Master of Science in
Professional Writing and Technical Communication

Official Handbook
for
Graduate Students

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Welcome

Welcome to the Master of Science in Professional Writing and Technical Communication (MSPWTC) at the University of Houston-Downtown. The MSPWTC is an outgrowth of our well-established undergraduate program in Professional Writing. The MSPWTC faculty and staff are excited about the graduate program and are delighted that you are entering our program as a graduate student. We designed this program to provide you with writing, design, and management skills based on rhetorical principles. Our goal is to offer you opportunities to improve your publication and production skills, study project management and the ethical and global implications of professional communication, participate in research, conduct audience analyses and usability tests, and create web sites and on-line help.

This program provides valuable growth opportunities for a range of candidates:

- Professional writers seeking promotion to managerial positions or interested in teaching technical writing in high schools or community colleges
- Science and technology, public relations, or corporate training professionals with the goal of expanding employment options
- Undergraduates interested in a applied master’s level degree, either to increase their employability or to pursue a doctoral degree in technical communication

The MSPWTC program is designed so that once you graduate from UH-Downtown you will be able to demonstrate professional-level skills or knowledge in the following areas:

- **Document production**: writing, editing, and delivering documents in the various print and electronic genres of professional communication.
- **Rhetorical analysis**: identifying, assessing, and articulating the theoretical principles that underlie rhetorical choices in professional writing. Students will demonstrate these skills in the analysis, design, and production of professional communication documents.
- **Ethical and global awareness**: analyzing the ethical and global implications of professional communication.
- **Research methodologies**: conducting research in technical and professional communication, including audience analysis and usability testing.

You are invited to read our booklet, view our website, and visit our campus. Please contact the Graduate Coordinator, Michelle Moosally, Ph.D., (moosallym@uhd.edu) if you have any questions about our program. Also, visit the University’s website (www.uhd.edu) to learn about the University, student life at the University, Student Affairs, and Student Services. If you are applying to a graduate program at UHD, we encourage you to obtain a copy of the University of Houston-Downtown Student Handbook to review the Graduate Policies, Procedures, and Services: [http://www.uhd.edu/campus/handbook/index.html](http://www.uhd.edu/campus/handbook/index.html).
MSPWTC Degree Requirements

The Master of Science in Professional Writing and Technical Communication requires a minimum of thirty-six semester hours that include a choice of thesis or capstone project.

12 hours Required Core Courses
18 hours Elective Courses
6 hours Thesis or Capstone Project
36 hours Total Hours Required

Thesis or Capstone Project Options
You will choose either a Thesis or Capstone Project option.

• Thesis option: Candidates opting for the thesis must complete 3 hours of thesis, 3 hours of directed research practicum, and oral defenses of the thesis and graduation portfolio

or

• Capstone project option: Candidates opting for the capstone project must complete 3 hours of capstone project, either 3 hours of directed research practicum or an internship, and oral defenses of the capstone project and graduation portfolio.

Graduation Portfolio and Oral Defense
All students must successfully complete a graduation portfolio and an oral defense of the portfolio.
MSPWTC Curriculum

Required Core Courses (12 hours)
ENG 5304 Proseminar in Professional Writing & Technical Communication
ENG 5317 Rhetorical Theory & Criticism
ENG 5330 Visual Design
ENG 5340 Project Management

Thesis or Capstone Project Options (6 hours)
Thesis:
ENG 6390 Directed Research
ENG 6391 Thesis

or

Capstone Project:
ENG 6390 Directed Research
or 6380 Internship
ENG 6392 Capstone Project

Elective Courses (18 hours)
ENG 5325 Advance Medical Writing
ENG 6303 Public Relations & Media Management
ENG 6312 Ethical and Legal Dimensions of Communication
ENG 6318 Stylistics & Editing
ENG 6322 Instructional Design
ENG 6324 Writing in the Professions
ENG 6328 Hypermedia Theory & Design
ENG 6360 Special Topics in Technical and Professional Communication

Other graduate courses offered at UHD may be accepted as electives towards the degree.
ENG 6301 Composition Pedagogy
ENG 6319 Language Development and Variation: Implications for Educators
CJ 6320 Research Design and Methods
CJ 6321 Quantitative Analysis in Criminal Justice
Math 5305 Advanced Business Statistics

A minimum of six (6) undergraduate hours may be accepted as degree electives, at the discretion of the Graduate Coordinator.

Course descriptions on following pages.
MSPWTC Course Descriptions

A. Required Core

ENG 5304  Proseminar in Professional & Technical Communication
Prerequisite: ENG 3304 or equivalent (E)
Orients students to faculty research and the issues, goals, and methodologies of professional and technical communication. The course examines: definitions and histories of the field; relevant theories, practices, and genres; data gathering and research; technology-related issues; ethical and intercultural implications; and professionalization.

ENG 5317  Rhetorical Theory & Criticism
Introduces major rhetorical theories, practice, and criticism. The course provides practice in applying critical theory to contemporary texts.

ENG 5330  Visual Design
Prerequisite: Eng 5317
Practicum in applying theory to original designs and to analyzing and revising designs. Examines the theory and practices for effective design in print and electronic media.

ENG 5340  Project Management
Prerequisite: Eng 5304
Introduces the techniques for systematic planning and supervision of complex writing projects and the production of print and electronic documentation. Students will become proficient in three major areas: collaborating with Subject Matter Experts to develop and clarify content; coordinating writing and production elements for publication; and expert testing for usability.

B. Required Options

Option A: ENG 6390 and 6391 or
Option B: ENG 6380 or 6390, 6392

ENG 6380  Internship
Prerequisite: 15 hours applied to MSPWTC degree
Provides industry experience for students. Writing or design projects developed in the course may be tested and used for the capstone project or portfolio.

ENG 6390  Directed Research
Prerequisite: 15 hours applied to MSPWTC degree
Supports and guides student research for thesis or capstone project. Students enroll in this course during the semester they intend to research, develop, and propose a thesis or capstone project.

ENG 6391  Thesis
Prerequisite: ENG 6390 and 18 hours applied to MSPWTC degree
Provides direction and support for students during the semester in which they intend to complete their thesis and graduate. No credit is awarded until the thesis is approved by the thesis committee and the student has passed an oral exam on the thesis and graduation portfolio.

**ENG 6392  Capstone Project**  
*Prerequisite: 6390/6380 and 18 hours applied to MSPWTC degree*  
Provides an alternative to the thesis. Students may complete a capstone project in which they propose and design a long document for a real-world audience. The project typically includes a form of usability testing and rewriting. No credit is awarded until the capstone project is approved by the thesis committee and the student has passed an oral exam on the project and graduation portfolio.

**C. Electives**

**ENG 5325  Advanced Medical Writing**  
*Prerequisite: graduate standing or departmental approval*  
Explores the theory and practice of documenting and reporting both narrative findings and statistical results, for medicine and life sciences in a variety of formats—including proposals, publishable articles, and patient information materials. Students will present a seminar with an accompanying literature review and complete individual and group projects.

**ENG 6303  Public Relations & Media Management**  
Explores the trends and issues affecting corporations: crisis management, public affairs, communication, consumer affairs, employee relations, environmental problems, and issues of multinationals. The course may include the analysis of various examples of publicity materials—news conferences, feature placements, special events, media tours, and case studies—as well as readings on propaganda and on the history and theories of public relations.

**ENG 6310  Intercultural & World Communication**  
Examines issues surrounding communication for/with multiple audiences with diverse linguistic and cultural patterns. The class will also consider implications of controlled language systems.

**ENG 6312  Ethical and Legal Dimensions of Communication**  
Helps students identify and address the ethical challenges that occur in private, social, and professional contexts. The course will focus on real-world ethical dilemmas with diverse approaches to decision-making using ethical reasoning and applied ethics. Legal considerations will include first amendment issues such as freedom of speech and press, copyright, libel, privacy, access, administrative law of advertising and broadcasting, and other legal problems in professional writing situations.

**ENG 6318  Stylistics & Editing**  
Trains students in the examination and assessment of the rhetorical effects of style and editing choices and in the application of appropriate choices to a variety of documents, audiences, and settings. Covers information-processing theory and practice, with students being responsible for articulating clearly and concisely the reasons for their style and editing choices, including graphics.
**ENG 6322 Instructional Design**  
Surveys and applies the theory, research, creation, development, and delivery of courses in corporate and academic environments. Students will design and present curriculum for business, industry, or classroom use.

**ENG 6323 Communications and Technology**  
Acquaints students with various computer software programs and their application to specific disciplines such as criminal justice, medical & science writing, and technical communication. Projects will include print documents as well as slide presentations incorporating analyzed research data. Students will expand their knowledge of rhetorical principles and of techniques for reporting statistical analyses and conveying them to specialized audiences.

**ENG 6324 Writing in the Professions**  
Examines researching, writing, and editing journal and newsletter articles in one or several technical fields or disciplines, including science, medicine, pharmaceuticals, engineering, environmental science, and law. Students will develop one article project from initial research to submission. May be repeated once for credit with permission of department.

**ENG 6328 Hypermedia Theory & Design**  
Reviews print-based methods of content organization and reader orientation. These traditional methods are contrasted with typical solutions in on-line and multi-media communications to the problems of content navigation, readability, and usability. Includes study of navigation maps or graphs, information architecture, traditional and hyper-linked indexes, table of contents and on-line context lists, and the use of document description or meta-information to facilitate effective information retrieval.

**ENG 6360 Special Topics in Technical and Professional Communication**  
Selected topics in writing for industry, linguistics, pedagogy, and rhetorical or discourse theory. When course content varies, course may be repeated by permission of department.

**D. Discretionary Electives**

**ENG 6301 Composition Pedagogy**

**ENG 6319 Language Development and Variation: Implications for Educators**

**CJ 6320 Research Design and Methods**

**CJ 6321 Quantitative Analysis (in Criminal Justice)**

**Undergraduate courses:** A maximum of six (6) hours of Professional Writing undergraduate courses may be accepted as degree electives, at the discretion of the Graduate Advisor. These hours must be approved in advance.
Thesis & Capstone Project

Thesis
Students choose a thesis topic after completing at least 15 hours in the program. The thesis may take a variety of forms, including traditional expository prose, or more experimental projects that utilize professional writing and technical communication applications. The thesis requires a substantial amount of research and writing. You will choose a thesis topic and perform a critical investigation of the topic. The thesis should demonstrate your ability to carry out independent research and contribute to the base of academic knowledge in your field.

The total length of the thesis may vary depending on the concentration. The final length should result from consultation with the thesis committee, as the committee will ultimately approve or reject the project.

Capstone Project
The capstone project provides an alternative to the thesis. The capstone project is an in-depth project that demonstrates your expertise in developing a deliverable for a real-world audience or client. The capstone project may be the result of work completed for an internship or an independent study.

The Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC) must approve your thesis topic or capstone project. After the GAC has approved your thesis or project, you will work under the direction and advice of two faculty members to write, revise, and produce original research or to produce the project. In your final semester, a third reader will be assigned to your committee to participate in reviewing and approving your work.
MSPWTC Faculty

Graduate Coordinator
Michelle Moosally, Ph.D.
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Note: Some faculty Suites may be relocated from time to time; students can also check with the English Department Secretaries to locate faculty, Ruby Brown or Bridgett Johnson, Suite 1045-South, 713-221-8013.
MSPWTC Admissions Procedure

Admission
Admission is competitive and selective. You must demonstrate that you possess the abilities, interests, and qualities necessary to successfully complete the program and the potential to contribute to the fields of professional writing or technical communication.

If you are seeking admission to the MSPWTC program you will need to provide the following application materials for review by the Graduate Advisory Committee. All materials should be submitted to the UHD Graduate Admissions Office:  www.uhd.edu/admissions/graduate.html

- Official transcript showing a baccalaureate degree from an accredited university
- Official transcripts showing GPA from all colleges or universities previously attended 
  Note: As admission to the degree program is competitive, candidates with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher will be preferred.
- Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score if cumulative undergrad GPA is below 3.5 (those holding a post-baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution are also exempt from the GRE requirement)
- Apply Texas form and 1000-word essay (the prompt is available in the online application found on the Graduate Admissions website)
- Resume
- Two letters of recommendation and recommendation forms from individuals acquainted with the applicant’s work and academic potential (form available on the website)
- Test of English as a Foreign Language scores if graduate of a university in which English is not the native language (minimum score of 550 with section scores of 50 or higher).

Admission Process
The Graduate Advisory Committee will

- Review your application after your file contains all of the items listed above.
- Evaluate applications using a matrix based on GPA, GRE score, relevant course work or experience, recommendations, and other written materials in the applicant’s file.
- Use the results of this evaluation to determine if you are admitted.
- Notify you, in writing, of the committee’s decision.
MSPWTC Application Process

Application Fee
A non-refundable application fee of $35.00 must be submitted with the application.

- Applicants mailing in the application should include a check or money order.
- Applicants submitting the application in person should pay the fee at the Cashier’s Office before going to Admissions.
- The application, documents, and fee will be valid for one year.

Official Transcripts
Have official transcripts sent to the Office of Admissions from all colleges or universities previously attended. A transcript is official when it is indicated as such by the issuing institution and sent directly from that institution to the University of Houston-Downtown.

If you have attended a college or university outside the United States, your transcripts must be evaluated by an evaluation service recognized by UHD. Please refer to the UHD web site www.uhd.edu/admissions/naces/html for a list of suggested credential evaluation services.

Test Scores
If your cumulative undergraduate GPA is below 3.5 or you do not have a post-baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution of higher education, you are required to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General as part of your application to the Master’s Program in Professional Writing & Technical Communication. You should have your official scores sent to the Office of Admissions. Scores are valid only for tests taken within the last five years. To have GRE scores reported to UHD, the graduate institution code R6922 (found in the GRE booklet) should be used. You may register for the GRE on-line at www.gre.org.

Personal Statement and Resume
You must submit a personal statement and a current resume to the Office of Admissions with your application. The personal statement should address the following prompt:

Write at least 1000 words answering the following questions in detail. Support your views with reasons and examples drawn from such areas as your reading, experience, observations, or academic studies. Be sure to develop your ideas fully and organize them coherently:

Why you want to study professional writing and technical communication? What topics or issues in our field might you want to study further and why? What qualifies you to embark upon this field of study? What experience you have in this field? How do you plan to use your degree?

Letters of Reference and Recommendation Forms
You should secure written references from two individuals who know you well and can comment objectively on your qualifications. Provide each evaluator with the recommendation form and a self-addressed envelope. You should ask the evaluator to enclose the completed recommendation form and a signed typed letter of recommendation in the envelope, seal and sign the envelope across the seal, and return it to you. You must submit both recommendations, unopened, to the Office of Admissions with your application. Recommendation forms are available in the Office of Admissions or online at www.uhd.edu/academic/colleges/humanities/english/mspwtc/GradApp_MSPWTC_RECOMMENDED.pdf
Residency Information
If you were born outside the United States, you will need to present, in person, your immigration
documentation, passport or citizenship certificate in order to determine residency for tuition
purposes. If you were born outside of Texas, you may need to provide information regarding
your employment in the state in order to qualify for in-state tuition.

International Students
NON-U.S. resident students holding a visa should complete the Application for International
Admission. International students should contact the International Students Office at 713-221-
8048 for additional information. The website is www.uhd.edu/admissions/international.html.
Advising and Registration

Advising
As a MSPWTC student you will not be required, but are encouraged, to meet with the Graduate Coordinator before registering for classes or before beginning first semester of course work. The Graduate Coordinator will be available to help discuss your academic goals and complete a degree plan.

It is suggested that you meet with the Graduate Coordinator or a Graduate Advisor at least once an academic year to review your degree progress.

Registration
Upon acceptance into the MSPWTC program you will be able to register for classes in person or online. However, prior to each semester, you will need to inform the Graduate Coordinator of which courses you would like to enroll in. The Coordinator will enter the necessary approvals for you to register for those courses.

To register online, go to https://global.dt.uh.edu/eservices/ and select “Class Schedule” to review classes or “My Registration & Schedule” to register. (Be sure to select “Graduate Only” under “Course Level”.) To register online or by telephone you will need a User ID (your 9-digit Student ID) and a password.
Post-Baccalaureate Students

If you want to take courses on the graduate level without pursuing a graduate degree at UHD, you will need to apply as a post-baccalaureate student on the undergraduate level.

UHD considers you a post-baccalaureate student if:
- You are seeking a master’s degree at another university and come to UHD to take courses that will transfer to that institution.
- You want to take courses and do not want to pursue a graduate degree at UHD and are not pursuing a degree at another institution.

Required admission materials:
- **Application form**: use undergraduate application which includes post-baccalaureate admission option
- **Application fee**: same as for undergraduate post-baccalaureate admission
- **Official transcript**: from the institution where your bachelor’s degree or equivalent was awarded.

International admissions:
- If you are an international student, you will need to meet international admission requirements.

Advising and registration:
- As a post-baccalaureate student, you are advised by University College.
- You may self-advise; however, you will not be able to self-register for graduate courses in the MSPWTC program because you will need the approval of the Graduate Coordinator.
- Post-baccalaureate students may have limited graduate course availability since degree-seeking graduate students will have registration priority in MSPWTC courses.

Taking graduate and undergraduate courses:
- You may take up to nine graduate semester hours without being admitted to the MSPWTC program or any other UHD graduate program.
- You may take undergraduate courses with your graduate courses. Undergraduate courses are not subject to the nine semester-hour graduate maximum.
- As a post-baccalaureate student taking graduate courses, you will
  - Have the same privileges as post-baccalaureate students taking undergraduate courses.
  - Perform the same work and be evaluated according to the same standards as graduate students enrolled in that course.

Transferring post-baccalaureate course credit to the MSPWTC:
- You may petition to transfer post-baccalaureate courses for graduate credit.
- The Graduate Coordinator, considering each petition individually, will determine if courses taken by a post-baccalaureate student may be transferred to the MSPWTC.
- To be considered for transfer credit, your petition must demonstrate that the course was:
  - In professional writing or a closely-related field,
- Completed with a grade of ‘B’ or better (official transcript, if transferred from another university),
- Not previously counted toward an undergraduate or graduate degree,
- Completed no later than six years from your date of graduation.
- If the courses are from another graduate program, you may need to provide course descriptions, syllabi, or readings lists.

**Admission to a graduate program:**

- Admission to UHD as a post-baccalaureate student does not guarantee acceptance into a graduate program.
- If you decide to pursue a master’s degree at UHD, you must apply to the graduate program and meet all the admission requirements.
- If you are denied admission to the MSPWTC, you will be allowed to apply as a post-baccalaureate and will be allowed to reapply later.
- You may not apply simultaneously for both graduate and post-baccalaureate status.
- If you have taken graduate classes as a post-baccalaureate student at UHD, up to 6 of those hours (grade of ‘B’ or better) may be counted toward your graduate degree if you are accepted into the program.
MSPWTC Academic Policies/Standards

Enrollment
Full time enrollment for the MSPWTC program for the fall and spring semesters is 9 hours. Part time enrollment for the MSPWTC program for the fall and spring semesters is 3-6 hours. The MSPWTC program will take 2 years to complete for full time students. It will take 6 years for part time students to complete the program. Because most financial aid programs require graduate students to finish their studies in 6 years, we encourage you to take no less than 6 hours a semester. If you drop out for a semester you must reapply for admission back into the program.

If you would like to enroll for 12 hours you must submit a waiver for approval and you must be not working during that period.

Orientation
Once enrolled in the MSPWTC you must attend an orientation.

Incomplete Grade
An incomplete grade is given only when an unforeseen emergency prevents a student from completing the course work and only with the instructor’s approval. A grade of I will be changed to a passing grade if the missing work is completed satisfactorily by the deadline set by the instructor but no later than the end of the long semester immediately following the term in which the grade was received. An incomplete grade that is not removed by this deadline becomes an F. Repetition of a course for which an incomplete grade was received does not affect resolution of the original grade. An incomplete grade earned in a student’s graduating semester is computed as an F in determining grade point average.

Grade Point Average (GPA)
Students must maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.0. Grades if C or lower do not count toward graduation, and two course grades of C or lower are cause for dismissal from the program.

Transfer
Students may transfer no more than six semester hours of graduate work; transferred coursework must be B level or above. The student must formally request the transfer from the Graduate Coordinator. Any courses taken for transfer after the student begins the MSPWTC program must be pre-approved by the Graduate Coordinator.

Academic Honesty
The Academic Honesty Code is embraced by all members of the University of Houston-Downtown academic community and is an essential element of the institution’s academic credibility. The Honesty Code states “We will be honest in all our academic activities and will not tolerate dishonesty.” The purpose of the Academic Honesty Policy is to deal with alleged violations of the Honesty Code in a fair and consistent manner. The policy is administered jointly by students and faculty. It is each student’s responsibility to read and understand the Academic Honesty Policy. It may be found in the University of Houston-Downtown Student Handbook.
Financial Aid

The Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid
Suite 330-South, 713-221-8041

The Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid (OSFA) assists students with the financial planning and financing for their education. Financial aid consists of grants, scholarships, loans and work study. Most aid, except for scholarships, is based upon individual need and eligibility. Aid is available to students who are enrolled at least part-time have satisfactory academic progress, and demonstrates financial need.

To be considered for aid you need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). A paper application can be picked up at the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid or the application can be filled out online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). The UHD school code is 003612.

You will also need to complete the UHD Financial Aid Application and the Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy and return them to the OSFA. Both the application and the SAPP can be downloaded from the financial aid website at [www.uhd.edu/admissions/financial_aid](http://www.uhd.edu/admissions/financial_aid).

Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid, 330-South, 713-221-8041 or visit the website [www.uhd.edu/admissions/financial_aid](http://www.uhd.edu/admissions/financial_aid).

Emergency Tuition and Book Loans

A limited amount of money is available to make emergency loans to students. You can review eligibility guidelines and download the instructions at [www.uhd.edu/cashiers/loans.html](http://www.uhd.edu/cashiers/loans.html).

These loans require an application and funds are disbursed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Estimated Costs

You can find estimates for all tuition and fee costs at [www.uhd.edu/cashiers/tuition_fees.html](http://www.uhd.edu/cashiers/tuition_fees.html).
Computer and Library Facilities

Academic Computing Lab
Suite 800-South, 713-221-8540

The Academic Computing Lab provides computer systems and support to all students, faculty, staff and alumni of UH-Downtown. The primary function of the lab is to provide computing resources and user support for instructional and research activities. The Academic Computing Lab is located in Suite 800-South. There are over 250 computers represented in the lab, as well as laser printers and a color printer. To enter the lab you must be a current UHD student with a valid UHD ID card or show your UHD Alumni card.

All Students using the Academic Computing Lab and TTLC Classrooms have a print quota for each semester. Once that quota is reached the user will be charged an additional amount per page to print.

The Academic Computing Lab hours and other details are available at www.uhd.edu/computing/acl/.

W.I. Dykes Library
5th Floor, 713-221-8181

The W. I. Dykes Library is located on the 4th and 5th floor of the One Main Street building (accessed by elevators on the east end of the building). The library has more than 200,000 print volumes on site and several million articles available online. The library also has many computers to provide access to the library’s online catalog and electronic databases for finding articles or citations. There are also many study areas and rooms available for student use. The library’s website is www.uhd.edu/library.

The UHD Online Catalog lists the books and journals available in the Dykes Library at UHD as well as libraries at UH, UH-Clearlake, and UH-Victoria. The catalog may be accessed 24 hours a day from the library’s website.

A current UHD ID card must be presented when checking out materials. Check the website for intersession and holiday hours.
UHD Student Affairs

The University of Houston-Downtown’s Division of Student Affairs offers a wide variety of services, programs and activities designed to augment the academic experience of students to facilitate their development as whole persons.

For more information please refer to The UH-Downtown Catalog or Student Handbook. You may also visit the Student Life website at www.uhd.edu/sae/student_life/.
Contact Information

For more information about the MSPWTC program please refer to the following contact information.

**MSPWTC website link**
www.uhd.edu/mspwtc

**MSPWTC Graduate Coordinator**
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www.uhd.edu/academic/gradprograms.html

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One Main Street, Suite 350-South
Houston, Texas 77002-1001
713-221-8048
www.uhd.edu/admissions/international.htm

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