The Academy for Teacher Excellence’s (ATE) La Clase Mágica after school Informal Learning Clubs provide Latinos and other minority students in low-income communities opportunities to experience hands-on STEM related activities in elementary and middle schools. Our purpose is to increase student interest in higher education, developing 21st century technology skills, raising awareness of potential teaching careers and general interest in the STEM fields.

The informal learning environment of our Robotics Clubs provides these typically underserved student learners a dynamic, learner-led approach to robotics exploration in a relaxed atmosphere.
Undergraduate students can earn service learning experience by mentoring in one of our 13 ATE-sponsored robotics clubs located in 6 school districts across San Antonio.

ATE’s service learning mentors will receive the following benefits:

- Free admission to all ATE hosted events and workshops
- Automatic membership in the Teacher Academy Learning Community (TALC)
- Career Transition Guidance to assist with learning and personal needs
- Service Learning Certificate for their professional portfolio
- Free iPad

The implementation of this informal learning experience is made possible through grants from the Department of Education: Title V, for Hispanic Serving Institutions.

ATE provides the majority of the start-up costs associated with operating a robotics club. ATE also provides on-going training and support to the coaches and mentors.

Using Lego® Mindstorms® robotics kits, the elementary and middle school student learners design, build, program, troubleshoot, re-design, and re-build the robots with the guidance of Coaches (club sponsors) and Mentors (UTSA students).

Working with robotics exposes students to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) concepts and develops real-world skills for future participation in a STEM-related career. Club activities challenge the students to become creative problem solvers in a fun and informal setting.

All of ATE’s robotics clubs have the opportunity to send a ten-person team of 9-to-12-year-olds to compete at the FIRST® Lego® League (FLL) regional robotics qualifier events and competitions each spring. The teams are judged on three elements – the Robot Game, the Project, and FLL Core Values. FLL expects and encourages teams to:

- Research their project and interview experts
- Fundraise and create a team identity
- Practice “Gracious Professionalism”
- Take team field trips