

# UHD University of Houston DOWNTOWN

MAGAZINE | SPRING/SUMMER 2023



## An Anchor for Houston



As I reflect on our work together, I am proud of, and thankful for, our accomplishments this past year. We have made notable progress on multiple interrelated goals within our Strategic Plan: A New Paradigm—our roadmap to becoming a model urban-centered university. Our Institutional Compass' Four Points of Excellence continue to serve as a directional guide, ensuring we remain on our intended path.

As a university driven by public purpose and committed to meeting the needs of our city, we understand there is reciprocity between our success and the success of the Houston Metroplex. We continue to align programs and curricula with complex urban issues and increase service-learning opportunities that nurture our students while investing in solutions for our local communities.

In this issue of UHD Magazine, we capture the stories that highlight our growth as an anchor institution.

Within these pages, you will discover updates on our

strategic partnerships, experiential community-based learning, and the combined efforts of our extraordinary students, faculty, staff, alumni, and dedicated supporters to advance our university forward.

This edition showcases faculty excellence and quality cocurricular instruction, including profound lessons for our students that unfold outside of the classroom. You will discover outstanding examples of student, staff, and alumni scholarship, service, and engagement—a representation of UHD's commitment to student success, elevated visibility, and community impact.

Our progress in enhancing student success, creating dynamic academic environments, sustaining operations, and disseminating impactful knowledge requires financial support from both the private and public sectors. We are thankful for our supporters and proud to report the many gifts and grants provided to us by our funding partners.

As UHD approaches its 50th anniversary, we invite you to join us in our mission to nurture talent, generate knowledge, and drive socioeconomic mobility for a just and sustainable future. Through our combined efforts, the impact of UHD will reach far beyond our time, and ultimately change the trajectories of families, ameliorate conditions in local communities, and contribute to the vitality of our region.

We are the anchor institution for Houston. We are the University of Houston-Downtown.

Loren J. Blanchard, Ph.D.  
President, University of Houston-Downtown

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# Growing as an Anchor Institution

By Marie Jacinto, Kionna LeMalle, Laura Wagner

**T**wo years ago, amidst a global pandemic, Dr. Loren J. Blanchard stepped into the role of President of the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD). Despite COVID-19's negative effects on higher education, Blanchard brought to life a vision for UHD, setting a course for new levels of success through four priorities he called Institutional Compass Points. In this issue, we spotlight Blanchard's efforts to steer UHD toward success in "Growing as an Anchor Institution."

**"UHD is more than a university *in* Houston;  
UHD is a university *for* Houston."**

— President Blanchard

# Addressing Students' Basic Needs to Secure Student Success

**“Access to basic needs resources will lead to improved student retention and graduation rates, positively affecting socioeconomic mobility for generations to come.”**

— President Blanchard

As an anchor institution, UHD is committed to graduating students with a degree of value, one that empowers them to take on critical roles as leaders in the community. But when students' basic needs are unmet—including issues with food, housing, transportation, physical/mental health, and dependent care—their ability to stay the course and graduate is in jeopardy.

To explore this issue, Blanchard hosted Leanne Davis, Senior Director of Education & Training Services at the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University in Philadelphia, for a President's Lecture Series event, “Supporting Students Starts With Basic Needs.”

**“Students are humans first, and their basic needs are essential conditions for learning,” said Davis. “We can't talk about providing society a more educated workforce unless we're addressing basic needs first.”**

A recent UHD student survey confirmed just how urgent the problem is: 30%-40% of participants reported facing one or more insecurities related to basic needs. UHD responded to this critical issue by launching a Basic Needs Center. With the help of a \$943,724 award from the U.S. Department of Education, the Center provides staffing and support to address immediate student needs and collects data through a case-management process. Ultimately, the Center will analyze data and create key performance indicator reports to assist the University in adjusting resources to address students' areas of greatest necessity.

Blanchard called the program a “collaboration and connections approach” that draws together and builds on existing efforts within UHD and provides access to resources via community partners. One cornerstone of those efforts

was laid in 2022 when UHD's Counseling & Disability Services (C&DS) team received a Trellis Foundation grant, “Mental Well-Being: A Basic Need for Postsecondary Students.” Dedicated to providing wraparound services—including counseling, workforce programming and placement, domestic violence awareness and support, and nutritional and financial assistance—the program has been facilitating students' access to internal and external resources. As a result, C&DS is building a community of partners equipped to meet the unique needs of UHD students.

These and other efforts that flow from the Basic Needs Center to the Gator community share the same goal: student success. **According to Blanchard, “The Center will consolidate existing campus-level interventions and services, improve awareness of and access to these services, and increase available resources, allowing students facing basic needs insecurities to stabilize and experience academic success.”**

## Partnering With Our Community to Improve Outcomes for All

**“An anchor institution partners with its city and the communities it serves.”**

— President Blanchard

Houston faces critical challenges, including an aging population and a lack of socioeconomic mobility for its most underserved residents. Research shows earning a college degree is highly correlated with socioeconomic mobility, yet only one-third of Houston-area residents have college degrees. Supporting students to graduate and advance their own social mobility while also teaching them to effect positive change in their community are two sides of UHD's educational efforts. Joining forces with community partners provides real-world experiences that take students beyond the classroom, enabling UHD graduates to become members of the community who both understand society's needs and who have the financial freedom to give back.

Under Blanchard's leadership, UHD has strengthened and added strategic partnerships with local businesses and stakeholders to support experiential learning initiatives that address the Houston community's most critical needs.

# Improving Literacy and Connectivity in Houston's Hispanic Community

**“Upgrading UHD’s bilingual e-library and involving children, parents, and teachers epitomize what it means for UHD to be an anchor for the city—not only through an accessible, online library specific to the needs of Houston’s Hispanic community, but also as a workforce development tool to grow the local economy significantly.”**

— President Blanchard

The project “Expanding the UHD Bilingual E-Library to Support Literacy Awareness and Connectivity Among the Hispanic Community” is multi-faceted in approach as well as in reach. The brainchild of co-investigators Dr. Irene Chen, Professor of Education in the Department of Urban Education in the College of Public Service, and Dr. Maria Bhattacharjee, a former UHD Associate Professor of Education, the two-year project garnered a \$2,470,225 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The first facet of the innovative project brings together children, parents, in-service bilingual/ESL teachers, UHD pre-service teachers, and UHD students from other programs such as Communication and Technology. Over the course of two years, 240 Hispanic families will receive assistance in writing culturally meaningful stories to augment the UHD bilingual e-library. In turn, Hispanic families will learn to use the e-library for self-teaching and as a resource for reading and writing with their children at home.

The second facet of the project will train representatives of Parent-Teacher Organizations/Associations (PTO/A) from seven elementary schools with high Hispanic student enrollment in reading comprehension strategies using the e-library. The PTO/A representatives will visit the University monthly to learn how to prepare students for a future at UHD and how to use the e-library to support the development of literacy skills. All parents will be invited to attend these meetings virtually.

This project will have a dramatic impact on workforce development and, ultimately, the local economy. According to Houston’s Adult Literacy Blueprint Executive Summary Report, published by the Mayor’s Office for Adult Literacy in partnership with the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation, Houston’s economic growth is linked to literacy achievement. The report stated, “Harris County’s economy could grow by \$13 billion if adults with low literacy could increase their literacy skills by even one level.”



**“Justice For All” by Victor Ash**

*Photo Courtesy of Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis*

**“The expectation is that as Hispanic families use the e-library, they will increase their literacy skill levels and abilities to self-teach using technology,” stated Bhattacharjee. “These skill sets, in turn, will increase the number of Hispanic individuals prepared to enter the labor market in Houston.”**

## Learning From Real-World Experience

**“As an anchor institution, we have both a civic and moral imperative to prepare our students to work and to serve.”**

— President Blanchard

UHD continually develops relationships with community partners—local nonprofits, schools, and businesses—growing a professional network for students through internships and service-learning opportunities.

Through the University’s Community Engagement Work Study and Internship Program, students contribute thousands of service hours to the Houston community, including GatorServe events supporting the National Days of Service in Remembrance of 9/11 and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. These efforts mean students are learning valuable, real-world skills and contributing to meaningful community projects.

UHD faculty routinely incorporate service-learning projects as part of the curriculum. In a Criminal Justice senior seminar taught by Dr. Judith Harris, for example, students assist with day-to-day functions of the Harris County Sheriff’s Office Brother in Arms program. Veterans in the Harris County Jail are provided resources to address substance abuse, help with life skills, and support mental health. In return for volunteering, students receive hands-on service-learning experience in the criminal justice system, including interacting directly with the inmate population as well as with employees in the Harris County Sheriff’s Office.

For many UHD graduates, contributing to the community does not end at graduation. UHD alumna Heide Laser (’14), a former student of Harris’, is the Chaplaincy Case Manager/Program Coordinator for Brothers in Arms. Laser epitomizes the “giving back” mentality of a UHD Gator. She observed:

**“This class was a priceless experience that really put things into perspective when I was a student. It changed my career trajectory by connecting me with something I’m very passionate about—helping people.”**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” At UHD, the answer is clear: Our faculty, staff, and strategic partners are providing students service-learning and volunteer opportunities that change their perspective, open their minds to possibilities, and bring home the value of helping others.

## Preparing a Senior-Focused Workforce

**“Impactful knowledge creation is part of our mission and how we contribute to better lives for everyone in our community, and in so doing, make our world more welcoming and kinder.”**

— President Blanchard

The over-65 population makes up more than 11% of Houston-area residents, and their need for innovative solutions to manage the challenges of aging—health issues, food and housing insecurity, social isolation, and in some tragic cases, abuse—grows with each passing year. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one in four Americans will be 65 and older by 2030. A large percentage of the elderly will be childless, meaning they may not have family members to care for them.

UHD’s Service, Teaching, Aging, and Research (STAR) Lab, based in the College of Public Service (CPS), is working to address those challenges by preparing a highly trained senior-services workforce through service, teaching, research, connection, consultation, training, and advocacy.

“The over-65 population is growing faster than any other segment in the U.S. They need help and their caregivers need help. **“We take a multi-faceted approach to providing that help, beginning with our students,” said Dr. Angela Goins, STAR Lab Founder/Director and Assistant Professor of Social Work. “We incorporate service opportunities into our classes to ensure students get real-world experience with the senior community, and in return, seniors and their caregivers get much-needed assistance.”**

Goins noted that part of STAR Lab's mission is to provide educational justice to this underserved community.

**“We’re trying to address the needs of seniors and caregivers today as well as to educate a future workforce of geriatric-focused social workers,” Goins explained. “Our hope is to create a world in which growing old is a privilege, not a punishment.”**

## Graduating Students With Financial Freedom

**“We are carrying the emerging dreams of our students and their families, dreams that when fulfilled will not only change their lives but will change their children’s lives and enhance their communities.”**

— President Blanchard

As an anchor institution, UHD seeks to prepare students to become workforce-ready, contributing citizens and community leaders after graduation. As Blanchard noted in his 2022 State of the University address, “We are preparing students with the mindset that their degree—and the knowledge and experience it represents—will propel them to both greater socioeconomic heights as well as position them to be civic leaders who are creating a more just and sustainable future for their communities.”

That goal is only achievable if students graduate free from crushing debt.

For many UHD graduates, student loan debt is vastly lower than that of graduates from other four-year Texas public universities. In fact, UHD’s graduates have the lowest debt in the Lone Star State, according to an Institute for College Access & Success report comparing the 25 Texas colleges that awarded the most bachelor’s degrees in 2019-20. Among those universities, UHD ranked the lowest for average amount of debt (\$4,902—the only institution in the comparison whose students averaged less than \$10,000 in debt at graduation). In addition, UHD graduates had some of the lowest percentages of debt among all the universities compared—only 14% of UHD’s graduates had any debt at graduation, and none had private debt. In fact, of the 2,658 UHD bachelor’s degree recipients in the 2019-20 academic school year, only 372 were associated with any debt at all.

Ensuring minimal impact when it comes to debt is a priority at UHD, achieved through a variety of financial assistance



**“King of Road” by Case Maclain**

*Photo Courtesy of @bohemiapros/Bohemian Photography*

programs and scholarships (see Donors, p. 31). Approximately 82% of full-time UHD students receive on average \$10,000 in scholarships, grants, and/or loans annually.

As Blanchard has noted, “Our graduates’ ability to enter the workforce with little or no debt speaks volumes about the determination of our students as well as the affordability of a UHD education.”



# A University With a Viewpoint

**“We are the University of Houston-Downtown, a university with both a view and a viewpoint, an institution of hope and courage—the anchor institution of Houston.”**

— President Blanchard

With the skyline of downtown Houston as a dramatic backdrop, UHD has a unique visual perspective on the city. Recently, the University received an enhancement to the view in the form of The Remembrance Murals. Designed to spark conversations about social change, these murals—“Lady Justice” and “Justice for All”—are the work of artist Victor Ash. Both are not just visible from around the UHD campus—they appear to watch over UHD, serving as constant reminders of the University’s commitment to the Houston community, to a just and sustainable future, and to the socioeconomic mobility of UHD graduates.

In the words of Blanchard, “Our view inspires us to act on the viewpoint that we are the anchor institution of Houston—an agent of change, uniquely positioned for strategic partnerships with businesses and community agencies. Our students are Houston’s next generation of business professionals, entrepreneurs, teachers, social workers, mental health professionals, scientists, activists, politicians, and community leaders.”

UHD has lofty goals, to be sure. “Writing the future of this University will require every ounce of our talents and abilities,” Blanchard noted. His experience as President has given him full confidence that the UHD community can and will achieve its goals: “Gators have Texas-sized talents and abilities.”

As an anchor institution, UHD is well on the way to having a Texas-sized impact as well.



# UHD Institutional Compass Points Leading to Four Points of Excellence

## Strengthening Justice

UHD is committed to reducing barriers that have traditionally impeded members of our region from accessing higher education, including financial, health, social, and environmental disparities. Through our programs, policies, curricula, and support, we must aspire to create a more just educational community focused on ensuring our diverse university population is equipped for success beyond our classrooms and well into the future.

## Strengthening Student Success and Equity

As a Hispanic- and Minority-Serving Institution, UHD is transforming today’s diverse student population into tomorrow’s leaders, trained to work in a multifaceted, ever-changing world. To ensure UHD can meet this critical mission, it must address equity in and out of the classroom so that all students can maximize their education.

## Supporting Institutional Excellence and Infrastructure

Faculty and staff are key ambassadors to what UHD stands for in this city, state, and nation. We must provide these critical stakeholders with personal and professional growth to ensure they can further advocate for the University both on campus and in the community. Further, the University must solidify its financial structure to invest more meaningfully in its people.

## Growing as an Anchor Institution


To fully realize the potential of UHD to make an impact, it must immerse itself in the work and partnerships that create wealth, equity, and stability. To do this, it must address complexities among various cultures through civic engagement and by unifying our community. No longer should the University only be a stage for civic engagement and community service, it should position itself as a key player in these arenas.

**Distinguished Faculty Award**  
Dr. Ronald Beebe  
EDUCATION

**Excellence in Service**  
Dr. Krista Gehring  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE

**Outstanding Lecturer**  
Sam Sen  
NATURAL SCIENCES

The Supreme Art of  
**Teaching & Scholarship**



**Excellence in Service**  
Dr. Jonathan Chism  
HUMANITIES & LANGUAGES

**Excellence in Scholarly/  
Creative Activity**  
Dr. Song Ge  
NURSING

Perhaps William Butler Yeats said it best: “Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.” UHD faculty are a testament to igniting their students’ creative expression and knowledge. Annually, these educators are honored by their peers for their contributions in teaching, research, and service.

By Sheryl E. Taylor



# A NEW ERA for Health & Well-Being

By Sheryl E. Taylor & Marie Jacinto

**I**t sits in the heart of campus with the intent to redefine the student experience through fitness, recreation, and learning about health and wellness. The \$39 million Wellness & Success Center (WSC) opened its doors to the campus community just in time for the spring semester.



"The reality is that the name of this building is synergistic in nature," stated President Loren J. Blanchard. "We are focused on the wellness of our students because we know that their success depends upon all of their basic needs, including physical and mental well-being, being met. They are much more likely to graduate, experience socioeconomic mobility, and, ultimately, become leaders in their professions and communities by living healthy lifestyles."

Prior to the new WSC, the Jesse H. Jones Student Life Center served the University as a hub for student activities for 25 years. During that time, student enrollment nearly doubled, increasing the demand for more exercise classes, sports and wellness options, and new areas for studying, socializing, and community-building. The WSC expanded the campus footprint from a 30,000-square-foot facility (original Student Center) to a 75,000-square-foot facility.

Director of UHD Sports & Fitness Richard Sebastiani said, "This facility demonstrates UHD's commitment to student wellness on campus. We expect the WSC to make a positive impact on student recruitment and retention in addition to improving the quality of student life on campus."

With its bold architecture by SmithGroup and construction by Vaughn Construction, the WSC brings a sense of place to the urban campus. Bordered by the White Oak Bayou Greenway to the west, the building's transparent, three-story entrance with a prominent overhang canopy faces the Bayou Trail, a part of the Campus Loop pedestrian route. The WSC pairs extremely well with the adjacent College of Sciences and Technology Building, which opened in 2019. The synergy of entry plazas between the two buildings establishes a landmark for the growing campus.

**NEW FRONTIER**  
Tomeka McLeod will head hydrogen at BP.  
PAGE B1



**NEW CONCLUSION ON COVID'S ORIGIN**  
Energy Department now believes Chinese lab leak caused coronavirus pandemic.  
PAGE A4



**DOUBLE TAKE**  
New Astros pitcher resembles one in past.  
PAGE C1

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM • MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2023 • VOL. 122, NO. 137 • \$2.00

## Lack of staff hurting state hospitals

Beds at expanded Kerrville site are going unused

By Eric Desheiner  
ASTORIA BUREAU

KERRVILLE — Overlooking the Guadalupe River in this bucolic city northwest of San Antonio, the sleek new facility at the Kerrville State Hospital was designed to offer the latest in modern inpatient psychiatric treatment.

Completed last fall at a cost of more than \$20 million, the 70-bed facility was built to ease a

costly and inhumane clog. The waitlist for state psychiatric hospital admission has ballooned to 2,500 people statewide. Criminally charged patients requiring high-security wait an average of a year and a half to get in. Most mark time in county jails until a scarce bed opens up.

On a recent tour of the brand-new unit here, Todd Citron, head of the local Hill Country Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities Centers, recalled leaving

impressed — and befuddled. "It was state of the art," he said. "And completely empty." Officials for the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, which oversees the state's nine adult psychiatric hospitals, confirm the petriate facility has lacked a crucial component since its completion nearly five months ago: actual patients. Despite the desperate need, Kerrville's six dozen new beds have remained untouched because Texas has

been unable to find people to work there.

The hospitals face the same economic headwinds as many other employers: higher wages and fewer workers. Yet Kerrville's hiring problem also is the latest development in a slow-motion, long-term disaster with consequences that echo far beyond the state hospitals.

County leaders say their local jails must spend millions of dollars every month for mental health treatment and housing that should be provided by the state facilities. The lengthy waits

still court cases, slowing down a system already bogged down by COVID-related delays.

And everyone agrees the back-up at the psychiatric hospitals is falling thousands of mentally ill patients, who at best languish in cells while waiting for a treatment bed, and at worst never make it out of the jails alive before a shot opens.

"This has been going on for many years," Rep. Toni Rose said at a House budget hearing last week. Rose represents Dallas, where the Morning News reports. *Hospitals continue on A10*

## UH-Downtown hopes new center will help students connect



The University of Houston-Downtown's new \$39 million Wellness & Success Center has been a hit with students since opening.

## Building a campus community

By Samantha Ketterer  
STAFF WRITER

Hundreds of University of Houston-Downtown students stream into the new Wellness & Success Center to exercise, eat and study with classmates on a typical weekday.

The long-awaited epicenter of student activity at UHD is the first in a series of anticipated expansions meant to give students and faculty an increased

sense of belonging at the commuter campus that houses four colleges, offers a master's degree and is particularly known for its criminal justice program in its College of Public Service.

"It's created a space where certainly students are taking care of their physical wellness needs, but it's also a place where they're just gathering. They're meeting together, they're talking, they're having

lunch," university President Loren Blanchard said. "It's those spaces where they feel a sense of connectedness to the university, which is what we want more than anything else."

The \$39 million building, which opened in late January, is one effort in UH-Downtown's plan to boost student success by building community and providing more basic services. Research on higher education institutions has repeatedly

shown that fostering a so-called "sense of belonging" has a direct link to measures such as graduation and retention rates, said Casandre Alvarado, assistant professor of practice at the University of Texas at Austin.

"It's not necessarily about where people lay their head at night, but about how they feel when they come onto the campus," said Alvarado, who studies. *Center continues on A6*

## Carter's example remains a model for aspiring candidates on all sides

By Bill Barrow  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — As the 2024 campaign season begins, political players are looking in the mirror and deciding whether they see an American president starting back.

It was no different for Jimmy Carter in the early 1970s. And if look, meeting several presidential candidates and then encouragement from an esteemed elder statesman before the young governor of Georgia, who had never met a president himself, saw

himself as something bigger. He announced his White House bid on Dec. 12, 1974, amid fallout from the Vietnam War and President Richard Nixon's resignation. Then he leveraged his unknown — and politically untainted — status to become the 39th president. That whirlwind path has been a model, explicit and otherwise, for would-be contenders ever since.

Jimmy Carter's example absolutely created a 50-year windshower of people saying, "Why not me?" said Steve Schale, who worked on President Barack

Obama's campaigns and is a longtime supporter of President Joe Biden.

Carter's climb is getting new attention as the 96-year-old re-evaluates end-of-life care at home in Plains, Ga. David Axelrod, who helped engineer Obama's four-year ascent from state senator to the Oval Office, said Carter's model is about more than how his grassroots strategy turned the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary into his springboard. *Carter continues on A8*



Then-Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter heads at Boston's Logan Airport in 1976, a stop on his New England tour.

CityDesk: A3 | Crossword: D3 | EBooks: A9 | Nation: A4 | Star: D1 | TV: D3 | TWITTER: @HoustonChron | INSTAGRAM: HoustonChron  
Comics: D4 | Directory: A2 | Horoscope: B4 | Sports: D1 | Texas Inc.: B1 | Weather: C, D | LINKEDIN: HoustonChronicle | FACEBOOK: @HoustonChronicle  
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Photo: Dr. Rhonda Scherer; UHS Chancellor Renu Khator; President Blanchard; UHS Chancellor Chief of Staff Michael Johnson; Dr. Liza Alonzo; Lynette Cook-Francis; and Richard Sebastiani

“Our students are second to none and deserve a state-of-the-art fitness facility and outstanding health and wellness programming,” said Dr. Rhonda Scherer, Associate Director of UFD Sports & Fitness. “This space provides amazing amenities and an invitation for our students to stay on campus beyond their academic commitments. UFD is their collegiate home, and Sports & Fitness is where their health and wellness goals can be achieved. Just as UFD has become our student’s university of choice, we want to be their gym of choice. Our expanded hours, operations, programs, and services will make this happen.”

The grand entrance welcomes visitors, rewarding them with outstanding views of the Downtown skyline once inside. The three-story lobby leads to a student lounge area with seating for socializing and casual study. It flows into an outdoor terrace that capitalizes on the building’s best Downtown views. Students can also prepare food and

share a meal in the adjacent community kitchen or find respite in the quiet spaces of the wellness suite.

“The opening of the Wellness & Success Center advances not only student well-being and success at UFD, but also the physical and mental wellness of our faculty, staff, alumni, and community members. I could not be more pleased that student advocacy and support helped to bring this important addition to our campus to fruition,” said Blanchard. **UFD**



# WSC FACTS

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Roughly 650 tons of structural steel, 6,400 yards of concrete, and 475 tons of rebar were used in its construction.

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The gymnasium includes eight long-span trusses, each measuring 99 feet in length, that were all delivered and erected in one piece!

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The east façade and elevated track “push” toward the bayous to maximize the new greenway and create space for the future growth of the UHD campus.

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Compared to the original facility, amenities now include more than three times the number of pieces of equipment, exercise studios, three basketball/volleyball courts, a customized bouldering wall, an indoor running track, a demonstration kitchen for nutrition, workshops, study/meeting suites, massage/personal training spaces, and a parking garage.

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# SEEKING A Second Chance

Motivated by kindness and a desire for justice, **Lauren Parker** is a first-generation college student with parents who instilled the importance of using her education to help others.

**Her goal is to reform the criminal justice system. “It’s bleak right now,” she said. “We have a high number of people being sent to prison and high numbers returning to prison. We need to focus on rehabilitation. Society needs to emphasize rehabilitation and give people a second chance to prove that they have changed.”**

Parker met some justice-involved students during her studies. She confessed that she was surprised because they were honor students and very involved in campus life. However, they shared that they felt like they needed to hide their past and were afraid of the stigma, the preconceived notions, and not being given a chance to be understood.

**“We have these amazing programs for single parents, minority students, transfer students, and first-gen students, etc. We have separate programs for students with different majors, like the arts or criminal justice. These formerly incarcerated students are without a specific program. They feel that no one sees them.”**

When Parker learned of the Student-Led Success & Equity Mini-Grant program, she knew that she could educate the student body

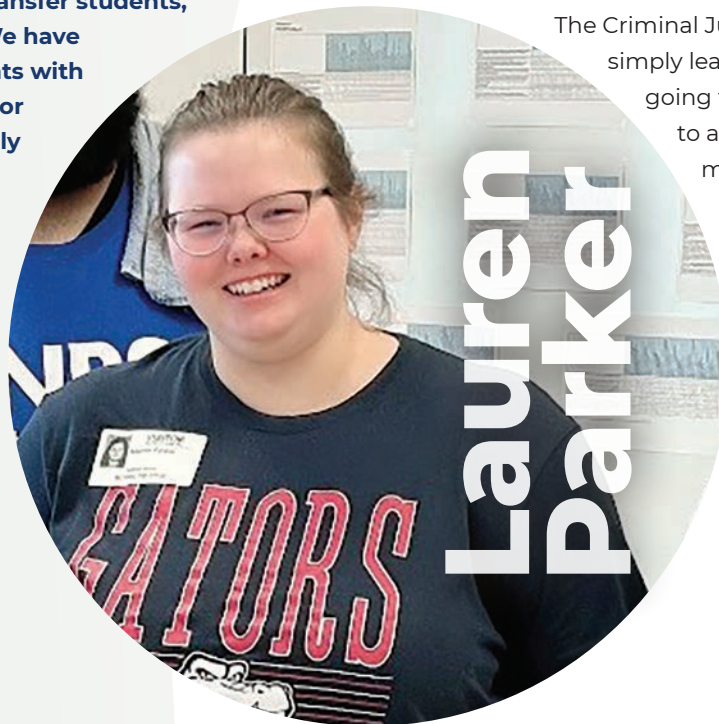
By Ashley Kilday

about the unique challenges faced by some of their peers. Desiring justice for these individuals, she titled her project “Seeking a Second Chance.” With the funds from the grant, Parker created posters and flyers to put around campus to bring attention to the situation.

Formerly incarcerated students face unique barriers to pursuing higher education that others might not consider, such as loss of access to financial aid, difficulty finding a job or securing housing, and other monetary obstacles, including parole fees and court costs. These challenges are in addition to their feeling that hiding their past is a prerequisite to entering society and gaining access to the same opportunities as other students.

Parker’s presentation to President Blanchard and UHD Cabinet members included a proposal for a program wherein UHD community members would receive training to assist formerly incarcerated or justice-involved individuals.

The Criminal Justice major believes that simply learning about the law isn’t going to be enough. Parker plans to attend law school to earn a master’s degree, followed by a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. She is a member of UHD’s Honors Program, Alpha Phi Sigma (Criminal Justice Honor Society), the Pre-Law Association, and the National Society of Leadership and Success. [UHD](http://UHD.edu)



Lauren Parker



# SUMMING IT UP:

## UHD Is the Place to Be for an MBA

By Laura Wagner

**Bobby Stokes** has a passion for numbers. After graduating from Texas Southern University in 2016 with majors in Civil Engineering and Mathematics, Stokes worked as a civil engineer. But after five years of managing water and wastewater industry projects, he was ready for a change.

He landed a role as a tax consultant for an international tax consulting firm, and a light bulb went on. “We helped small to medium businesses find tax deductions, and I loved it. But I wanted to go beyond taxes and learn more about how companies make and manage money,” he said.

Stokes knew the next step was an MBA. Friends recommended the Marilyn Davies College of Business (MDCOB). “I have friends in the program and friends who are graduates of the program. They all speak very highly of it,” he said. Add to that the flexibility of online and in-person classes, small class size, and a smooth application and enrollment process, and Stokes was sold.

As a fan of chess and puzzles (Sudoku and Rubik’s Cube, among others), Stokes chose Finance as his concentration because of its focus on using mathematical concepts and analytical tools to make business decisions. It also offered him “the ultimate puzzle.”

**“I’ve always liked planning for the future, and finance is all about predicting what the future will look like,” he said. “None of us can truly predict the future but trying to get as close as we can using numbers—that’s fascinating to me.”**

Now that he has finished his second semester as an MBA student, Stokes has a great appreciation for the energy and attention his professors bring to graduate classes. “Faculty members like Professor Kurt Stanberry keep you engaged.” As an MBA student coming to the program from a different discipline, Stokes also appreciates the ground-level approach of Assistant Professor Daniel Perez. “He makes sure we understand the fundamentals,” Stokes noted.

Having been both an undergraduate and a working professional, Stokes has an informed perspective on returning to college: “You have to take advantage of all the opportunities the campus offers.” A member of the Financial Management Association, Stokes also was recently voted into the Student Government Association as the MDCOB Graduate Senator.

Taking an active approach to both education and career is a philosophy Stokes shares with students who seek help in the MDCOB Career Center. As a graduate assistant, Stokes assists students with networking, résumé building, and finding internships. “Don’t be passive about your future” is advice he routinely gives, along with, “Nothing is going to fall in your lap or be handed to you. You’re going to get out what you put in.”

After graduation, Stokes plans to land a role in investment banking or corporate business strategy. He’s confident he’ll secure a good job because of the opportunities he sees via the MDCOB Career Center. **“UHD graduates are now in firms in every industry you can imagine,” he said. “Large, prestigious companies come here every week to recruit more students like the ones they’ve hired previously—that creates a pipeline from UHD to industry.”**

When asked why others should choose MDCOB’s MBA program, Stokes highlights its welcoming environment and “sums up” his advocacy for the MBA program in three compelling reasons:

- If you’re a student who learns better with small class sizes and needs a little more attention to be successful, this is the school for you.
- If you’re concerned with not having the time to complete your education, this is the school for you.
- If you want to learn industry skills today that you can directly apply to your career tomorrow, this is the school for you. **UHD**



# A Gift Discovered: AALIYAH NORFLEET'S LIFE PORTRAIT

By Sheryl E. Taylor

From the moment she arrived on campus as an incoming freshman, **Aaliyah Norfleet** knew what she wanted to be.

She needed a three-hour course credit. She selected ART 2303, Painting 1. By the way, she had never painted before.

Ironically, a self-portrait changed the picture of her future, and it wasn't a career in Marketing Communications.

**"The passion that I put into my self-portrait (titled 'Japanese Cherry Blossom') was strongly related to my experiences during the semester," Norfleet said. "The class really changed my viewpoint for artistry."**

Norfleet said, "If this person with all his experience and knowledge in the art world was telling me that my work was good, then maybe this is something that I should take seriously."

**Norfleet admits that it was an overwhelming experience. "I didn't have any interest in this discipline, and it was confusing to think that maybe I should shift gears and go into art," she said. "Or should I keep it as a hobby?"**

Newsum encouraged Norfleet to apply for a spot in the 2022 Project Row Houses' (PRH) Summer Studios Residency Program. Norfleet was one of eight college students selected. As described by the organization's website, "These emerging artists were tasked with "creating and exhibiting work that responds to, engages, and/or reflects the Third Ward Community."

"I love to claim Third Ward as home. It's my heart and where the driving force of my artistry comes from," said the 21-year-old native Houstonian. "When I was chosen for the program, it confirmed that this was meant for me and that I had to pursue it further."

Norfleet's Project Row House, "Black Femininity thru The SZNS," served as a love letter to Black women to acknowledge and appreciate their contribution of beauty to the world. Images representing the four seasons held court in each corner of the shotgun-styled house.

"When I would visit museums, I never saw Black women nor Black people depicted at all," she emphasized. "There's a lot of traumas associated with Black life in the Black image and Black representation. I really wanted to change that representation with a more positive portrayal. I want to shine a light of positivity."

Some things were meant to be. Thanks to her mother's (a UHD

alumna) consistent encouragement, Norfleet chose UHD. "I made so many meaningful connections here," she said laughing. "She was so right."

With a few more years before graduation, Norfleet is ready to take on the art journey that lies ahead. "I believe that there are forces that pull you in the right direction," she said. "My advice for someone who is unsure about college is to put yourself in the space to receive the opportunities and blessings that will propel you where you need to be." **UFD**



Her talent caught the attention of world-renowned UHD Professor of Art Floyd Newsum, who expressed the brilliance of her technique and the importance of what she was creating. He considers Norfleet to be a special student because of her work ethic and desire to succeed. "She is willing to experience unknown territories that some students would consider forbidden fruit," he said. "Aaliyah's goal is not just to attempt but to perfect. She spends several hours beyond the structured class hours to refine and improve her craft. I believe Aaliyah will succeed in any endeavor because she doesn't allow a glass ceiling to be placed in her way."

# SWAP

## Don't Shop

By Ashley Kilday

**K**aethleen Siguenza is the daughter of two Salvadoran immigrants, mother of two, and a nontraditional, first-gen, transfer student.

And she is determined.

"After a five-year break from college," said Siguenza. "I returned to finish my degree because I wanted to show my two children the importance of completing a college education." She is studying Computer Science in the College of Sciences and Technology.

Siguenza was processing a lot of ideas surrounding sustainability when she heard about the Student-Led Success & Equity Mini-Grant Program.

**"The motivation behind my proposal for 'Swap Don't Shop' came from multiple sources," she said. "During orientation, I saw the positive impact of the on-campus Food for Change Market, and I became inspired to help. Around the same time, the question of how ethical it was to shop from 'fast fashion' brands began trending on TikTok. I also saw a report on how secondhand clothing from Western countries was contributing to the intense pollution of Ghanaian beaches."**

She synthesized those current events with her desire to help others to imagine "Swap Don't Shop."

"I wanted to give students the opportunity to help one another by swapping or donating clothing they no longer needed. In doing so, we collectively increased sustainability around campus and helped students who lacked the time or resources to buy clothing," Siguenza said.

"During our second event, a student told me that she wears every item she got at our first event to class, and another student told me that he found slacks just in time for an upcoming teaching opportunity." That feedback helped her know that "Swap Don't Shop" was on the right track and had a positive impact on students.

Siguenza hopes that "Swap Don't Shop" becomes permanent at UHD.

"The events are fun, but I feel like having a free community store on campus where students can donate and take all kinds of items (school supplies, home/seasonal decor, etc.) will benefit all students," she said. "For example, my kids are constantly outgrowing their clothes and toys. Instead of having these items end up at a landfill or going to a resale store, they can stay within our local community and possibly help another student who is also a parent." **UHD**



Kaethleen  
Siguenza

# NOTHING Out of Her League

By Ashley Kilday

International Business senior **Madeleine Diagne** is a motivated professional who never allowed the expectations of others to guide her path in life—she forged her own way. That drive to succeed pushed her to take charge of her future from Houston to Senegal and back, ultimately earning her a place in Harvard Business School's (HBS) Summer Venture in Management Program.

After graduating high school at the height of the pandemic, Diagne encountered numerous challenges early on that prepared her to navigate her future. One of these was growing up in a community that did not support her in reaching her goals. "Because I wanted to pursue my own path, I was perceived as stubborn and impractical by some of my family members," she said. "If I was not going to get the exposure and insight I needed from those around me, I was determined to find my own way."

Although she was born and raised in Houston, Diagne's family is Senegalese. The first in her family to pursue a college degree, she attended Lone Star College via online courses from her family home in Senegal, despite the six-hour time difference.

**"Originally, I went pre-med, but my heart wasn't in it. Business suited me better. The degree would allow me to broaden my horizons in the business industry."**

Diagne transferred to UHD and returned to Houston in spring 2022. She quickly acclimated to the intimate campus atmosphere, her first time on a college campus, and made herself at home.

She credits her mother for being the most supportive voice in her life: "She raised my sister and me all on her own, and I give her an immense amount of credit for shaping me into the

powerful woman I am today. She's been there in the good days and the bad days."

A simple Google search looking for educational opportunities led Diagne to HBS' Summer Venture in Management Program.

**"The purpose of the program is to expose younger students of color to the MBA environment. I never considered Ivy League schools because I thought only privileged children with financial resources and connections go there," she shared. "Fast forward three years, and I was part of the 180 undergraduates chosen from thousands to attend."**

The weeklong program played out on Harvard's scenic campus, with a packed schedule of class sessions, meetings with professors and scholars, and bonding with her cohort. One class that resonated with Diagne was titled "Harambe: Mobilizing Capital in Africa."

"The class focused on developing African leaders. As the professor came into the room for the first time, he told us he'd analyzed the program's student directory, which

had our names, majors, and schools," she said. "He scanned the classroom and pointed out one student for having the coolest major. Then he pointed at me and told me he thought I had the best headshot and that I looked like a boss. And then he dove into the lesson for the day. It really removed the perception that these professors were untouchable."

**Diagne found the experience life-changing. "This journey sparked my personal development and ignited the flame to become a well-rounded, influential leader," she said. "The whole experience changed my outlook. There's nothing out of my league." UFD**



# For the Love of Tacos (& Family)

By Sheryl E. Taylor

When thinking of the Lone Star State, a few things quickly come to mind: football, BBQ, and sweltering heat. What about a food lover's paradise? It's true. Texas, particularly Houston, is considered a culinary melting pot that never disappoints—and, in fact, often surprises.

Not known as a hotbed of Mexican food, Houston's Spring Branch District hosts a restaurant that offers an authentic taste of Mexico: Tacos Doña Lena (TDL).

UHD alumnus **Angel Cabrera** runs the taqueria. His mother, Maria Magdalena "Lena" Cabrera, sold tacos in her native home of Mexico before coming to the U.S. in 1992. With the encouragement of her son, she continued to sell tacos, tamales, and other specialties for more than 25 years from the front porch of her family's apartment.

**"When I was 10 or 11 years old, I was like, 'Hey Mom, you were making money in Mexico, maybe you should do it again,'" he recalled. "That's how she paid for my UHD education."**

## School Before Tacos

Cabrera, a self-described "really good student" wasn't documented at the time, and the trajectory of his life after graduating from high school was steeped in fear.

"I felt like my world was coming to an end," he said. He credits an aunt who encouraged him to "not stop" his dream of earning a degree. "UHD made me feel comfortable and not seen as an awkward and shy 18-year-old teenager who was afraid to speak up," he remembered. "I couldn't get financial aid, but UHD helped me with a Texas grant." Cabrera graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish with a minor in Education.

After graduating from UHD, Cabrera had aspirations of becoming a teacher. **"I wanted to inspire young immigrant kids like me to follow their dreams and fulfill what they want to be in this life," he said. Even though he was unable to become a teacher, the universe had greater plans.**

## The Universe Called

For the next 10 years, Cabrera worked for Barnaby's Café in varied positions—from waiting tables to management. "I always knew I loved the restaurant business because of my mom," he said. "She's an extremely good chef and has so much passion for what she does."

At this point, two events collided for Cabrera: a 30-something life crisis and a change in DACA status. "I was at a point in my life when I was considering whether I should earn my master's degree or should I do what I've seen my mom work so hard for her entire life," said the 37-year-old. "While I was at UHD, I felt that I had to have a more traditional profession to make a difference and be a role model." He decided to make his mother's dream a reality.



## Dream to Fruition ... Even During a Pandemic

With his husband, Brian Ponce, and mother on board, the hard work began. Fast forward to 2020 at the onset of an unprecedented pandemic, Tacos Doña Lena opened its doors. It has since been featured twice (once on the cover) in the local

LGBTQ publication OutSmart Magazine for its "Gayest & Greatest" Readers' Choice Awards for Best Mexican in 2020 and 2021, and on Yelp's community list of the Top Places to Eat in 2021. Cabrera was also named among Houston Business Journal's "40 Under 40" Class of 2022.

## The Reward and the Gift

While holding back tears, Carbera shares his greatest achievement—gifting his parents a house.


**"Never, ever give up on your dreams. When people look at Tacos Doña Lena, I want people to see more than a restaurant. It was just a dream. It doesn't matter where you come from; it doesn't matter your background; it doesn't matter if you're an immigrant ... as long as you're determined to achieve that goal, you can do it." UHD**

**TACOS**  
**DOÑA LENA**



# Downtown Treasures

By Sheryl E. Taylor

They are the frontliners. Oftentimes, they are the first face a student sees. They're always ready to offer a smile or reassurance to a visitor who may be lost. They keep the University humming and running to ensure that our Gator pride is on full display. UHD recognizes these dedicated members of the campus community with its Annual Staff Awards. More than 60 nominations were received in a single year—a testament to the significant impact employees have on their campus partners. "Our annual staff awards shine a spotlight on how UHD's caring culture is evident in every department across our university," said President Blanchard. "Through the care shown for one another and especially in their support of our students, the UHD staff epitomizes excellence in service that is second to none." 



**Rookie of the Year & Rising Star**

**Christian Purdy**

MANAGER

Projects, Compliance & Communications  
Employment Services & Operations



**Staff Excellence Award**

**Alex Hernandez**

DIRECTOR

College Administration & Operations  
College of Sciences and Technology

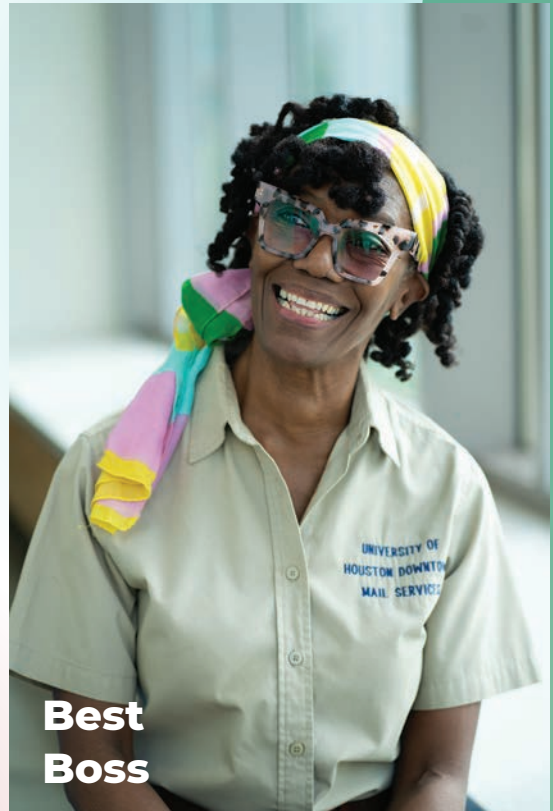


**The Ultimate Professional**

**Michelle Jones**

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

W.I. Dykes Library



**Best Boss**

**Debora Evans**

MANAGER

Shipping, Receiving & Mailroom  
Auxiliary Services



**Staff Excellence Award**

**Courtney Lundgren**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Student Communications & Transition Programs  
Enrollment Management



**T. Chaney Anderson President's Distinguished Staff Service Award**

**Richard Simonds**

DIRECTOR

College Data Analytics  
College of Public Service

# Re-Imagining the Future at THE INTERSECTION OF ART & SCIENCE

By Marie Jacinto



**Dr. Suzette Mouchaty** wants to change minds—beyond the classroom.

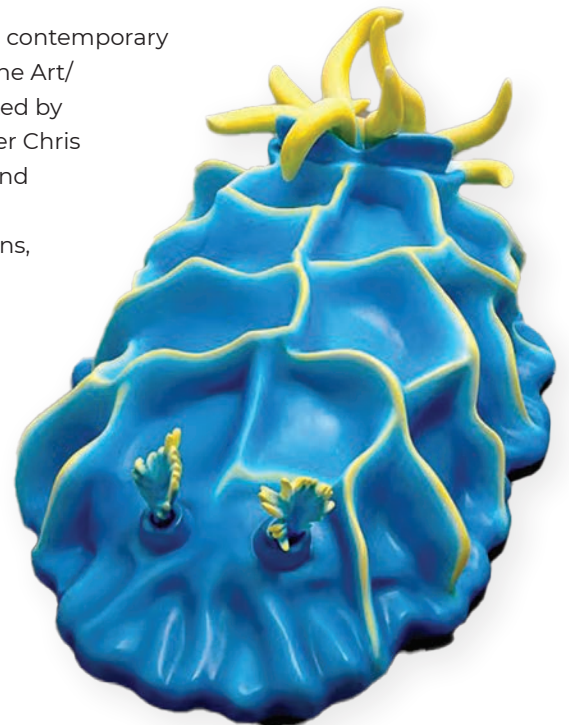
With an MFA from the University of Houston School of Art in Interdisciplinary Practices and Emerging Forms and a doctorate in Genetics from Sweden's Lund University, Mouchaty is an artist and a lecturer in the Department of Natural Sciences. Her artistic practice blends formal structures of rational scientific thought with imaginary and subversive tenets from the artistic realm.

Late last summer, her large-scale marine animals—real and imagined—filled the Mark & Tami Mallett Grand Lobby of the College of Sciences and Technology (CST) building as part of her art installation, “Suzette Mouchaty: How to Talk to a Nudibranch (and some other things worth knowing).” Funded by the CST and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance, her colorful, whimsical nudibranch sculptures encouraged viewers to reflect on the natural world and re-imagine the future as communities come to terms with climate change.

**“Art has no utilitarian function and the reasons for making art are as varied as the artists who make it,” said Mouchaty. “In contrast, science is a quest to understand how the material world works. Art is irrational and poetic, and it broadens our perceptions; science is rational and logical, and it tests our perceptions. This space between the irrational and the rational, between art and science, is wide open for exploration, and the large-scale, charismatic artwork in this exhibition took a tentative step in that direction.”**

To continue the conversation, Mouchaty invited international contemporary artists whose works address climate change to join her for “The Art/ Science Nexus of Climate Change.” The virtual panel was hosted by CST and the O’Kane Gallery. Photographic artist and filmmaker Chris Jordan, Swiss multimedia artist Katja Loher, Australian artist and documentary filmmaker Dan Monceaux, and Houston-based interdisciplinary artist John G. Reed explored ideas, expectations, and aspirations for transformative artwork and art practices.

**“Through artwork and dialogue,” concluded Mouchaty, “I hope to inspire people to re-imagine the future as our societies grapple with the looming existential issue facing humanity today—climate change.”** [UHD](#)





# OUTSIDE THE Classroom BOX

## Dietrich von Biedenfeld Heads Off Campus to Teach Life Lessons

By Laura Wagner

### Networking is often explained using the cliché, “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.”

A better definition comes from legendary author Ken Blanchard: “No one of us is as smart as all of us,” according to Assistant Professor at the Marilyn Davies College of Business (MDCOB) Dietrich von Biedenfeld, J.D. He orchestrated three off-campus events last fall to help students make professional connections and apply classroom theory in the real world.

**Making Individual Connections.** Von Biedenfeld introduced International Business Law seniors to two visiting dignitaries at a local restaurant for an informal chat: Henry Chambers, Program Administrator of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Tufts University’s Fletcher School, and Jeff Shokrian, CEO of 791 Purchasing Cooperative and a leader in the public procurement and economic development industry. The conversation dived deep into the nuances of creating a successful global procurement function.


Senior Seth Hackett appreciated graduate school advice from Chambers as well as the insider view from industry expert Shokrian. “Jeff has achieved and experienced a lot, so getting insight into how he made it to where he is today was eye-opening,” Hackett noted. “Thanks to Professor von Biedenfeld, I’ve made a connection to someone who has gone down the path I hope to follow.”

**Linking Knowledge and Practice.** MBA students from von Biedenfeld’s class on Law, Contracts, and Ethics for the Supply Chain were provided an educational tour at Equal Parts Brewing. “The goal was to ground classroom theory in

a working enterprise that’s affected by supply chain issues,” said von Biedenfeld. “The students were able to see topics we’d discussed in class come to life.” They were also able to meet new business contacts in the process. “You never know which connections will result in internships or job opportunities,” von Biedenfeld noted.

**Leading by Example.** The third event in his networking tour was a supply chain conference hosted by Houston-based Daikin, an air-conditioning, filtration, refrigeration-transport, and oil-hydraulics company with more than 20,000 employees worldwide. As an invited guest on a panel of supply chain experts, von Biedenfeld spoke on the challenges faced by Daikin and others in the industry post-COVID and met a number of supply chain industry leaders. “My role in participating in the conference and networking with speakers and attendees is primarily to contribute to important industry conversations and elevate issues and solutions,” von Biedenfeld noted. “But a close second is to showcase our dynamic student body and lay the groundwork for connections that could potentially benefit our students.”

**Daikin employee Jess Love (BBA ’21), commented, “Networking opens up opportunities to connect with world-class professionals, entrepreneurs, and businesses. With mentors such as Professor von Biedenfeld, networking has become seamless.” She added, “It’s also inspiring to have one of my professors be considered an expert on a panel in my industry. I know that UHD is great, but it’s nice when peers in your industry get to see just how great.”**

“These students are the best advertisement for the value of a UHD degree,” von Biedenfeld said. “Through their hard work, they’re showing employers what UHD students bring to the table while they’re creating a path for other students to follow. It’s another facet of networking.” 

# GATOR BITES



## A Healthy Exchange: UHD Students Teach and Get Schooled Through Service Learning

By Laura Wagner

The best way to learn is to teach, the saying goes.

UHD students recently discovered this truth after teaching more than 80 K-12 students and their families about nutrition and health science at a UHD service-learning project in Houston's Northline community.

Led by Dr. Mesias Pedroza, Lecturer of Biology and Chemistry in the Natural Sciences Department, more than 20 UHD students taught health-related concepts to students and their families at a Learning with Thomas Academy event.

"Our students conducted health science activities and games and read with the children," Pedroza explained. "We want to teach these families about diseases and health issues that disproportionately affect the Latino community in the U.S. to help decrease the incidence of the diseases as well as the associated morbidity and mortality."

**UHD's service-learning programs integrate community service with coursework to "enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." The UHD students who participated in the project confirmed its value for them.**

Social Work junior Veronica Hernandez noted, "I learned that communicating to the kids with patience is key. And that with encouragement, they wanted to keep trying more difficult challenges."

Biological and Physical Sciences senior Omar Khan agreed. "Trying to make complex scientific processes and chemical reactions tangible and fun to younger students was enlightening," he said. "It helped me understand how to take concepts we learn in our classes and translate them so that a child could understand." The results were worth the effort, he added. "Watching their faces get excited about the hydrophobic effect was amazing! And it was challenging—it taught me and the students a lot."

The learning session was so successful, Pedroza plans to conduct one per semester going forward in addition to the more frequent tutoring sessions. "The community provided great feedback, saying it was informative and enjoyable," he said. "Families walked away from this event equipped with the knowledge of how to make healthy decisions concerning their diets and lifestyle." **UFD**

# Food for Change Market Serves Student Success

## Tackling Food Insecurities Head On

By Sheryl E. Taylor

In November 2017—not long after the epic landfall of Hurricane Harvey—the UHD Food for Change Market opened its doors in hopes of addressing ‘the invisible epidemic’ of food insecurities taking hold of college students across the U.S.

**“It was necessary to change our approach to reach more students,” said Tremaine W. Kwasikpui, Director of Student Activities and UHD Staff Council President. “We quickly realized it’s not just a ‘need-based’ market, it’s a UHD-based market. When you become a UHD student, we want our students to know that it’s a resource for you.”**



Tremaine Kwasikpui

The Food for Change Program provides currently enrolled students access to fresh produce, meats, and other groceries in the market. The beauty of this program is that no payment is required when shopping in the market, which allows students to save money for other necessities and maintain their academic progress while balancing personal responsibilities.

Two years after the soft opening of the market in 2017, Dr. Lea Campbell, Executive Director of Assessment & Accreditation in UHD’s Office of Institutional Assessment, conducted an assessment on the

Market, “Analysis of Food Market Users & Academic Success Spring 2019,” followed by a survey in 2021.

**“Assessment is important because we wanted to document that students are using the food market and the positive impact it has had on our students’ sense of financial security and academic success. We want our students focused on learning and not worrying about where their next meal will come from,” Campbell added.**

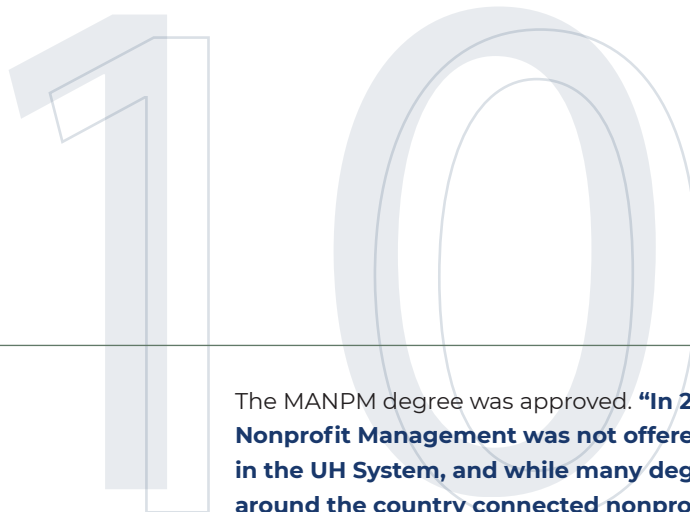
Since the beginning, UHD’s collaboration with the Houston Food Bank (HFB) has enabled the market to touch the lives of many students. From 2019 through 2022, the award-winning Food for Change Market has provided food to students via 14,600 visits. As one of the first student food markets in the nation, the program began by offering food scholarships, sponsored by the Houston Food Bank and available to all Gator students.

The student’s original weekly allocation of 30 pounds of food was increased to up to 40 pounds thanks to the market’s success. The campus footprint of the market has increased from 290 to 555 square feet. The Houston Food Bank has now increased its weekly donations to 10,000 pounds, including a variety of items from baby food to waffle makers—even cell phones.

**“To grow from a pilot project to sustaining the Food for Change Market over five years is amazing,” said Kwasikpui. “Here’s to the next five years! I am excited to see what’s in store for the UHD Food for Change Market.” UFD**

# Master of Nonprofit Management Turns 10

By Sheryl E. Taylor



## What is nonprofit management?

Glad you asked.

Nonprofit management is maintaining or managing a not-for-profit organization's labor and resources to successfully create something of value—a social outcome or cause, such as providing services to a community or group. So, it comes as no surprise that UHD offers a graduate multidisciplinary program that prepares recent college graduates as well as mid- and senior-level administrators to manage and lead nonprofit organizations of all types.

During his tenure as UHD President, Dr. Bill Flores envisioned an opportunity for the University. "At the time, UHD had greatly expanded its work with local communities, governmental agencies, and nonprofits. We had (and still have) an active Center for Community Engagement (now Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning) with a broad advisory committee. So, we decided to develop a degree in nonprofit management, as there were only certificate programs in the Houston area."

**"The first order of business was to assemble an industry advisory committee to discuss the need for the nonprofit management program—which competencies should be woven into the courses, and what graduates should know and be able to perform."**

Executives were hired from relevant industries as "clinical faculty." Per Flores, the Master of Arts in Nonprofit Management (MANPM) program was fortunate to hire Robert Sanborn, CEO of Children at Risk, and Brian Greene, CEO of the Houston Food Bank, as instructors. Both Sanborn and Greene also continue to serve as co-chairs of the MANPM Advisory Board. Cynthia Colbert, President and CEO of Catholic Charities of Houston-Galveston, joined Sanborn and Greene as an instructor.

The MANPM degree was approved. **"In 2010, a Master's in Nonprofit Management was not offered at any campuses in the UH System, and while many degree programs around the country connected nonprofit management to public administration and public affairs programs, nonprofit management as a discipline to itself was almost completely new in the U.S., especially in the South," said Dr. David Branham. As Director of the MANPM program and Interim Chair of Social Sciences, Branham created six courses.**

Flores added, "In creating the degree, it was important to develop strong connections to Houston's nonprofit community and develop a program that had both academic and applied rigor."

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, the MANPM program has been a tremendous success. The program consistently ranks among the top five nonprofit graduate programs in the country. Current rankings include No. 3 "Best Online Nonprofit Management Programs" (intelligent.com), No. 3 in the nation for "Most Affordable Online Nonprofit Management Programs" (geteducated.com), and No. 7 for "Best Value Among Online Nonprofit Management Programs" (bestvalueschools.com).

When asked what makes this program so relevant today, Professor of Political Science and Nonprofit Management Branham offered, "Relevance is usually related to the success of your graduates. Our graduates, as a group, have been extremely successful. However, when you remember that nonprofit success is measured in positive impact instead of net profits, you understand that the program is doing a service, not only to its students, but to the entire community. From that perspective, the relevance is massive."



## UHD Chemists Develop Million-Dollar Formula for Student Success

By Laura Wagner

Time has revealed a surprising silver lining to the pandemic: It has served as an engine of innovation. That was certainly the case for two UHD faculty members whose innovative thinking generated a novel approach to teaching online chemistry labs.

Developed during the pandemic to give home-bound students hands-on lab experiences, the approach is the brainchild of College of Sciences and Technology faculty Dr. Eszter Trufan, Associate Professor of Chemistry, and Dr. Elene Bouhoutsos-Brown, Chemistry Adjunct Professor. The pair's outside-the-lab thinking paid off with a multi-year Open Textbooks Pilot (OTP) program grant worth \$1.16 million to enhance and grow the method they titled "Experimentium: Inclusive by Design."


"Success with any project like this starts with fundamentally understanding your student population," Trufan said. "Many of our students have English as a second language, but many have never set foot in a chemistry lab, or they

may struggle with financial insecurity. Our challenge is to convey jargon-dense chemistry instruction so students don't make mistakes over and over. And it must be affordable."

The OTP grant supports projects that help students realize savings through open textbooks, particularly in high-demand fields like STEM, making Experimentium a perfect fit. "This is the frontier of chemistry instruction," said Trufan. "We are going to push the boundaries."

Partners at Baylor University in Waco and Houston Community College are also part of the project, which will include experiments for students with disabilities. "Video-based instruction with closed captioning and transcripts will accommodate a range of disabilities and allow those students to perform experiments independently at home," said Trufan.

They're also planning to share their approach and resources widely via the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board OERTX Repository, at conferences, and with high school teachers.

Bouhoutsos-Brown is excited to have students move past the "cookbook" approach to chemistry and finds it gratifying that students in their courses shared their learnings with their own children and parents. "They're engaging the community in our studies. That's a positive force for STEM, which makes me very happy." 

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# College of Public Service Grants Roundup

By Sheryl E. Taylor

## Education Prep Planning

The College of Public Service (CPS) received two Educator Preparation Planning Grants funded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) for \$50,000 each. The first grant awarded is led by Dr. Jonathan Schwartz, Dean of CPS, who serves as principal investigator on "**Houston Region Teacher Pipeline Community of Practice**," a grant to address the teacher pipeline shortage. "The focus of the 'Houston Region Teacher Pipeline Community of Practice' is on strengthening educational justice as we work to have well-prepared teachers in the Houston region," said Schwartz. "Additionally, this project supports us in Growing as an Anchor Institution as we work to provide solutions to improve the Houston educational system."

The second grant, "**Trek to Teacher Certification: Targeted Test Preparation Programming to Improve Certification Rates of Diverse Pre-Service Teachers**," will support teacher certification with principal investigator Dr. Christal Burnett-Sánchez, who is Chair of the Department of Urban Education in CPS. According to Burnett-Sánchez, "This grant will bring together universities, school districts, and nonprofits to work together to find solutions to improving education in Houston and solving the current teacher shortage."

Congratulations to Dr. Tonya Jeffery, Assistant Professor of Urban Education, and colleagues Dr. Lizette Burks, Assistant

Professor of Educational Leadership; Dr. Susan Albrecht, Assistant Professor of Bilingual Education; and Dr. Lisa Morano, Professor of Biology and Microbiology and Director of the Center for Urban Agriculture & Sustainability, for their \$68,749 Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Co-Op grant with CPS and the College of Sciences and Technology's Center for Urban Agriculture & Sustainability. The **Let's Go Outside!—Urban Explorers Girls STEM Academy** will provide authentic environmental science educational experiences for 100 middle-school girls from the Greater Houston area. The grant will also fund a week-long summer Environmental Science Institute that will provide professional development training for in-service and pre-service teachers selected to participate in the program.

The **William Stamps Farish Fund** awarded a one-year grant of \$45,000 to develop support services to successfully help pre-service teachers enrolled in the College's Department of Urban Education to complete Texas teacher certification exams. More specifically, the project, "Preparing Qualified Teachers for Students' Success in the Houston Area Schools," will assist in addressing lower teacher certification rates. The strategy will include boot camps to provide supplementary instructional materials and diagnostic tests to determine baseline test scores for teacher candidates. According to the College's proposal to the Farish Fund, there is a critical need to increase the number of fully certified teachers. [UFD](#)



# Doing What Works: Enrolling, Retaining, and Graduating Women and Minorities in STEM


By Laura Wagner

Women and minorities continue to be underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. UHD's Scholars Academy is working to change that. The Academy was awarded a Department of Education Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program (MSEIP) grant for \$249,000 over three years—the fifth MSEIP grant UHD and the Academy have received over the course of 14 years. Titled “UHD Boosting STEM Student Success in Computer Science/Data Science/Mathematics Through Robotics-Neural Networks-Big Data-Human Computer Interface (HCI)-Machine Learning,” the project aims to increase enrollment in the four-year undergraduate college experience through “interactive and intentional support systems.” Key student stakeholders include first-time-in-college freshmen and transfer community college students majoring in STEM subjects, with an additional focus on increasing women majoring in these areas.

Mentored research, which is conducted in the lab or on the computer under the close guidance of doctoral faculty, is a

type of impact learning that is an essential part of UHD's curriculum.

Principal investigators include Dr. Hong Lin (Computer Science); Dr. Ting Zhang (Computer Science); Dr. Ling Xu (Computer Science); and Dr. Katarina Jegdic (Mathematics and Statistics). The grant provides a stipend that is particularly useful for students because of its flexibility—funds can be used for whatever the student needs to successfully continue in the program, including support for their basic needs.

**“The goal of the MSEIP project is to support STEM student success, and that means supporting student persistence as undergraduates,”** said Dr. Mary Jo Parker, Executive Director of the Scholars Academy. “Persistence comes through connection to UHD and faculty. Mentored research connects students to faculty mentors who nurture their work and reinforce students' connections to their studies. And it works. They persist. Mentored research works because it adds value to the university degree attainment.” 

## UHD Receives First Cancer Prevention & Research Grant

By Sheryl E. Taylor


Dr. Angelica Roncancio's research in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences focuses on reducing cancer-related disparities in underserved communities. Seizing the opportunity for a grant through the Cancer Prevention & Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) was meant to be. UHD received its first CPRIT grant, which funds a joint effort between The University of Texas at Austin, UT Health San Antonio, and two Federally Qualified Health Center Systems (12 clinics) across seven counties in the state.

Roncancio, Assistant Professor of Health & Behavioral Sciences, is the principal investigator for this grant, which totals \$991,308 over a three-year period. **“The program is focused on primary prevention efforts to reduce HPV-related cancer disparities specifically for those who reside in Medically Underserved Areas and Health Professional Shortage Areas in Texas,”** she said.

“Our mission is to provide health care professionals with educational sessions on evidence-based HPV vaccination

practices to increase the proportion of health care providers offering the vaccine to patients aged 18-26,” she noted. “We also plan to provide information about the HPV vaccine and HPV-related cancers to both young adult patients in our partner clinics and young adults attending community events in our seven target counties in Texas.”

She added, “Our vision is to increase rates of HPV vaccination among these young adult patients in our partner clinics to meet or exceed the mean HPV vaccine initiation and completion rates reported by the National Health Interview Survey, 2013-2018.”

When asked how this opportunity sets the stage for students' academic success, she said, **“Implementation of this program will provide learning opportunities for our students to gain practical experience in community outreach, health education, and how to collaborate successfully with various community organizations and clinics while applying what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations.”** 

# Making Real Change Happen: How UHD Plans to Increase Graduation Rates

By Marie Jacinto

Do you wonder how real change happens? Writers like Malcolm Gladwell of “The Tipping Point” fame and “Freakonomics” authors Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner have built careers writing about societal change, but what about effecting change within our own university?

UHD is on target to do just that—to make real change happen in retention and graduation rates. How? By moving the needle on first-year retention rates by 12 points—from the current 67% to 79%—over six years and doubling the six-year graduation rate by 2028.

Setting goals is one thing; however, to reach a bold future requires a strategic plan. In collaboration with the UHD community, President Blanchard created the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan: A New Paradigm with Enhancing Student Success as the first goal. To that end, UHD Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Deborah E. Bordelon, Ph.D., instituted a new case management approach to advisement. Now, UHD Academic Success Coordinators follow a given cohort of students throughout their academic careers at UHD, providing many points of contact along the way.

This new approach was just the first step in effecting real change. Next, the National Institute for Student Success analyzed UHD’s data over the summer of 2022 and recommended these effective strategies:

- Redesigning academic advising;
- Providing consistent academic support and reducing D or F grades, withdrawals, and incompletes of gateway courses;
- Improving systematic first-year support; and
- Increasing support of student financial wellness.

Now with a \$750,000 grant from ECMC Foundation, UHD is establishing the new Gator Success Institute (GSI), providing the student-centric infrastructure and expanded wraparound services necessary to address the academic,

CHANGES AT PUMP Global events to keep gas prices swinging. PAGE B1

THOUSANDS PAY THEIR RESPECTS Officials say 45,000 viewed Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's body on the first day. PAGE A4

PLAYER CRITICAL MNF game postponed after Buffalo player hurt. PAGE C1

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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## UH-Downtown intent on doubling graduation rate



University of Houston-Downtown graduates enjoy December commencement ceremonies at Minute Maid Park. Photos by Y. Chen/Lau/Staff photographer

**New partnership with institute will assess ways to increase retention**

By Samantha Ketterer  
STAFF WRITER

The University of Houston-Downtown hopes to nearly double its graduation rate within three years, a huge lift that, if effective, could filter in to the local economy and shape how institutions across Texas usher their students toward degrees.

University leaders plan to hit the target using recommendations from the National Institute for Student Success, a group at Georgia State University that uses data modeling to help universities improve measures such as graduation and



UH-Downtown's six-year graduation rate currently sits around 30 percent, a number officials hope to improve.

retention rate. While student success has always been the ultimate goal of higher education institutions, schools around the country have doubled down on such measures in recent years to offset declining enrollment and correct historical inequities across racial lines.

UH-Downtown's six-year graduation rate currently sits around 30 percent — a number that was difficult to reach but has promise for dramatic growth, President Loren Blanchard said.

"If we can make sure that we're meeting the state mark and perhaps even exceeding it,

## Lessons from county's election

Report: Unclear if voters were denied

By Jen Rice  
STAFF WRITER

The operational systems behind Harris County elections are in "immediate need of upgrades or replacements," according to a new report from the county's Elections Administrator Cliff Tatum, who took office shortly before the Nov. 8 election.

Tatum's postmortem analysis of the midterm election comes amid criticism primarily from Republican lawmakers that the election was marred by paper ballot shortages at some locations, numerous alleged violations of state election code and delayed openings that resulted in a court order requiring polls to stay open one hour later on Election Day.

At least one of those Republican critics, Precinct 3 Commissioner Dan Ramey, has called for an audit of the November election, though Harris County already has been selected as one of four counties that will undergo an audit of this year's election by the Secretary of State's office. It will be the second election audit in two years for Harris County, though the first to be conducted under election law the Legislature passed in 2021.

Tatum's report addressed the importance of better training election workers, upgrading the communication system that tracks calls for assistance from polling locations and addressing technical issues involving software upgrades and paper jams.

The county noted some recent improvements, like updated curriculum for the mandatory four-hour training session for election workers. The new class format uses smaller breakout groups so workers get more hands-on practice with the machines. The elections office trained over 6,000 election judges and clerks for the November

Election continues on A6

## Aggie's sleuthing found lost history

By Brent Zwernemann  
STAFF WRITER

COLLEGE STATION — Twenty-five years ago, Newt Lamb's visit to the Houston Public Library changed Texas A&M history.

"I wanted to look up stories on the great storm of Galveston," recalled the 42-year-old Lamb, who has a passion for genealogy and Texas history. "The library had the Galveston Daily News on microfilm, and while I was looking up the 1900 Galveston hurricane, I decided to see what the paper had written about the Texas A&M-Galveston ball football game."

"That maybe it had something in there on AAM's first game."



Newt Lamb's love of Aggie sports began in his days of throwing the javelin. He graduated AAM in 1960.

## Both parties facing hurdles in '24 race

By Steve Peoples  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Both political parties are opening the new year confronting critical questions about the people and policies they want to embrace as they next election speeds into view.

The challenges are particularly urgent for Republicans, who hoped to control the House in 2023 and a secure grip on one, if not both, chambers of Congress. Instead, an underwhelming midterm election yielded only a thin House majority that will expose fierce intraparty divisions this week as California Gov. Gavin Newsom's fight for the speaker'ship. And before the end of the month, the Republican National Committee must

resolve a divisive leadership battle of its own.

A central figure in virtually everything is Donald Trump, the former president who transformed the GOP more than seven years ago and is still fighting to ensure he will overtake Democrats in Congress, the RNC and Republican voters just as the next presidential primary season begins.

RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel acknowledged, in an interview, that her party's greatest political challenge ahead may come from within as party leaders navigate Trump's sized role.

"There's so much at stake we can't afford to be divided heading into 2024," McDaniel said.

Politics continues on A7

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professional, financial, and basic needs of first-generation, low-income, and historically excluded students. Ultimately, the GSI will help these students navigate their educational journeys and earn their degrees so that they may become the professional labor force and civic leaders of Houston, the state, and the nation.

And that's how real change happens. **UHD**



Every generation strives to make things better and provide for those who follow. The

scholarships, programmatic funds, and endowment funds you support are helping us transform today's students—the next generation of professionals and leaders. Their future work will advance the living standards and quality of life for those they touch.

We are proud to be a catalyst for our students as they embark upon their respective careers and lives equipped with a strong academic preparation and a sense of mission. We are

encouraged and most grateful to have you as a partner on this journey. Thank you for your continued support of the University of Houston-Downtown.



Javier "Jay" L. Zambrano  
Vice President  
Advancement & University Relations

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Zambrano". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over the large, semi-transparent "THANK YOU" text.

THANK YOU

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## MAGAZINE

### SPRING/SUMMER 2023

UHD Magazine is published by the University of Houston-Downtown Division of Advancement & University Relations.

University of Houston-Downtown  
One Main Street  
Houston, Texas 77002  
713-221-8000  
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