates whose careers have had an impact on **mental health care** and **leadership in higher education**.

“The careers we recognize with the EXATEC Awards reflect the best of our alumni community: talent that becomes innovation, leadership that translates into service, and knowledge that transforms realities.

*“Eva Trujillo and Javier Reyes are examples of how education, **when lived with purpose**, multiplies its impact on health, education, and the future of our communities”,* said **Juan Pablo Murra**, Rector of Tecnológico de Monterrey.

The awards were presented in **Mexico City** to mark the **50th anniversary** of Tec de Monterrey’s continuous presence there.

MORE ABOUT THE EXATEC CAREER AWARD:

