Dear Students,

Each day you make a new commitment to continue your education, please remember that we are here to support you throughout your entire journey and that we welcome you on every day of the semester.

Located in the College of Public Service, the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Program is an active and growing part of the College and the larger community. As the Director of the Program, I am proud of our staff, students, and faculty as they engage in research and service throughout the city and the world. With ongoing research projects in Houston, Mexico, El Salvador, Costa Rica and India on topics including cancer survivorship, gerontology, immigration, and suicide, we are quickly making our mark on the world!

As a motto, Social Workers “Stand up for Others.” As a mission, our Profession is focused on improving the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole. Social Workers can be found on the front lines of disaster response and recovery, in community organizations, in schools, in healthcare settings, in policy and legislative development, and much, much more.

Just a few of the many opportunities in our Program include study abroad in Costa Rica and India, and a successful “Spanish Track” option where students develop as competent Social Workers in both English and Spanish. Our newest effort to support our students went fully live in fall of 2018. The Social Work Program is the first on campus to go textbook free! Called our Open Access Textbook Initiative, students save money and reduce student loan debt by not having to pay for text books in any Social Work class. In short, all the materials required in any Social Work course are open access and/or free to all students, even non-majors!

As the Director, I encourage you to stop by Suite 345 in the Commerce Building to learn more about Social Work as a meaningful career path. If you are ready to apply to our Program, we are here to help you complete the application process. I hope that you will contact me at mccartyd@uhd.edu with questions. We are eager to welcome you to our Profession.

Dr. Dawn McCarty
Director of the Social Work Program
Undergraduate Research Projects

Social Work
Christina Johnson, Chelsea Pederson, Pasia Uranga, and Safia Kuzu: Currently doing their practicum with Baylor College of Medicine under Dr. Barros-Lane for a national research program called CHOICES4Health. CHOICES4Health is funded by Center for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health Working with women that are child bearing age of 18-44 in Harris Health Clinics, students conduct assessments to assess and addressed mothers who have struggle with substance abuse. This research will lead to intervention and prevention programs to help reduce substance exposed pregnancies.

Criminal Justice
Raheema Adilqad "Voices of Death Penalty Jurors: Initial Examination" Dr. Janice Ahmad

Graduate Research Projects & Theses

• Matthew Carter "4th Amendment and the 3rd Party Doctrine" Chair: Dr. Kevin Buckler
• Linda McCullum "Ethics, Robotics and Criminal Justice Policy" Chair: Dr. Beth Pez
• Liselie Alcala "Phone Scams: An Exploratory Study of the Perception of Hispanics" Chair: Dr. Hsiao-Ming Wang
• Dennis Tabora "The Blank Box Effect: How a False Narrative was Created and Ways to Fix It." Chair: Dr. Ashley Blackburn
• Jessica Ayala & Jacqueline Mayoral: Currently creating a draft manual for new employees in the victim advocacy division of a county agency. Chair: Dr. Ashley Blackburn

6 Questions with MSCJ Students Jessica Ayala and Jacqueline Mayoral

01 Tell us about your experiences in the MSCJ program.
02 Why was getting your Master's degree important?
03 What advice would you give to other students considering getting their Master's degree?
04 Can you talk about your school journey? Did you face any obstacles/adversities? How did you overcome them?
05 Could you explain your work as victim advocates?
06 Lastly, what is your dream job and why?

MSCJ Student Highlight
Jessica Ayala & Jacqueline Mayoral

Tell us about your experiences in the MSCJ program.

JM: I love that the classes are small, it allows us to build relationships with your professors and peers. The classes are quite challenging but manageable if you're willing to invest time and effort.

JA: I have completed my core and elective classes for the MSCJ program. Currently, I am working on a project with Dr. Blackburn. I started the program in 2013, took a break and returned to school in 2018. I would describe the classes as interesting and quite challenging. A majority of the classes require you to read, so it's important that you invest the time.

For Policy Analysis the material was hard to understand in the beginning but after putting in the time into the assignment I got a good understanding of all of the content. Human Trafficking was a fascinating class to take because we learned about the various types of human trafficking and read about personal experiences.

Why was getting your Master's degree important?

JM: As an immigrant family, my parents have sacrificed everything to be able to provide me and my brother with education. I work hard every day to be able to make them proud. My Master's degree is also important to be able to seek better job opportunities in the future.

JA: A Master's degree is important to me because in a competitive workforce it's something that I feel is needed to stand out and excel in my career. I have been working with victims of crime for almost 9 years. I think it's important for me to be educated in the different fields of criminal justice.

What advice would you give to other students considering getting their Master's degree?

JM: Just go for it! I became interested in criminal justice because I have always wanted to help the community in ways that not many people would be willing to.

JA: The program at UHD is very flexible but intense. You have to be willing to put in the work in order to achieve passing your courses. All of the MSCJ professors are great to work with.

Can you talk about your school journey? Did you face any obstacles/adversities? How did you overcome them?

JM: I felt intimidated due to my young age. I graduated with my Bachelors at age 20 and started the MSCJ program that same year. I met with Dr. Cavanaugh and he explained the program and talked about his students; this showed how much he cares and how passionate faculty are about their students' successes. I immediately knew this was an environment I would like to be in; a program where they care and are willing to help in any way possible.

JA: I graduated from UHD in 2009 with a Bachelors in Criminal Justice. I decided to return to UHD for my MSCJ because of the flexible schedule and small classes. I was able to register for classes online and continue working my full time job. The reason I stopped is because my husband decided to return to school, so I supported him through his journey. I had another son while I was on break, so my growing family took most of my time. When I started back at UHD I was pregnant with my third son. I completed six remaining courses in one year by taking two classes in the spring, two in the summer and two in the fall of 2018.

The available courses at UHD is what allowed me to complete.

Could you explain your work as victim advocates?

JM: I started working in foster care as a Case Manager and then moved on to the Harris County District Attorney's Office as a Victim Assistance Coordinator (VAC). As a VAC, I help victims navigate the criminal justice system and court process while connecting them with resources in the community to build their social support system.

JA: I have been in the field of victim services for 9 years. I started my career at the Attorney General's Office-Crime Victims Compensation Division. I then went to work in their Child Support Division for some time. I've been working at the District Attorney's Office Victims Services Division since 2012 as a Victim Assistance Coordinator (VAC). My caseload consists of working with victims of violent crime, specifically Felony cases. As a VAC, we are the liaison between the prosecutor and the victim. We help guide the victim through the criminal justice process, inform them of their rights, update them on their case and accompany them to court. Victim services is something I got into because of UHD. UHD connected me with an internship that lead me to fall in love with this field.

Lastly, what is your dream job and why?

JM: Great question! At this point, I am still unsure of what my “dream job” is. There are so many opportunities and types of positions in the system that are of interest to me. I see myself working in a state or federal capacity doing some sort of investigative work. I hope that whatever job I have in the future contains a component of victim advocacy.

JA: At this point of my career, I truly love what I do. Being a Victim Assistance Coordinator is my dream job.

Criminal Justice Internships & Jobs

Declared junior and senior criminal justice majors may be eligible to enroll in Field Experience with Dr. Gilmore and earn academic credit while completing an internship. Students who complete the Field Experience course gain valuable skill sets such as the ability to critically analyze crime and justice issues within practical criminal justice applications while also acquiring first-hand experience in a criminal justice occupation of their interest. In previous semesters, students have been offered full- or part-time employment with the agency with which they completed their internship. For other students, participation in the program provided them very positive recommendations from a professional, which resulted in another agency hiring the student or admission to a graduate program or professional school.

Current placements at agencies span a gamut of criminal justice professions to allow students to explore the wide variety of careers available to them upon graduation. In past semesters students have completed internships with Houston Police Department, The Harris County Institute of Forensic Science, Harris County Juvenile Probation, The Children’s Assessment Center, and the FBI. The Field Experience course is offered in Fall, Spring, or Summer semesters, and can be completed for either three or six credit hours.

If you are interested in learning more about internship, please make an appointment to meet with Dr. Gilmore by emailing her at gilmore@uhd.edu.
Francisco Ovalle, senior undergraduate student enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work, Spanish Track. Finding interest in the social work, Francisco found himself searching through Google for the best social work program in Houston. The top result was University of Houston-Downtown Bachelor of Social Work. Not only was the program CSWE (Council on Social Work Education) accredited, he also saw the many opportunities that the program offered and the great professors that taught the courses. He tells us that his stay at UHD has been life changing because in UHD he has found likeminded people that are committed to change the world just like he is. As Francisco has been admitted to the Graduate School of Social Work in the University of Houston Main with an advance standing, he will be pursuing Masters of Social Work to become a License Clinical Social worker.

In the future, Francisco would also like to pursue a Doctorate of Social Work (DSW). Francisco’s future career goal is to provide therapy to those who struggle with gender identity. He hopes to empower Trans people, non-binary people, and others to live their lives fully by focusing in the LGBTQ+ population centered on mental health services. As an exemplary student, Francisco strongly advises students to get acquainted with the course catalog and to create a mock schedule that will guide them through the courses in the program. Alongside creating a mock schedule, Francisco advises students to get involved with the social work organizations in campus and also to volunteer outside of school with any of the many agencies and non-profits in our area. He says that the opportunity to volunteer opens the door for learning possibilities and also network opportunities for the future.

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My name is Courtney Clark and I’m a senior undergraduate student at the University of Houston-Downtown. I am working on my Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Psychology. I have decided to continue my education in the Fall of 2019 to pursue my Master’s Degree in Criminal Justice. I am so lucky to have had awesome professors during my time here at UHD: Dr. Barbieri and Dr. Gilmore. These two amazing women have not only inspired me but have taken the time to mentor me.

My journey here began in the Spring of 2017 after I received my Associates Degree at Lone Star North Harris (Fall 2016). Since then, I have joined two incredible organizations the Professional Society of Criminal Justice Students (PSCJS), and Alpha Phi Sigma (APS), which is the National Criminal Justice Honor Society, where I hold an officer position as Secretary. I have completed an internship at the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department as well as won a book scholarship at school. I have volunteered at the Children’s Advocacy Center and many other local nonprofit organizations such as the Beacon, Target Hunger, the Houston Food Bank, and the Port of Houston.

During my experience at the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department I was able to be exposed to kids who really need help and guidance from someone other than their parents, if one was even available. My experience has also furthered my desire to be in the field working with children, women, and their families. This semester (Spring 2019) I am working on my last three classes until I graduate with my Bachelor’s Degree. My time here at UHD has been nothing short of amazing. I was able to receive work study to help me with life expenses and still focus on my school work. While working with the work study program I have created a blog for the Social Work Department that posts jobs, events, and community service opportunities for anyone interested. The University of Houston-Downtown has taught me that hard work definitely pays off and how important building connections really are. I want to tell students coming up after me that you never know who’s watching or who could extend a helping hand. Always be kind and respectful.

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The Social Work Student Community Advocacy Network was founded in 2012; of the original founding members is our very own professor Damaris Cortez. SWSCAN is an organization founded on the principles of service to the community and abides by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. The organization aims to build camaraderie between social work students and encourages freshmen and sophomore to become more involved with the UHD campus. SWSCAN is a great way to become more involved in the community and is an organization open to all UHD students regardless of major. Please contact uhdswscan@gmail.com if you would like more information.