`Cloud Deck` Lets the Sun Shine Through
Good news came in threes for recent UHD Urban Education graduate John Wolf. He earned his university degree, landed a dream job teaching at the same elementary school he attended as a boy and received the Texas Student Teacher of the Year Award – all within a few weeks.

“To me, this award isn’t because I’m so great, it’s because my professors are so great,” Wolf said. “They teach in such a way that you cannot walk out of there not being a good teacher.”

Wolf is back in class at his alma mater, Berry Elementary School in the Houston Independent School District. Now, however, he is the pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade science teacher in the environmental magnet school.

In his final semester at UHD, spring 2010, Wolf completed his student teaching at Carmichael Elementary in Aldine ISD, but before starting his “regular job,” Wolf was already impressing people.

“In 50 years working in education, I have not seen another so perfectly suited for his role as educator in the classroom,” said Alice Ott, Wolf’s supervisor at UHD. “I wish John had taught my two sons.”

Jane Thielmann-Downs, associate professor in Urban Education, said, “I found him to be a very caring teacher with a sincere devotion to improving the academic achievement of all of his students.”

Wolf was recognized and presented with the Texas Student Teacher of the Year Award from the Texas Directors of Field Experiences in October. The presentation was part of the annual Consortium of State Organizations for Texas Teacher Education Conference.

Myma Cohen, chair of the Department of Urban Education, said Wolf’s statewide award is an honor to the entire department.

“John represents the high quality of all the teacher candidates in our program,” Cohen said. “We know that John and his fellow graduates will be assets to their schools and districts and will make a huge difference in the lives of their future students.”

Wolf is already busy at Berry Elementary. He spent summer mornings teaching English as a second language. In the afternoons, he worked on the school’s website, another responsibility he was able to take on because of his UHD training, he said. He also checked on his school’s science nature trail project.

“It is so awesome, because I walk around campus and can see myself as a little kid, running and playing on the playground,” Wolf said. “I walk around the corner sometimes and wonder if I’ll see Miss Baker, the third-grade teacher I loved so much. I had a stuttering problem when I would read, and she helped me overcome that.”

While Miss Baker has long since left Berry Elementary, Wolf continues to find inspiration in her teaching philosophy.

“You have to care about learning and about doing more and doing better,” he said. “With my kids, I’m always trying to instill in them a passion for learning more.”

Graduating from college was a challenge for Wolf, and it took two attempts to earn his teaching degree. From 2003 to 2008, he worked a night job driving a truck between Houston and Austin and Houston and San Antonio, squeezing in a 20-minute nap before classes each morning.

When he began his teacher training at UHD, he realized he needed more focus, so he began working part time and volunteering at assigned schools. During this time, his parents experienced health problems. Despite these difficulties, Wolf said his professors encouraged him to keep up his efforts. Now, his efforts have been recognized across the state.
New ‘Cloud Deck’ Art Inspires Visitors, Complements Shea Street Building

The new artwork is difficult to miss at UHD’s College of Business, stretching nearly four stories throughout the Shea Street Building’s windowed atrium. Visibility played a major role in developing the concept and design of the piece artist Jacob Hashimoto calls “Cloud Deck.” Walking or driving past the building, day or night, the artwork shows through the vaulted wall of glass. Suspended from the ceiling, the piece’s multiple strands gently move in interior air currents and change appearance with shifting light.

Hashimoto said his challenge was to create something that complemented the building’s beautiful architecture rather than competed with it. The result is his moving “cloud” made of approximately 5,000 bamboo and resin kites that are hung on 240 strands of aircraft cable. The entire piece floats in a 40 by 25 by 5 foot space, Hashimoto said.

The project has taken four years to complete for a variety of reasons, including damage to the building from Hurricane Ike. When a project takes that long to come to fruition, “the concern is that a lot of people will be up in arms about what you put up,” he said. “I hope they like it.”

During the Shea Street Building’s design phase, the UHD Art Acquisition Committee looked at possible locations for artwork in and outside the building. The committee’s goal was to identify locations for artwork as well as potential local, regional and national artists whose work would be a good fit for the building. The work also should add to the strength of the university’s existing art collection, said Michael Guidry, committee member and Curator of the University of Houston System Art Collections.

The committee identified the Shea Street Building’s main floor hallway and the atrium as the best locations for art. The committee asked Janaki Lennie, an internationally known painter living in Houston at the time, to create a suite of paintings for the hallway at a cost of $58,000. The paintings have been on display almost since the building opened.

Jacob Hashimoto, a rising star at the time, had a small installation of his “Cloud” series at the Rice Gallery. Some committee members had seen Hashimoto’s work, which led to his invitation to produce a large piece for the atrium for $125,000, Guidry said. “We are lucky we got to Jacob when we did because the value of his work has gone up significantly. Today, we would have paid closer to $250,000 or more for the same piece,” he said.

Mark Cervenka, UHD associate professor of art, director of the O’Kane Gallery and chair of the UHD committee, said Hashimoto was inclined to work with the university and in fact, working in the university environment was important to him. Hashimoto is Japanese-American and his art pays homage to the Japanese culture’s traditional kite making and attention to nature with a contemporary, abstract twist.

“The artwork is nearly abstract, but it references nature often. It has contemporary technology and perfect geometric shapes, yet it has this organic cloud structure. A geometric metaphor for harmonious existence,” Cervenka said. “Nice attributes in an education system where organization and working together are important.”

Hashimoto had the 5,000 or so bamboo frames fabricated in China. The rest of the piece was finished in his studio in Brooklyn, and he assembled the components onsite. The “kites” are rayon soaked in an acrylic that seals the fabric and repels dust.

“Aesthetically they were looking for a piece (related to the Rice project) . . . something monochrome, light, upwardly moving through the building, not a heavy presence,” Hashimoto said. “The building is very beautiful. The trapezoid windows draw your attention upward. Sometimes you see artwork destroy the architecture of a building. I wanted my art to work in concert with the architecture, not against it.”

“It’s an opportunity. As an artist, we want as many people as possible to see our work,” he said. “With the art dressing the windows, it is visible from the street. The piece takes a... dramatic stance in front of the building. It’s a lot of stress on me to deliver something worth looking at.” He previously had done a series of pieces that were sculptures of the skies, the atmosphere and clouds.

“I wanted people to have this sensibility . . . you could see through the piece to the city and see through the building to the piece. The university also was interested in the piece being transparent and porous,” he said.

“The building has beautiful views of the city. The university put in windows for a reason. I want people to feel like they are walking through this cloud as well as through the building.”

People may see different things in the art or interpret it in many different ways and that’s fine with Hashimoto. He wants the piece to be open-ended and speak to a large audience.

The nice thing about it is its constantly shifting, the layers open and close.”

The Shea Street Building sculpture is his largest to date . . . at least for now. “Everyone has been terrific here,” he said. His next stop is Finland where he plans to build a larger “cloud.”
Freshman Convocation promotes common reading program

Each of the estimated 1,000 new freshmen who walked through UHD’s doors this fall had a common bond: they had read Malcolm Gladwell’s best-selling book “Outliers: The Story of Success.”

Every freshman participating in summer orientation sessions and every UHD professor who teaches freshman classes received a copy of “Outliers” to read during the summer. Organizers of UHD’s First-Year Common Reading Program hoped requiring students to read and digest a good book would spark intellectual discussion.

“This is UHD’s gift to you,” Associate Professor of English Tammis Thomas told about 100 incoming freshmen during one orientation session. “Let it enrich your life and let it support your success.”

The national Achieving the Dream academic success initiative supported UHD’s first common text program. Stanford University selected “Outliers” as part of its summer reading program in 2009, and several other universities around the nation have selected it as part of their freshmen success efforts.

A committee of 10 UHD professors met last spring to select the best text to launch UHD’s First-Year Common Reading Program. Members looked for a book that would offer freshmen the most potential. The common text program aims to stimulate an environment of inquiry and promote connections among first-year students and their professors. “Students who make connections with other students and with their professors are more likely to graduate,” Thomas said.

“Outliers” details the paths of some of the world’s most extraordinarily successful people. What circumstances create a success story like Bill Gates? What do the best hockey players in the world have in common? What common patterns do the most successful pilots share? Author Gladwell looks beyond the biographies to find patterns in success and discovers they often have a lot to do with equal parts hard work and luck.

Inside the front cover of their books, UHD freshmen got their first university assignment: read the book before classes start and submit a 500-word essay. A $500 award was reserved for the best essay. Additional awards were available for other entries. In addition, freshmen were asked to attend UHD’s first Freshman Convocation on Aug. 21. UHD’s professors, deans and president—all of whom had read “Outliers”—discussed the book with the incoming freshmen.

“We’re trying to do everything we can to support your success,” Thomas told an orientation group. “This book is your introduction to academic life. We would like to see every single one of you walk across the stage and earn your degree.”

Numerous freshmen responded to the essay challenge and UHD honored 17 students for writing top essays. UHD President Bill Flores and Freshman Convocation Coordinator Tammis Thomas congratulated the students and their families at the awards event.

The winning essay writers are: John Walker, first place, $500 cash award; Elena E. Walker, second place, $250 book voucher; Sierra Farrell, third prize, $100 book voucher; Luis Navarro and Isaac Valdez, sharing fourth place, $75 book vouchers.


The Common Reading Program was a success and UHD plans to make Freshman Convocation an annual fall tradition.

New Staff

The UH System Board of Regents confirmed Michael R. Dressman as UHD’s Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost and Johanna Wolfe as Vice President for Advancement and External Relations at its quarterly meeting.

Dressman came to the University of Houston-Downtown in 1992 as chair of the Department of Arts and Humanities, a position he held until 1999 when he became the first dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

He served for 14 years as dean and helped create the department of urban education. Dressman also oversaw planning efforts to split the college and create the new College of Public Service. Before coming to UHD, he worked at the University of South Carolina, Spartanburg, where he served for two years as the chair of the English department. He also served as an instructor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and as an English teacher in Detroit. He has also worked at the Detroit Free Press and as a VISTA volunteer.

Dressman holds a bachelor’s degree in Latin and a master’s degree in English from the University of Detroit. He earned a doctorate in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His research and publications are in the area of American literature specializing in Walt Whitman and the history of the English language.

Before coming to UHD, Wolfe was assistant vice president for major gifts at the University of Houston.

“This is a very important step for UHD, and I am very pleased Johanna Wolfe will be part of our team,” said UHD President Bill Flores. “Her vast knowledge of Houston and her broad understanding of advancement and external relations will help UHD as it continues to build relationships and provide opportunities for students in Greater Houston.”

Wolfe brings more than 20 years of experience in non-profit management and development to the newly created position at UHD. She serves on the board of the Greater Houston Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Wolfe holds a bachelor’s degree in music education from Southern Methodist University (1980) and a master’s degree in voice performance from Rice University (1985).

UHD is the second largest University in Houston and the 13th largest four-year, public university in Texas. UHD ranks 33rd nationally for graduating Hispanic students with bachelor’s degrees and 47th nationally for graduating African American students with bachelor’s degrees.

Johanna Wolfe
Alumni and students launch The Midnight Theatre Company

The new Midnight Theatre Company, founded by several UHD alumni and students, launched its first performance in May, followed by a second performance in August, and is closing a successful first season with Marsha Norman’s drama “night, Mother” at the Frenetic Theater, 5102 Navigation, on Nov. 5, 6 and 7.

The company’s goal is to make original contributions to the Houston arts community. It aims to give up-and-coming playwrights, actors, directors and producers opportunities to make their works come to life, said Jimmy Mai, a 2008 UHD graduate who majored in English and minored in theater. It aims to give up-and-coming students, launched its first performance in May, followed by a second performance in August, and is closing a successful first season with Marsha Norman’s drama “night, Mother” at the Frenetic Theater, 5102 Navigation, on Nov. 5, 6 and 7.

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The company has plans to expand to serve all forms of performance art and is applying to become a nonprofit organization so it can become more involved and established in the community.

The group opened with “Case No. 105,” a one-man adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Raven,” starring UHD history major Christian Briones, who also is general manager of Midnight Theatre. The play is set in a mental hospital and was written by Mai. In addition to the featured performance, Midnight Theatre Manager Tara Siewrattan introduced her sketch comedy group “The Lonely Hearts Comedy Club.” Siewrattan received her bachelor’s in communications from UHD in 2009.

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The second production was “The Brush,” written by Mai and directed by Christopher R. Vara, who earned his bachelor’s in humanities from UHD in 2004. The play is a psycho-drama showing how individuals’ emotional skeletons can hinder love. The show starred UHD students Jasmine Torres, Carla Magana and Elizabeth Capper.

Marylu Rodriguez, the theater company’s director of communications, attended UHD for two years then transferred to the University of Houston where she received a bachelor’s degree in communications in 2009. The company’s support team includes UHD student Amanda San Miguel, who works on sound production, and 2004 UHD graduate Tudy Martinez, who works on sound design.


Instructor Robert Wilson receives 2010 Kemah Boardwalk Jazz Achievement Award

UHD Jazz-Artist-in-Residence Robert C. Wilson has played with Ray Charles, Judy Garland, Stevie Wonder and other jazz greats, but an award he won this September in Kemah may be more memorable.

Wilson won the 2010 Kemah Boardwalk Jazz Achievement Award at the festival he founded 13 years ago. Immediately after his wife, Julie, finished her vocal performance on the Kemah stage, Bob McGrew, secretary and treasurer of the Houston Professional Musicians Association, and UHD President William HoustonProfessional Musicians Association Treasurer and Secretary Bob McGrew, left, and UHD President Bill Flores present Robert Wilson with the 2010 Kemah Boardwalk Jazz Achievement Award as Wilson’s wife, Julie, looks on.

Wilson is a prime mover and shaker when it comes to the jazz world and still is active in putting the festival together.

“He knows everybody there is to know in the jazz world,” McGrew said while presenting the award. “UHD is involved in Kemah because of Robert’s hard work. It doesn’t matter if you are talking to individuals in Houston, New Orleans or other places. Robert knows people and people know Robert.”

Wilson involves students in jazz outreach in New Orleans, Houston and abroad. He figures out ways to make things possible for his students, many of whom are first generation college students and need extra encouragement and support, McGrew said.

Each year the Houston Professional Musicians Association selects an outstanding musician to honor. The recipient must be a living musician known for his or her contributions to the music profession. The recipient must also be committed to mentoring new artists and furthering music education. Wilson is the 12th recipient of this award that includes a cash prize.
The key to successfully obtaining P.E. for utilized, the Student Life Center has no space, the gymnasium is already heavily The University, though, has no outdoor opportunities and ideas to campus through monthly seminars and events such as "Health and wellness programs are classes has been discussed off and on for however, the UHD Wellness Committee’s obstacles to launching such classes. Newsum created a three-part or triptych piece especially for the New York City exhibit. Entitled “What’s Your Primary?”

Newsum’s creation has a bright orange upper layer offset by a lower layer on the floor with cardboard and hits and pieces of plastic wrap, a wrapped football, a dripping faucet and bathtub, and the body of a dead, dried-up frog. These elements stand in contrast to the work’s centerpiece, a portrait of a beautiful, healthy, glowing young woman in the midst of an environment of excess.

Newsum exhibits his work throughout the United States. His pieces are in permanent museum collections in Houston, Memphis, Philadelphia and Dallas, and in corporate and private collections. Newsum portrays images of community and culture using acrylic, oil stick, collage on paper and sculpture.

“It’s a really wonderful piece and shows his respect for individuals, no matter where they live,” Cervenka said. The exhibit is organized by the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Czech Center New York.

Cervenka said the exhibit opening attracted many dignitaries including Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director United Nations Environment Programme, as well as many people who might not typically be exposed to the different types of art represented in the exhibit.

The exhibit included the work of nine artists from different countries representing different types of art from contemporary to figurative. Cervenka assembled the exhibit in about three months. Typically exhibits can take a year to put together. “People were overwhelmed with what had been done in such a short amount of time,” Cervenka said.

The comments indicated attendees, including the UN Environment Programme representatives, were very pleased with the exhibit, he said.

Cervenka has been curator for many previous exhibits that deal with nature, social issues and equality. Last semester he directed the Drawing Lessons exhibit at the O’Kane Gallery, the only showing outside New York City of the Early Academic Drawings from the Art Students League of New York.
Instructor makes gulf oil disaster toxic cleanups safer

UHD lecturer Albert Condello had plenty of material to make his lessons come alive for students this fall after spending the summer working with companies and organizations involved with the gulf oil disaster cleanup and a pipeline spill in Michigan.

The gulf oil disaster created a special set of challenges in a wide range of areas, but Condello has an extensive background and was equipped to handle them. “I conducted daily safety briefings for contractors. I’ve done job safety analysis, industrial hygiene, safety management and workplace violence prevention – some cleanup workers have had to deal with unhappy residents approaching them on the beach,” he said. “Sometimes I’m a source of advice, a sounding board, for safety personnel already on site.”

Condello, 51, came to UHD as a visiting adjunct associate professor in April 2008. He has a background as a firefighter and hazardous materials specialist. He also has worked for companies and organizations such as Marine Spill Response Corporation, Garner Environmental Services Inc. and the Center for Toxicology and Environmental Health that the United States Coast Guard has certified as Oil Spill Response Organizations.

In his work with the clean up from the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion, Condello was charged with making near shore assessments and anticipating, recognizing and mitigating unsafe situations. Condello has worked in Florida, Alabama and Mississippi as well as Louisiana where he taught a three-day hazardous materials (hazmat) certification course at the Louisiana State Police Academy in Baton Rouge. The overall cleanup effort was coordinated through the Deepwater Horizon Unified Command.

The cleanup workers dealt with hazards related to dispersants, solvents and toxic materials as well as heat, stress, respiratory protection, cumulative stress and lightning as well as the physical damages of working around shipyards. Many people worked on the cleanup from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. day after day, he said.

The environmental impact was the most highly visible aspect of the disaster, but the disaster had a big, negative economic impact on the people who live and work in the region, he said. “It’s a sad thing and this accident was preventable,” Condello said. The mechanics of the rig were not maintained. For example, the backup batteries were not charged. “The BPD (Blowout Prevention Device) was not operable and it was known to not be operable.”

Condello has a bachelor of science degree from the LaSalle University in Philadelphia and a master’s of business administration degree with honors from Philadelphia University. He has numerous instructor certifications related to fire safety, hazardous materials and Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards as well as Environmental Health in Disasters Certification from Tulane University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham through the South Central Public Health Partnership.

Condello said he stays involved in safety training because of the lessons yet to be learned that can prevent accidents and deaths. More than 100 fire fighters die every year. “We push the limits and sometimes we fail. Safety comes in as an afterthought and it shouldn’t. It should be part of the design,” he said.

Shortly before the start of classes, Condello was off to Michigan to work the Enbridge Energy Pipeline Oil Spill into the Kalamazoo River. A 30-inch underground pipeline failed near Marshall, Mich.

Condello was back for the start of fall classes. He is teaching Construction Safety Management, Industrial Safety and Fire Protection Chemistry and Physics in UHD’s Fire Protection Engineering Technology Option in the Engineering Technology Program.

Veterans Services provides resources, computer lab to help vets

UHD was recently named a 2011 Military Friendly School by G.I. Jobs Magazine which places it in the top 15 percent nationwide among all colleges and universities.

UHD’s Veterans Services Office has grown and its activities have expanded since Michael Records, himself a veteran, was tapped to serve as manager of Veterans Services last year.

The program has a new office in Room S-244 in the One Main Building which opened this fall. The office includes a computer lab and offers veteran students the assistance and support of a full-time staff that can provide them with educational benefits information and guide them through the enrollment process, Records said. Staff members also can certify their benefits and serve as their advocate at UHD. The office also provides workshops, seminars and informational fairs on topics of interest to veterans.

UHD Veterans Services also started a support group for veterans in partnership with the Employee Assistance Program conducted through the University of Texas Health Science Center (UT EAP).

The support group addresses such topics as marital and family problems, post traumatic stress disorder, transitioning to civilian life, addictions and traumatic brain injuries. The group also serves as an information resource to help veterans and their families, Records said.

For more information, contact Records at 713-226-5581 or email him at recordsm@uhd.edu or for specific support group information, contact Delphi Medina, LMWS, LCDC, at 713-500-3156, or email medinad@uhd.edu.

New Center for Family Strengths offers training, research and support for family-related programs

UHD launched a new Center for Family Strengths in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences this fall and the center staged a “Symposium on Family Strengths and Diversity: Power, Promise, Practice.”

Topics included a family-centered approach to Child Welfare, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Juvenile Justice, Schools, Developmental Disabilities, and Fatherhood among others.

Director and visiting professor Alvin Sallee said the mission of the Center for Family Strengths is to support families by informing community-based services that promote and sustain family systems. The Center for Family Strengths facilitates family, worker, supervisor and agency training; promotes research and evaluation; and disseminates information for best practices that support family centered practice.

The center provides training opportunities for those committed to providing services that seek to prevent child and adult maltreatment and promote family health. It serves as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of research and best practices in family services, and it functions as a support unit for faculty research, program evaluation and technical assistance in the areas of family support and family centered program design and practice.

The center is designed to be interdisciplin-ary and support training and research in a wide variety of disciplines.
Hands-on research leaves students well grounded, sometimes flying high

Early on a hot, sunny September morning, a handful of UHD students and their professors gather in a campus parking lot with their research essentials: hats, sunscreen, notebooks, radio equipment, laptops, scientific gear, water and picnic coolers.

They set up shop near the center of the black, asphalt lot in the shade of a bus-stop canopy that resembles a state-park picnic shelter. Working as a team, they carefully organize and pack an atmospheric balloon payload that will soon measure ozone levels in the sky above Houston.

It’s hot and humid, but no one complains. Intently, one group of students reads the payload while others test radio receivers that will gather ozone data from transmitters as the balloon moves from the troposphere and into the stratosphere. Penny Morris Smith, UHD associate professor of biology and geology, and Donald Musselwhite, UHD lecturer in geology and physics, have organized the outing that has fired these students’ imaginations.

“We want our students to know that there are scientific research opportunities that don’t involve work in laboratories,” Smith said. “These kinds of hands-on, inquiry-based research projects have real potential for attracting bright students to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields.”

UHD undergraduates involved in the atmospheric research learn about all aspects of ozone data collection in their work that gathers information on temperature, humidity and ozone at various altitudes.

Once everything is ready to go, students help fill the balloon with helium until the helium’s buoyancy is light enough to lift the payload; then they carefully guide the balloon upward, eventually releasing it against the Houston skyline. Data begins to stream into the radio console almost immediately and is fed into the laptop, collected and graphed almost instantaneously.

Later, students will upload the recorded information into a shared database that researchers across the country access.

UHD student Julie Wright said the opportunity to participate in this real-time research has made a positive impact in her education. “I have learned so much in the program. I had to learn how to ask the right questions,” she said. “I have definitely improved my querying skills that help the data make sense. I am more comfortable with what data is telling me.”

Wright said the work has also painted a different picture of scientific inquiry. “Having the faculty participate with us opened my eyes to the possibility that science is what you make of the experience,” she said. “People approach science and research science differently. It was refreshing to see experts debate a procedure, and to see they were open to seeing new ways of doing things. It was a learning environment. The experts were learning from each other and students were learning from the experts and from each other.”

That synergy is just what Smith and Musselwhite try to develop. UHD is part of the Minority Consortium for Earth and Space Sciences — a group of minority institutions working to increase the number of students interested in space and atmospheric exploration.

Smith and Musselwhite work with students and researchers at City University of New York’s Medgar Evans College, Norfolk State University and South Carolina State University to bring the experience to other areas of the country.

The more schools that participate the more opportunities Smith said. “The more schools that participate the more opportunities for the opportunity to do,” she said. “I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the research and the experience gained which will set me apart from other graduate school applicants.”

Credit line: UHD Associate Professor of Biology and Geology Penny Morris Smith. UHD Associate Professor of Mathematics Donald Musselwhite.

Smith and Musselwhite will present their research and information about their program at the Geological Society of America’s conference in Denver in late October. The researchers and students also were scheduled to reach out to eighth-grade girls to encourage them to consider careers in science at the Sally Ride Festival Saturday, Nov. 6, at Rice University.

Summer theater project focuses on American plays, playwrights

Jon Egging, who played Tom in the Landing’s production of the “Glass Menagerie,” pauses following an argument with his mother, Amanda Wingfield, played by Terri Branda Carter.

UHD started a summer theater project called The Landing Theatre Company, dedicated to the celebration of American plays and playwriting, and using a blend of student and professional actors to produce classic dramas as well as new plays in a theater experience of the highest quality for its audiences.

David Rainey is artistic director. He has been an adjunct professor in drama at UHD since 2005, and this year he was named its first Artist-in-Residence in Drama. John J. Johnston is managing director, and he is an adjunct professor in drama at UHD. Thomas Lyttle is drama director and he is a professor in UHD’s College of Arts and Humanities.

The company offers a range of plays that highlight the great wealth of American playwriting from its origins to the present day. Its first production was Tennessee Williams’ “The Glass Menagerie.”

More information is available at www.landingtheatre.org.
UHD students had the option this fall of renting textbooks from the on-campus bookseller, Barnes & Noble, which saved them a combined total of $161,000 on the cost of their textbooks.

"Since textbook rentals exploded onto the scene they have become an increasingly popular choice for students," said Karen Gonsor DiScala, manager, Corporate Communications, Barnes & Noble College Booksellers. "Our textbook rental program saves students more than 50 percent over the cost of buying a new, printed textbook and helps keep textbook dollars on campus. Barnes & Noble was the first national bookseller to offer an in-store and online textbook rental program.

"UHD Bookstore is thrilled to be able to offer this significant cost savings program to our students," said Bill Schaub, UHD Bookstore manager. "Additionally, we are excited by the student participation in this program and look forward to offering this as well as other cost savings programs, such as e-books, in the future."

Students can rent textbooks in the store or from the store’s website using any payment method already accepted at the bookstore including student financial aid. Students have the books for the entire term and must return them to the bookstore in person or via mail no later than 10 days after the last day of finals. Normal highlighting and note-taking are permitted. The bookseller sends email reminder notices regarding the book’s return date. Students also have the option of buying the books, and the bookstore coordinates the availability of required books with faculty members.

While renting textbooks has the lowest initial cost for students, buying used textbooks, when they are available, is still the least expensive option provided the book will be used next term and the student can sell it back to the bookstore for 50 percent of the purchase price, DiScala said.

Scholars Academy receives $450,000 to encourage students to pursue careers in nuclear science

UHD’s nationally recognized Scholars Academy has won a five-year, $450,000 federal grant designed to increase underrepresented students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics who enter programs in the nuclear science arena.

Principal investigator Mary Jo Parker, director of UHD’s Scholars Academy, was notified Sept. 21 that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission had funded UHD’s proposal. "The grant will let us create pipelines from UHD to Texas A & M University, the University of Texas Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in Houston and other schools with graduate programs in nuclear sciences, nuclear engineering and nuclear medicine," she said.

UHD will receive $90,000 a year for five years. Parker said the money will pay for scholarships, research stipends, conference-related expenses and other costs associated with mentoring eight students each year. "We want to increase the number of underrepresented professionals in the nuclear industry, and this grant will provide support for students who are interested in a number of different career paths."

At the end of the five years, Parker hopes to have a firmly established pathway from UHD to nuclear science graduate degree programs in Texas for underrepresented populations.

UHD assistant professors Janusz Grebowicz and Maria Benavides in the Natural Sciences Department serve as co-principal investigators on the project and Rene Garcia, Scholars Academy program manager, will help manage the grant.

Other collaborators include the state’s two nuclear power sites, the South Texas Project and its Nuclear Operating Company, located 90 miles southwest of Houston near Bay City, and the Comanche Creek Nuclear Power Plant, located about 40 miles southwest of Fort Worth.

Bookstore rental program saves students $161,000

UHD students had the option this fall of renting textbooks from the on-campus bookseller, Barnes & Noble, which saved them a combined total of $161,000 on the cost of their textbooks.

"Since textbook rentals exploded onto the scene they have become an increasingly popular choice for students," said Karen Gonsor DiScala, manager, Corporate Communications, Barnes & Noble College Booksellers. "Our textbook rental program saves students more than 50 percent over the cost of buying a new, printed textbook and helps keep textbook dollars on campus. Barnes & Noble was the first national bookseller to offer an in-store and online textbook rental program.

"UHD Bookstore is thrilled to be able to offer this significant cost savings program to our students," said Bill Schaub, UHD Bookstore manager. "Additionally, we are excited by the student participation in this program and look forward to offering this as well as other cost savings programs, such as e-books, in the future."

Students can rent textbooks in the store or from the store’s website using any payment method already accepted at the bookstore including student financial aid. Students have the books for the entire term and must return them to the bookstore in person or via mail no later than 10 days after the last day of finals. Normal highlighting and note-taking are permitted. The bookseller sends email reminder notices regarding the book’s return date. Students also have the option of buying the books, and the bookstore coordinates the availability of required books with faculty members.

While renting textbooks has the lowest initial cost for students, buying used textbooks, when they are available, is still the least expensive option provided the book will be used next term and the student can sell it back to the bookstore for 50 percent of the purchase price, DiScala said.
Graduate receives national fellowship from American Society for Microbiology

Jennifer Abrams found her life’s work would center on scientific research thanks to opportunities provided by UHD’s Scholars Academy and faculty mentors in UHD’s Department of Natural Sciences.

Abrams graduated from UHD in 2007 and moved directly into a microbiology doctoral program at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. This fall she won a three-year, $33,000 fellowship from the American Society for Microbiology to support cutting-edge research into the molecular causes of diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Lou Gehrig’s and Parkinson’s. She was one of seven students to win the national award.

Abrams said she found out about the award while at home one night reading email. “I was very surprised,” she said. “Honorable mentions had already received their letters, so I wasn’t expecting the ASM’s Award letter.”

Abrams said her success started at UHD. “UHD is a smaller school and it provided me with a great deal of interaction with professors,” she said. “My faculty at UHD really cared about getting students to the next step in their careers.”

As an undergraduate member of the Scholars Academy, Abrams had a paid research stipend working with associate professor of natural sciences Phil Lyons in Kevin Morano’s laboratory at UT Health Medical School. Abrams conducted her research on a field project at Sheldon Lake State Park. “We looked at the fungal populations in native land, farmland and restored farmland,” she said. “All three environments existed there, and we used DNA sequencing to identify more than 1,000 varieties.”

Lyons remembers Abrams as a very talented student who really connected with the research opportunities at UHD. “Her work was funded through the National Science Foundation Grant and you could tell she enjoyed it,” he said.

Abrams also credited associate professor Lisa Morano and assistant professor Jerry Johnson in the Natural Sciences Department with opening doors and taking a special interest in her academic progress. Johnson remembers Abrams as a student who enjoyed challenges. “She looked at assignments and tough projects as being beneficial,” he said. “She also was motivated. We selected her to go on our New York City trip that explores alternative careers in science. She was always very positive and it’s great to see her accomplish this.”

Morano said that she coordinated all summer research programs the year Abrams worked at the state park. “She was just a fantastic student and we encouraged her to go into a Ph.D. Program,” she said. “I am so proud of her. She is a really talented student from our school and it is great to see her doing so well.”

Of course, little did Morano know that Abrams would eventually end up working with her husband in the Texas Medical Center. Abrams conducts her research in Kevin Morano’s laboratory in the UT Health Medical School. His laboratory staff is using a yeast model to learn more about neurodegenerative diseases.

“I never talked to him until I started my Ph.D. work,” Abrams said, but his laboratory work is right in line with her research interest in degenerative diseases.
Prof. Writing grad student already a bylined author

UHD graduate student Lindsey White worked full time and finished her thesis last spring.

Now, as a published author, White already had a step up on her career while she finished her graduate work this summer.

Six months before completing her Master of Science in Professional Writing and Technical Communication, White’s bylined article on “Usability Testing Trends in Library Services” came out in Intercom, the monthly magazine for the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

“It was their first issue online,” White said. Intercom published her article in January 2010, the month it started a Flipbook PDF program, a fitting finale for the work of a technology-minded writer like White.

A 2005 graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, White was looking for graduate programs where she could combine her English degree with her interest in writing and research. UHD’s Professional Writing program best matched what she was looking for in a graduate program. A move to be near family sealed the decision.

White enrolled in post baccalaureate classes even before she was accepted into the graduate program in 2008. In one of her early classes – Writing in the Professions – her professor encouraged her to try to publish her research paper on usability in library services.

“Dr. Natalia Matveeva (UHD assistant professor of English) encouraged us to submit our research,” White said. “I didn’t do that until the end of the semester, and I didn’t hear anything. Almost a year later they (magazine editors) contacted me and told me they needed it for the January 2010 issue. We hammered out the edits in a week.”

The wait was worth it. White’s three-page article – complete with a graphic that juxtaposes library shelves on a computer screen — tracks how librarians are becoming usability experts as they strive to make their academic referencing services easier to use and navigate.

Getting a byline can be an intoxicating experience, but the aftermath is even better.

“It gets your name out there, and it’s really good for networking,” White said. “And if someone is looking for an expert on this topic, my article is in the database.”

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End of Year Giving

Alumni and special friends of the university give selflessly to UHD’s annual fund each year to help provide student scholarships and other UHD needs. You can help UHD carry on its mission of access and education by sending an end-of-the-year donation. Gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. There are several ways to make your gift to UHD:

- You can give by phone or by mail.
- You can give cash contributions online.
- UHD faculty and staff can give via payroll deduction.

You can make a gift of cash using your credit card by giving online at https://give.uh.edu/uhdowntown/via our secure server or by calling 713-221-8045.

Join us on these social media sites!

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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, send an e-mail to alumni@uhd.edu or, mail your item to Alumni Relations at UH-Downtown, One Main Street, Suite 990-S, Houston, Texas 77002.

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Summer Receptions

Alumni in the Bay Area talked with UHD President Bill Flores, left, and Sarah Crawford, UHD director of alumni relations, right. UHD held four receptions in different parts of the Greater Houston Area so alumni could meet Flores, learn more about the state of the University and discuss UHD’s name change. The receptions also provided alumni with an opportunity to network with fellow alumni and learn how to become involved with the Alumni Association.

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—Alumni Notes—

Alumna Mary Flood has moved from the Houston Chronicle to the downtown Houston office of Androvett Legal Media & Marketing. Her new title is Legal Media Consultant. Her office does media relations, marketing and branding for lawyers and law firms along with crisis communication and litigation media strategies. The firm also serves as a legal source bank for reporters and provides regular legal story idea tip sheets to reporters.

Scott Belshaw (’94, Social Science) received his doctorate in juvenile criminal justice from Prairie View A&M University and is now an assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of North Texas. Belshaw teaches undergraduate and graduate students in the criminal justice program. Belshaw has published numerous articles in criminal justice and education related journals.

Laura Ramirez (’99) was recently named principal of Southwest Elementary charter school in Houston. In addition, she was accepted to the education doctorate in Executive Leadership program at the University of Houston. Since graduating from UHD, she has obtained two master’s degrees from the University of Houston-Victoria in Counseling and Administration and Supervision.

Alumna Sheradyn Littles (’08), has worked in Financial Aid since she was a student assistant, and now she’s a full-time employee and is responsible for making sure people don’t default on their student loans.

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UHD fall enrollment nears 13,000; Sets record with Northwest campus

UHD’s fall enrollment has set a new attendance record with a total enrollment of 12,900 students, including more than 500 students enrolled at UHD’s new campus in northwest Houston.

“We’ve reached a new high in enrollment, and we expect enrollment to continue growing,” said Ed Apodaca, vice president for Student Services and Enrollment Management. “A key reason for our success is that we offer quality programs, and we are able to quickly add or change programs to meet community needs.”

UHD had 12,239 undergraduates, 507 post baccalaureate students and 154 graduate students for a total of 12,900 students.

The average age of UHD students is 27 years and dropping. Less than 23 percent of UHD’s enrollment is over 30 years of age. Depending on one’s point of view, UHD is a great place to be a single guy with its female enrollment of 61.8 percent and male enrollment of 38.2 percent.

Demographically, UHD represents the community it serves with an Anglo enrollment of 20 percent, African-American enrollment of 29 percent, Hispanic enrollment of 39 percent, Asian and Pacific Islander enrollment of 9 percent and an international student enrollment of 2 percent.

UHD President Bill Flores cuts the CyFair Chamber of Commerce ribbon officially opening the new UHD Northwest campus at Lone Star College-University Park at S. H. 249 and Louetta Road. Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce officials also helped celebrate the opening with a ribbon cutting. Dignitaries on hand included University of Houston System Board of Regents Chair Carroll Robertson Ray and past Chair Welcome Wilson.

More than 1,500 students will receive degrees at fall commencement Dec. 19

The University of Houston-Downtown Fall 2010 Commencement exercises will be held at Minute Maid Park, home of the Houston Astros at 10 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 19, where more than 1,500 students will receive bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

UHD has 13,000 students and more than 25,000 alumni. UHD staff members expect commencement attendance to top 15,000 as family and friends turn out to watch their loved ones cross the stage in recognition of reaching their goals of obtaining a college degree. UHD staff members are excited about partnering with the Astros to hold one of the most important UHD events of the year in the university’s downtown neighborhood.

Students who have applied for graduation and plan to walk in the commencement ceremonies must report to Minute Maid Park no later than 8 a.m. on the day of the event to receive final instructions. Students should use the Atrium Entrance. Family and guests must use the Right Field Entrance. UHD ranks 34th in the nation for graduating Hispanic students with bachelor’s degrees and 47th in graduating African-American students with bachelor’s degrees among 2,300 colleges and universities. UHD is a federally designated Minority Serving Institution as well as an Hispanic Serving Institution.

UHD’s facility, UHD Northwest, at State Highway 249 and Louetta Road, had a first fall enrollment of approximately 500 students which exceeded staff expectations.

UHD held open houses this summer giving prospective students their first look at the facility for the summer and fall terms. Students met faculty and staff members, applied for admission and registered for a variety of degree programs. UHD Northwest’s first classes started in June, and expanded offerings continued in the fall.

UHD President William V. Flores said he expected the UHD Northwest programs to grow quickly, but the size of the fall enrollment indicates the programs fill a growing need for college graduates in greater Houston.

“UHD Northwest is designed to meet the needs of one of the state’s fastest growing regions. Students who enroll with associate degrees will be able to finish bachelor’s degrees close to home,” he said. UHD will also offer master’s degrees in teaching and criminal justice.

UHD’s facility includes new classrooms, computer labs, a science lab, faculty and academic advising offices and an instructional television classroom. UHD’s new location builds on the school’s traditions for developing community including small classes, excellent instruction, accessible faculty, diversity and affordability.

UHD is the 13th largest public university in Texas and enrolls nearly 13,000 students who often earn degrees while working full or part-time.

UHD offers classes during the day and on nights and weekends. Students have access to an on-site library, cafeteria, student presentation practice rooms and bookstore. Parking at the facility is free.

The University of Houston System Board of Regents approved plans for the new location and space arrangements at Lone Star College’s University Park last spring.

UHD now offers bachelor’s degrees in criminal justice, interdisciplinary studies with teacher certification (bilingual and generalist in early childhood through grade six and grades four through eight), general business, management, accounting, mathematics with secondary level teacher certification in business, national sciences or social studies, safety management, biological and physical sciences with secondary-level teacher certification, humanities, and social sciences.

For more information, call 713-237-5400 or email Louis Evans at evansl@uhd.edu.