Historically symbols of evil, snakes invoke sheer terror from most of us. Dr. Aaron Krochmal, assistant professor of biology at the University of Houston-Downtown, studies pitvipers from a deferential distance. His research on their heat-seeking sensors requires that he study them in a controlled laboratory environment but it does not make him any the less wary.

“I have a great respect for the animals I study,” he said. “Anything less could be life threatening.” Krochmal and colleagues will be on a National Geographic Channel television special called “Striker!” due out in early 2007.

Based on their findings, Krochmal and colleagues have turned their attention to the image-forming properties of these sense organs. Each facial pit is analogous to a pinhole camera, but the wide, shallow opening of the pit results in the formation of a crude image, “similar to our vision after our eyes get dilated at the optometrist,” Krochmal explains. Krochmal is using optical physics and state-of-the-art thermal cameras to recreate what the snakes are actually seeing and, by looking at the snakes’ behavior, hoping to learn how they complete complex tasks with such blurred thermal vision.

A New York City native, Krochmal discovered his early interest in biology visiting the Bronx Zoo and the American Museum of Natural History. To his delight, he has come full circle: his research was recently featured in the exhibit Lizards and Snakes: Alive! at the American Museum of Natural History. The exhibit is now traveling the country.

“My results will hopefully extend beyond viper biology to human systems, helping us understand and improve human vision,” Krochmal said.

Above and left: Aaron Krochmal observes his research subjects from a safe position.

There’s more good news inside!

• Science Foundation Grant ............................................ p. 3
• Alum on the Go! ......................................................... p. 4
• UHD Entrepreneurship Program.................................... p. 6
• Bragging Rights........................................................... p. 7
Where can you find a rich source of knowledge from a wide range of professions? Look no further afield than Houston. With the nation’s fourth largest concentration of corporate headquarters, the Port of Houston, NASA, and growing technology and support industries – Houston hosts a wealth of expertise. And the University of Houston-Downtown is taking full advantage of it.

“There have been some wonderful guest speakers on campus, and that fosters the intellectual energy that we are always striving for in a university setting,” says Dr. Chris Birdach, dean of University College. “Guest speakers encourage linkage of the classroom to the broader community.”

This fall, University College presented Dr. David Weinberger – currently a research fellow at Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society – who gave an entertaining yet challenging presentation on the authority of knowledge.

The College of Business began its Executive Speakers Series to bring the best of the business community onto the campus.

“We believe a college education is more than what goes on in the classroom,” says Dr. Don Bates, dean of the college. “We look for business leaders who have an interest in higher education and can enrich the learning environment in the College of Business.”

Speakers in the College of Business series share information about career possibilities in their areas – and in their firms. Importantly, they serve as role models, and many UHD students are first-generation college students with few professional role models.

Fall speakers included Anne Taylor, Gulf Coast Managing Partner of Deloitte, who spoke on “Career Management;” Mike Vescuso, vice president of human resources at BMC Software, who discussed the hiring, development, retention and assessment of managers; and Jack Plumett, CEO, Plumett Research, who spoke on entrepreneurship in the high tech industry. Among upcoming topics are how to prepare for the coming revolution in the digital industry and the future of the energy industry.

Students in the Criminal Court class of the Criminal Justice Department, College of Public Service, saw the justice system from both sides recently when Harris County District Attorney Chuck Poth and criminal defense attorney John Kahn visited their class.

“I think it’s important to invite experts to the campus to speak to the students and faculty to enrich the applied fields of Criminal Justice and Teacher Education within the College of Public Service,” says Dr. Beth Pelz, dean of the college. “These people are addressing the day-to-day issues inherent in the education and criminal justice arenas and enhancing the learning experience for our majors.”

Another department which regularly schedules impressive speakers to address the UHD community is the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

“We’re quite proud of the diverse programs put together by the Cultural Enrichment Center,” says Dr. Susan Ahren, dean of the college. “We look for opportunities to collaborate with groups in our community, such as Inprint, Inc. and the Houston Poetry Fest.”

This fall’s Houston Poetry Fest featured poet Tanya Foster and UHD’s Joseph Aimone, assistant professor and poet. Other recent speakers included Fulbright Senior Fellow Pramod K. Neyan; “English Travel Writing and India, 1600-1820;” Argentinean photographer Paula Luttringer, an exhibit combining photography and text to give expression to those kid-napped and tortured during the 1970’s unrest in Argentina; a reading by Cuban poet Dionisio Martinez; and the popular Papa Russo, African harp/lute player and oral historian from Gambia.

In October alone, UHD’s College of Science and Technology presented Dr. Surya Mayandi Thevar of Annamalai University in South India speaking on “Emerging trends in the IT Sectors, KPO Sectors: and demand for knowledge professionals;” Gary Rockswold of University of Minnesota-Mankato discussing “Mathematics, Science, and Reality;” and Dr. Anita Silver of San Francisco State University addressing “Ethical Issues Concerning the Human Genome Project.”

At UHD, one cannot feel starved for information. The capacity to stretch the mind is the only limit on what can be learned from the thought-provoking speakers who grace our halls.
A significant grant recently received by UH-Downtown may just have some of the most important long-term outcomes for the university and its students.

The $900,000 National Science Foundation Grant awarded to Dr. Richard Aló, principal investigator, provides two-year funding for the CI TEAM Implementation Project Minority Serving Institutions – Cyberinfrastructure Empowerment Coalition (MSI-CIEC).

The project will bring together cyber-infrastructure (CI) experts from across the country through its partnering with the San Diego Supercomputer Center and the leadership of the three major MSI member associations, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium.

What is the purpose of a cyber-infrastructure? It brings together the many computing and database resources from around the world to the desktop. At that point, computer power can process and utilize this information. The NSF grant provides the tools, resources and training to realize this concept. Additionally, the grant enables an exchange of faculty and students.

The grant supports the integration of CI tools across the curriculum of MSI universities. The interdisciplinary approach encourages majors outside of math, computer and natural sciences to use e-science tools and resources. A significant portion of the NSF grant goes toward training MSI faculty nationwide and includes short residential programs, research projects with leaders in e-science, and a training series in San Diego.

“This grant will go a long way in bringing advanced research into our curriculum,” says Richard Aló, director of the Center for Computational Sciences at UHD.

He notes that the jobs of the future will be interdisciplinary and often global in nature, like university curriculums. Students need the resources to problem solve with students from other countries. He calls this distributed learning.

“This has given me the opportunity to learn not just theory but applied science that can help heal people who are ill, which means so much to me,” notes Pedroza. “The university is really accelerating science by giving undergraduate students the opportunity to excel.”

**Dedicated to Literacy**

For UHD student Janet Cantu, a good education starts with solid reading skills. With that in mind, this passionate student of urban education successfully moved toward a promising teaching career. “I believe a teacher plays the most influential role in a child’s life. A teacher can either make or break a child when it comes to wanting to learn,” says Janet.

This year at the 2006 Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts Conference in Houston, Texas; Janet received the $1,000 Scholarship for Future English Language Arts Teachers. The scholarship acknowledges deserving college students who are preparing for a career in English education.

As an active member of the UHD Children’s Literacy Society, Janet selflessly commits to Family Literacy Nights at several Houston area elementary schools. Janet’s devotion to teaching comes from watching her own mother’s impressive effort to earn a GED.

Dr. Carol Bedard, Urban Education assistant professor who nominated Janet, says, “Late nights and long drives do not deter Janet from bringing literacy to children.”

Graduating in December 2006 with her bachelor’s degree, Janet recently began her journey as an educator at Alief ISD’s Chambers Elementary where she student-teaches and hopes to continue as a full-time teacher.
Okay, maybe UHD graduate Tara Darby would figure somewhere high in your lineup of beautiful women. She was Miss Alabama, 2004, after all. But do not think for a minute that Darby is just another pretty face. This workaholic has multiple irons in the fire, all of them white hot.

“My problem,” she laughs, “is that I can’t give anything up because I love all the jobs I do.”

You have probably seen her on television at one time or another. She hosted Crossing Country on the Outdoor Channel, a show that featured travel up the southeast coast of the United States. Or perhaps you caught Wild About Houston on Channel 55. If not, she just got back from South Africa, doing a travel show on HDNET called Get Out, so watch for that airing.

She also models professionally. Is that what’s keeping her busy these days? Nope. Darby is putting her fine UHD education to work editing Houston Go! Magazine, a monthly entertainment and lifestyle publication.

“The hours could make this a miserable job, but we just love our product. It’s really great to love your work so much that you don’t even mind staying up all night for it.” Darby had just come off a 48-hour push to get the fourth issue out when she spoke those words.

Houston Go! Magazine has a distribution of 30,000, primarily inside the loop. Darby compares this young publication to Entertainment Weekly in content, covering things like big movies, music, celebrities and fashion.

Darby keeps the articles short and concise to fit into the fast-paced lifestyle of Houstonians. Houston Go! Magazine offers its readership small tidbits of information that the reader can walk away with, feeling a bit more savvy about the entertainment industry without having spent a lot of time reading up on it.

Where will she go from here? Darby plans to stick with her present endeavors for a while. Her laptop-enabled flexibility with the magazine lets her keep all her TV and modeling bookings. Everyone at the magazine supports her, covering for her when she goes out of town.

“When I was very young, I dreamed of being a writer,” Darby says. “Later, I wanted to be in television. Now I have both dreams.”
Strikes Gold Graduate Writing Professional Master of Professional Writing. The program April 20 Conference UHD Student Research April 20 Conference March 15 – April 26, O’Kane Gallery Vincent Valdez and Alex Rubio March 2007 Women’ s Month February 28, Career Services Black History Month January 17 – March 2, O’Kane Gallery Retrospect Audrey Buller: A Magic Realist in January 30 Address December 17, 2 p.m., Minute Maid Park Fall Commencement December 1 – December 9, O’Kane Gallery President’s State of the University Address January 30 UHD Student Leadership April 13 Address

Toby Hunt Toby Hunt, (’02, accounting) landed her dream job six months ago when Global Santa Fe hired her as a staff accountant in their operations accounting department. Global Santa Fe is an offshore oil and gas contractor that leads the world in providing turnkey drilling and drilling management services. Toby manages the accounting for nine of the company’s jackup rigs that are located in the Gulf of Mexico. “I love what I do,” Toby says. “This is the industry I’ve always wanted to work in. There is so much opportunity in the oil and gas industry here in Houston. It’s just phenomenal.”

Orean D. Chatman It may be 22 years past his UHD Bachelor’s degree in Business Services, and a Master’s along the way in Public Administration, but Orean D. Chatman has finally figured out what he wants to do with his life: he writes novels. “I always thought you had to be a perfect speller and have perfect grammar, which I don’t,” says this author. He finally found the confidence to write his crime novel, The Time is Wright, which has been released by VirtualBookWorm.com.

Stacy Martin Stacy Martin (’05, professional writing) was once a prolific journalist for the Dateline Downtown, UHD’s student newspaper. Now Stacy is using her keen writing skills to help the disabled. For two years, she has worked for the Barbara Jordan Endeavors in Excellence, Inc. program. As senior ambassador coordinator, Stacy helps people with disabilities find work, housing opportunities, and funding to pay for college. “I love what I do,” Stacy says.

Marvette Limon Marvette Limon, (’05, computer information systems) honed valuable IT skills in her five years as one of UHD’s own IT technicians. “Studying and working for the UHD IT Department helped me acquire the knowledge and experience I now utilize in my career,” Marvette says. She landed a technical analyst II position with the City of Houston and helps support the entire City of Houston network of departments, including police and fire. Marvette eagerly awaits word on whether or not UHD will get its MBA program.

ALUMNI NOTES

What’s New? Send a Note!

Update your former UHD classmates on your life by submitting an item for the “Alumni Notes” in New Horizons. We’ll also post your item in the alumni section of UHD’s website.

You can e-mail directly from the website at www.uhd.edu/alumni/notes.htm or mail your item to Alumni Relations at UH-Downtown, One Main Street, Suite 990-S, Houston, Texas 77002.
Entrepreneurship Up Close and Personal

The gap between theory and practice can dazzle a new graduate freshly unleashed on the business world. UHD’s Entrepreneurship Program helps students jump that gap. Despite its name, the program is not reserved for future business owners or business school students. Ken Jones, Director of Entrepreneurship at UHD, and Officer of our very own in room 276 North. This September, Doug teDuits (pronounced tay-dee-uits) accepted the position of UHD Campus Relations and Affirmative Action Officer. The program is a “super resume enhancer” for anyone, regardless of major or career goal. Why? A student who achieves an appropriate education plus real-life knowledge and experience behind him to know that an English major can be highly successful in the program “because they know how to read and write” on a communications level vital to professionals.

The Entrepreneurship Program focuses on giving students a “better, well-rounded viewpoint on what it takes to be successful in business,” says Jones. The program is a “super resume enhancer” for anyone, regardless of major or career goal. Why? A student who achieves an appropriate education plus real-life knowledge and experience behind him to know that an English major can be highly successful in the program “because they know how to read and write” on a communications level vital to professionals.

The use of guest speakers “provides that missing piece – real-life experience,” adds Randy Barrett, a current senior, and wire salesman. “It’s how a business works.”

“Learning from a textbook could never compare to real-life knowledge and experience.” — Robert Chevalier

“I plan to advertise that I’m here and what I do – to share my roles with faculty, staff and student groups,” says teDuits. “I’ll explain what I can provide to assist them.”

Watch for teDuits’ website; it will have links to associated university policies and external agencies related to discrimination, along with user-friendly forms. He will also plan to listen to the various constituencies of the university community to see what roles he can play to assist them. Send him an invitation to attend a faculty, staff or student meeting so he can hear any concerns and provide further information. Also, expect updated policies and training programs relating to discrimination, harassment and problem resolution.

Doug teDuits has two watchwords in his work: confidentiality and protection. As you might imagine, confidentiality applies to all aspects of the office.

“I encourage employees and students to ask about the precise confidentiality procedures that would apply to their specific case prior to discussing the details,” teDuits says.

Welcome, Douglas teDuits!

If you poke around down on the second floor, across from Student Activities and tucked away behind the student lockers in amongst the occasional scrap of forgotten paper and a dust banny or two, you will come upon something new and exciting.

Yes, it has been a long time coming, but UHD can now boast of having a Campus Relations Office and Officer of our very own in room 276 North. This September, Douglas teDuits (pronounced tay-dee-uits) accepted the position of UHD Campus Relations and Affirmative Action Officer.

Do we need him? You bet we do! Doug teDuits provides UHD a one-stop shop office where faculty will find support for working through discrimination issues, and staff and students can come to resolve conflicts related to employment, discrimination and harassment.

Doug teDuits will wear several hats in this encompassing and often sensitive work, but he has the appropriate education plus real-world experience to carry matters forward to resolution. He even understands the UH System, part of his experience being affirmative action and employee relations at UH. He has extensive expertise in working with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Affirmative Action Planning and Employment Discrimination investigations. In addition, teDuits is a certified mediator.

What will he tackle first?

“I plan to advertise that I’m here and what I do – to share my roles with faculty, staff and student groups,” says teDuits. “I’ll explain what I can provide to assist them.”

Watch for teDuits’ website; it will have links to associated university policies and external agencies related to discrimination, along with user-friendly forms. He also plans to listen to the various constituencies of the university community to see what roles he can play to assist them. Send him an invitation to attend a faculty, staff or student meeting so he can hear any concerns and provide further information. Also, expect updated policies and training programs relating to discrimination, harassment and problem resolution.

Doug teDuits has two watchwords in his work: confidentiality and protection. As you might imagine, confidentiality applies to all aspects of the office.

“I encourage employees and students to ask about the precise confidentiality procedures that would apply to their specific case prior to discussing the details,” teDuits says.

“Learning from a textbook could never compare to real-life knowledge and experience.” — Robert Chevalier

“I plan to advertise that I’m here and what I do – to share my roles with faculty, staff and student groups,” says teDuits. “I’ll explain what I can provide to assist them.”

Watch for teDuits’ website; it will have links to associated university policies and external agencies related to discrimination, along with user-friendly forms. He also plans to listen to the various constituencies of the university community to see what roles he can play to assist them. Send him an invitation to attend a faculty, staff or student meeting so he can hear any concerns and provide further information. Also, expect updated policies and training programs relating to discrimination, harassment and problem resolution.

Doug teDuits has two watchwords in his work: confidentiality and protection. As you might imagine, confidentiality applies to all aspects of the office.

“I encourage employees and students to ask about the precise confidentiality procedures that would apply to their specific case prior to discussing the details,” teDuits says.
New President of the American Marketing Association Collegiate Division Board

Dr. Lucille Pointer, assistant professor of marketing at UHD, has been elected to the American Marketing Association Collegiate Division Board as president. Her presidential duties will include advice to the collegiate division and oversight of collegiate programs such as the case competition, International Collegiate Conference, and awards program. The American Marketing Association, one of the largest professional associations for marketers with over 38,000 members worldwide, has been an essential resource providing relevant marketing information for experienced marketers.

Outstanding Educator

Dr. Anisul Islam, Professor of Economics, received the 2006 Outstanding Educator Award in Economics given jointly by the Southwestern Society of Economists and the Federation of Business Disciplines (FBD). Dr. Islam had the honor this year of being selected among many professors from different well-known universities across the country. Dr. Islam is President of the Academy of International Business, Southwest Chapter, and Economics and International Business Coordinator for the College of Business.

Woman of the Year

The Society for Technical Communication, Houston chapter, presented the Woman of the Year award to Dr. Ann Jennings for dedication to the promotion of professional writing skills and educational concerns, fellow professionals, and the community. STC, the world’s largest professional organization for technical communications, consists of 18,000 members. Jennings, 2006 panel presentation at the 53rd STC Annual Conference explored how universities and STC chapters can work together.

Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration

Dr. Carolyn Ashe, Professor of Management, Marketing, & Business Administration at UHD, completed the Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration sponsored jointly by Bryn Mawr College and Higher Education Resource Services. She was one of 72 participants selected from around the world. This exclusive institute, established 31 years ago, offers intensive training in education administration to middle and executive level women administrators who are committed to working together and supporting each other to expand opportunities for women in higher education.

Trevor Evans Award Winners

Dr. Ronald Barnes and Linda Becerra were awarded the Trevor Evans Award for expository writing at MathFest 2006, the annual Mathematical Association of America summer meeting. The award, given to authors published in Math Horizons who have written articles especially accessible to undergraduates, honored these UHD professors’ article, “The Evolution of Mathematical Certainty” published last year. Both Barnes and Becerra have written and lectured widely on mathematics education.

New Publication

Dr. Pamela Behan, assistant professor of sociology at UHD, recently published Solving the Health Care Problem: How Other Nations Succeeded and Why the United States Has Not. The book examines how a nation can permit widespread lack of healthcare due to lack of funds, or conversely becomes bankrupted by medical bills, by comparing the U.S. to Australia and Canada. Behan joined UHD’s faculty in 2000, shortly after receiving her PhD from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Art Exhibit

Floyd Newsom, UHD’s art critic/encouragement and Professor of Art, unveiled his solo exhibit The Things I See at the Jean Wich Gallery in downtown Houston. Newsom’s works of art are a compilation of bright and contrasting colors as well as symbols that create a feeling of hope and achievement. His art has been shown all over the United States and is in permanent museum collections in Houston, Memphis, Philadelphia and Dallas.
"At the beginning of every semester," says UHD student Chundra Smith, "I know what students are worried about – when will they get their financial aid refunds? They need the refunds to buy their books."

The Financial Aid office applies student awards first to the payment of tuition and fees. Any remaining monies in the award get "refunded" to the student.

Smith came to UHD from Sam Houston State, where financial aid refunding was a quick and easy overnight affair instead of the one-to-two week wait it has been at UHD. The secret? Student IDs.

The HigherOne ID used at Sam Houston State allows that university to credit refunds to student HigherOne checking accounts that can be accessed by the ID/debit card.

"It breaks my heart when students cry," says Patricia Jacobson, UHD Director of Student Accounts and Collections.

When students come to her because their refunds are delayed (maybe even lost) in the mail, when they are single parents with no food in the house, when they need books for their classes and are getting further and further behind, when they are being evicted and one week is a long, long time to wait; when it takes too much time to process the refunds, cut the checks at another campus, stuff the envelopes and get them in the mail – that's when Jacobson keeps her staff working into the wee hours, trying to help UHD students.

"I have personally given a student gas money because the check wasn't here and she didn't have gas money to come back the next day for it," Jacobson says. "I try to help every way I can. But now, I think the new GatorCard will solve a lot of those problems."

The GatorCard is UHD's new student ID, just like the one Chundra Smith used at Sam Houston State. This spring, it replaces the UHD photo ID presently in use.

GatorCard holders can open free checking accounts with HigherOne, the company behind the card, and access the money on deposit there with their GatorCard, which is also a debit card.

Furthermore, if a student chooses to open the free account, HigherOne will credit the account with any refunds due the student. This means that, yes, those same-day to overnight refunds known so well to Chundra Smith are becoming a reality at UHD, too.

The GatorCard carries a Mastercard imprint. This allows students to use the card anywhere a debit card is accepted. But remember – the GatorCard is not a credit card. If you have no money in the account, the GatorCard cannot loan it to you.

What does the UHD family think about the new GatorCard?

"I think the students who choose the GatorCard debit option will be thrilled at how quickly they receive their refunds," says Jacobson.

The Scholarships and Financial Aid office echoes that sentiment. "The GatorCard will not affect our financial aid processes administratively," says Director LaTasha Goudeau, "but, for the student, it is going to be great because of the time it saves over processing and mailing refund checks."

Lizza Salinas, UHD work study student, agrees. "The beauty of the GatorCard is that it's ready to go for you. I plan to have a little extra money in there for emergencies," adds UHD student Alicia Don. "I think the whole thing is a pretty good idea."

We do, too. If you have not yet verified your address and made certain you have a photo on file with UHD, take care of that right away so that, when the GatorCard is issued, you will have immediate, full use of its services. You are going to love it!