President’s Investiture Showcases University
Investiture of University’s Fifth President Marks Time of Change and Growth for an Institution of the 21st Century

The University of Houston-Downtown has the potential to become a model for institutions nationwide through student success efforts in a changing world, President William V. Flores said during his formal investiture speech at the Wortham Center.

“What we do at UHD for student success can become a model for the rest of the country, and that excites me,” he told faculty, staff, students, legislators, community leaders and UH System officials in the tradition-filled ceremony March 11. “The world is changing in ways that are unsettling, and we have to change with it.”

The official investiture ceremony of UHD’s fifth president capped a week of activities that showcased faculty, student and staff achievements while raising more than $500,000 in donations to fund student scholarships and cover investiture costs. Flores thanked donors and sponsors as he officially accepted the presidency and pledged to uphold the Investiture Week theme of “Changing Lives, Building Futures.”

“The faculty and the staff drew me here,” Flores said. “We are working on plans to ensure that every student receives a deep and memorable experience at UHD, be it internships, undergraduate research, civic engagement or capstone projects. We will improve student success at UHD; we will increase the number of students who graduate each year.”

Seven months into his first year in office, Flores faces state-mandated budget cuts and major issues on campus including a name change. He candidly details these challenges in his online blog, “View from the Bayou” (http://uhdprez.blogspot.com/). His fluency in the social media and his communication skills drew kudos from UHD Student Body President Laura Sanchez, who spoke during the Investiture ceremony and pledged to uphold the Investiture Week theme of “Changing Lives, Building Futures.”

“Dr. Flores, you believe in who you are,” Sanchez said. “There is nothing more powerful in this world than a positive attitude.”

Similarly, UH System Chancellor Renu Khator introduced Flores as a man with qualities of “maturity and leadership” who embraces technology and the opportunities offered through social media. “He’s truly a university president of the 21st Century,” Khator said. “We stand by him and this University.”

UHD Faculty Senate President Michelle Moosally remarked on Flores’ willingness to engage in serious dialogue and his ability to “find pathways to turn thoughts into actions.”

“The faculty are ready for change, and we know you are ready for us,” she said.

Staff Council President John Lane urged Flores to tap into the wealth of resources represented by UHD staffers, many of whom are actively engaged in the community. Staff Council started a scholarship fund in honor of Investiture Week for children of UHD employees. “We come from many different background, we are accomplished in areas that might surprise some people and many of us are alumni of UHD,” Lane said, as he welcomed Flores.

In his post-Investiture blog, Flores reminded readers that the Investiture was not about him but about the University and its role in the Houston region. “We used the opportunity to strengthen relations with our alumni, our donors, our regents, with the system, with elected officials and with the community-at-large,” he wrote. Several family members, friends and colleagues from other states and universities joined him during the weeklong celebration. His wife, Celina, sat beside him on the Investiture stage.

Flores’ friend and former boss, Jay Gogue, president of Auburn University and former UH System chancellor, was keynote speaker at the Investiture and said Flores demonstrates the difference between management and leadership and has the integrity, the ethics and the capacity to lead UHD.

Gogue was president of New Mexico State University. Quoting a speech he once heard from a Canadian health minister, Gogue said Flores is a leader with “the capacity to make public an unreasonable declaration” and is not afraid to make tough decisions.

UHD alumna Mary Flood, an award-winning investigative and legal reporter with the Houston Chronicle, called her alma mater a godsend for thousands and a place “of stunning diversity” where “open doors break barriers for people.” She recalled standing by a 55-year-old banker and his son as they graduated together with her in 1989. When she went away to Harvard Law School and an environment of privilege, “I frankly missed the variety of folks I knew here.”

Chancellor Khator and Welcome Wilson Sr., chairman of the UH System Board of Regents, presented Flores with UHD’s Presidential Medallion and mace. Faculty wore academic regalia for the formal opening and closing procession to music performed by The Houston Brass. Professor of Computer and Mathematical Sciences Andre de Korvin read his poem “A New Beginning,” and three of UHD’s four past presidents shared the stage with faculty, speakers and guests.
Students, alumni and donors gathered at UHD on March 10, the night before the Investiture, for the first President's Scholarship Dinner on campus that honored UHD alumnus Richard A. “Rick” Hartley, CEO and Executive Director of The 100 Club.

UHD President Bill Flores announced that UHD has raised cash, gifts-in-kind and pledges totaling more than $500,000 in celebration of the Investiture, adding the gifts would help offset costs and provide scholarship support for UHD’s students.

“This is truly a very special day and occasion that brings new history to the University. I am deeply moved by all of the contributions we have received to fully fund this Investiture and to create or expand several endowed scholarships for our students,” Flores said. “I especially thank our sponsors and our donors.”

Flores also thanked The 100 Club for generously pledging $65,000 to The Clarence Kendall 100 Club Endowed Scholarship at UHD, a full-ride scholarship awarded to a high school junior or senior who plans to pursue a degree in criminal justice at UHD. The 100 Club, one of Houston’s most respected non-profits, helps families of law enforcement officers and firefighters who are killed in the line of duty.

Hartley was recognized for his service to UHD, including serving on the President’s Advisory Board and the Criminal Justice Advisory Board. Hartley’s dedication to UHD and the mission of The 100 Club came through clearly in his remarks as he recognized Renee Garcia, one of the newest 100-Club Scholars. The 100 Club Scholarships for criminal justice majors have opened doors for many officers and administrators across Greater Houston. The 100 Club’s cumulative giving to UHD now reaches into the six-figure realm and is greatly appreciated by UHD and the College of Public Service, home to the Department of Criminal Justice.


UHD alumnus Richard A. “Rick” Hartley, right, CEO and Executive Director of The 100 Club, speaks at the Scholarship Dinner, where he was honored for his service to his alma mater. Above, alumna Vicki King, assistant chief with the Houston Police Department, was the emcee who recognizes UHD student Renee Garcia, one of the newest 100 Club Scholars.
The colorful collage is as diverse as the people who wrote the books. From Renaissance music and Texas politics, to bigotry, crime and foreign capital, UHD’s faculty publications tell the story of the people who make UHD tick and spark students’ imaginations.

Nearly 100 faculty members contributed to a special Faculty Publications Showcase during Investiture Week, and their biographies and information on their publications are preserved in an exhibit catalog. The covers of the dozens of books submitted form a rich tapestry of imagination and research. Their titles weave a time-less UHD quilt in which every block shares a common theme—the quest for knowledge.

The Faculty Publications Showcase will remain on display in the W.I. Dykes Library Reading Room on the fourth floor through the end of the semester, said Pat Ensor, library executive director. Faculty creative work was on exhibit, and framed posters celebrating faculty and staff achievements were on display around the campus. The Investiture Visual Arts display included pieces by UHD’s Floyd Newsum, Mark Cervenka, Beth Secor, Mike Johnson and Lili Smith.

“Given that an investiture is an academic ceremony grounded in university ritual, it makes a lot of sense to all of us that we should celebrate the faculty’s work,” said Robin Davidson, assistant professor of English and co-chair of the Presidential Investiture Committee. The Showcase has generated a renewed sense of pride in the university and its faculty, she said.

Davidson and a seven-member library committee started work in January to collect and present the publications and biographies. Each contributor either teaches or has taught at UHD, and many of them presented their research during panel discussions during Investiture Week. Included in the display is a special memorial dedicated to the work of
eight deceased faculty members.

Fourteen faculty members agreed to film short videos about their research and teaching interests. The 50-page Exhibit Catalog can be downloaded and the videos viewed on the library’s exhibit page at http://www.uhd.edu/library/exhibits/

Committee members who worked on the collaborative project said faculty members and students continue to visit the display, some of them snap a photo or two of the showcase and others send grateful e-mails. One faculty member was so delighted to be included that she hugged Davidson. “A lot of our faculty members are very humble,” she said.

In a letter to thank contributors, Davidson wrote: “I know my colleagues to be dedicated, generous, talented teachers. Over the course of the past three months I have also discovered the depth and range of the scholarly and creative work which inform their skilful mentorship of students.”

Ensor said this is the first such university-wide collection of faculty scholarly work and research. “We have world class scholars and creative artists here, and not everyone knows that,” she said.

Top photos show posters and banners that marked the milestone as UHD celebrated its talent and achievements during Investiture. The cast of UHD’s first musical Ain’t Misbehavin’ returned for an encore performance. President Flores and his family, including wife Celina, left, and mother-in-law Emma, right, attended many of the festivities. UHD’s spirit came alive, with dance, music, food and networking. Last photo shows student Elena Espina and her research poster on pancreatic cancer cells.
Robert Wilson has reminisced with Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie, played with Ray Charles’ band and organized jazz concerts around the world. He’s also looked under rocks for money to fund concerts, festivals and other music projects, he said, like “a 70-year-old beggar.”

A man of many talents, Wilson has taught English, and later music and jazz, at UHD for 20-plus years. For his commitment to the university, to his students and to music, UHD designated him Artist in Residence, clearing the way for him to continue making musical connections in the classroom, practice hall and on concert stages.

“The title really does open doors,” Wilson said. “Artist in Residence has a pretty powerful sound. I hope it’s going to help me to do more music projects and present concerts around the world. He’s also looked forward to more festivals and other music projects, he said.

Over the years, Wilson’s summer jazz camp for Young Sounds of Houston and the UHD Civic Jazz Orchestra sent students on to The Juilliard School and careers as professional musicians. He has served a term on the Texas Commission on the Arts and Dance Panel and counts many jazz greats among his friends and colleagues. Wilson also presents a Women in Jazz concert each spring and the popular Kemah Boardwalk Jazz Festival, a 12-year summer tradition.

The musical synergy produced when jazz lovers from all walks of life connect makes Wilson tick. Even when he has to scrape for ever dwindling funds, the outcome — making great music — is worth it. He and his wife Julie, a jazz singer and public school chorus director, often donate their own money and time to keep projects alive. Wilson hopes the Artist in Residence designation will attract interest and funding, freeing him to focus on a future of possibilities.

“Robert has done a great deal with very little for years,” Julie Wilson said. “Now he can develop his programs and make them grow.”

Wilson credits UHD’s Dr. Molly Woods with helping him with his fledgling program alive all these years; he credits UHD President Bill Flores for a renewed commitment to the jazz program. During his two decades teaching at UHD, Wilson has maintained a simple philosophy for working with students: “I try to make the classes fun, because they learn more when they have fun. I love my students — they get into the music.”

Many students and former students volunteer at Wilson’s concerts and love the chance to rub shoulders with Grammy award-winning musicians from around the country. Wilson’s office on the 10th Floor South, One Main Building, is a study in jazz history, with photos of jazz greats like Satchmo, Dizzy and saxophone legend David “Fathead” Newman adorning every wall. Wilson returned to his office in January after an illness sidelined him for several weeks.

As his strength returns and health problems are resolved, he hopes to resume his passion for playing the trumpet. He and internationally famous trumpeter Wynton Marsalis share the same trumpet model, both instruments crafted by top-of-the-line trumpet maker David Monette last year. “I do a whole set in my jazz class on Wynton. He’s crazy — one of the greatest trumpet players in the world. He had some of my students at Juilliard.”
Ryden’s Book about Slavery Wins Spot on Prestigious List for Libraries

A book about slavery in the West Indies and British abolition by David Ryden, associate professor of history at UHD, made it to a prestigious list that guides librarians across the country as they add to undergraduate library collections.

Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries magazine, a source for librarians overseeing collections.

Case’s Book Details ‘The Great Southwest Railroad Strike and Free Labor’

Case examined more than 1,000 pages of Congressional hearing testimony from the period as well as memoirs written by itinerant railroad workers and 17 local newspapers. The Great Southwest Railroad Strike of 1886 spanned five states – Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas and Illinois – and left a significant impact on the entire country.

“Usually the story of the conflict was cast as a fight between good and evil,” Case said. “I wanted to go from a ground-up perspective and write a history as opposed to a morality tale.”

The congressional testimony, documented by hearing examiners who traveled to the many sites of unrest, provided Case a “fine-grain picture” of the relationships between railroaders and their neighbors and the local communities. “The strikers’ interracial alliance and their conflicting ideas about a violent strategy receive particular attention in her book.

Case’s 2009 faculty development leave award provided her the time last semester to complete the book, which is published by Texas A&M University Press.

Anderson’s “Benign Bigotry” Tackles Myths of Prejudice


The book relates myths like “feminists are man haters” and “gays flaunt their sexuality” to real events, showing how social justice, prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination, with a goal of reaching a wider audience than most types of scholarly research.

Anyone can read drafts of sections of “Benign Bigotry,” and she used students’ comments and feedback. “In a lot of ways, this book is written for them,” Anderson said.

Many of Anderson’s UHD students helped provide feedback. “In a lot of ways, this book is written for them,” Anderson said.

Published by Cambridge University Press, the book drew kudos from colleagues. A University of California Santa Cruz psychology professor calls it “a brilliant piece of scholarship” that diagnoses and offers cures.
Five UHD freshmen who participated in a high school outreach initiative may not be rock stars, but they made a big impression on Eisenhower High School students last semester.

“One kid asked me to sign his book,” freshman Ray Cortez said. “I didn’t even think I would ever go to college.”

Cortez and his four freshmen colleagues each received $200 toward this semester’s textbooks as part of a Community Engagement Grant through the office of State Rep. Sylvester Turner. This is the first time UHD students have participated in the program. Cortez, Aracely Zuniga, Manual Lara, Krystal Thomas and Jessica Silva, all University College students, received Barnes & Noble gift cards for fielding questions from about 90 Eisenhower High School students curious about college life.

The two-hour college readiness session was part of David Morales’ CSP (College Success Program) 1101 class. The high school students had a lot of different questions, like that age-old problem of how to pass classes but have fun, too.

“Balancing everything — that’s the big trick,” said Morales, director of academic services with University College. Morales has taught CSP classes for 20 years, covering everything from note taking and time management to career services and work-outs in UHD’s gym. “It’s basic survival skills,” Morales said. Mentoring high school students boosted the confidence of his freshmen, and was fun for them, he said.

Second semester freshman Lara, 18, agreed. He fielded questions about party life versus studying and told the high school students the two aren’t mutually exclusive. “You can pretty much do everything, but you have to time it right. If you have a test the next morning, stay home and study.”

From left: Krystal Thomas, Jessica Silva, Manual Lara, Ray Cortez, Aracely Zuniga and David Morales, University College director of academic services

UHD Freshmen Discover Mentoring High School Students Builds Confidence

Community Service Earns UHD Spot on President’s Higher Education Honor Roll

The Corporation for National and Community Service named the University of Houston-Downtown to its 2009 President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, recognizing its outreach programs for area elementary and high school students and a growing, family-oriented Destination Downtown open house program.

UHD is among 30 colleges and universities in Texas and more than 700 across the nation to receive Honor Roll recognition for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement. Administered by The Corporation for National and Community Service, the award is the highest federal recognition a university or college can receive for such initiatives.

“Community engagement is an integral component of UHD’s mission, and being recognized nationally for the initiatives is the proverbial icing on the cake,” said Joan DeWitt, UHD’s Director of Community Engagement.

UHD and other Honor Roll recipients were chosen based on the scope and innovation of their service projects, participation, service incentives and academic service-learning courses.

“UHD lives in the heart of the Houston community, and outreach is an important part of our mission,” said UHD President Bill Flores. “We’re pleased we made the Honor Roll and will continue our community engagement projects.”

Included in UHD’s highlights is an ongoing partnership with Crockett Elementary School in which UHD students and professors work with Crockett teachers, students and administrators to increase student achievement. UHD students from freshman to senior year help tutor elementary children and participate in dozens of school and community projects year-round, interacting frequently with children and their families through events like science fairs, music concerts and other projects. The program is credited with Crockett Elementary’s designation in 2009 as an “Exemplary School,” the highest state standard in accountability.

Another successful community outreach effort is UHD’s Summer Enrichment Program in which high school students participate in a three-week academic curriculum designed to introduce them to college and to enhance their high school studies. UHD students serve as program assistants, role models and mentors. Last summer’s theme of sustainability and its importance to the future of a society tied in the elements of economic growth and social justice, all designed to give college-bound students strategies to successfully complete their degrees.

And in another initiative, UHD’s semiannual Destination Downtown Open House has grown from 352 attendees in 2008 to nearly 1,300 just one semester later through innovative community partnerships, sponsorships and volunteer efforts.

UHD’s Open Houses have become community events, embracing potential students and their families and other members of the Houston community with a day full of activities. Students, faculty and staff volunteer during these campuswide celebrations that are fast becoming a UHD tradition.
No AC + Long Work Hours = Best Spring Break Ever

Tending sick children in a hot, tiny medical clinic with no air conditioning doesn’t sound like much of a vacation, but for six members of UHD’s student Health Professions Organization (HPO), it was the Spring Break of a lifetime.

“It was far more than what I imagined it would be,” said senior Audrey Gonzalez, HPO president. She and five fellow UHD science majors volunteered with The Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children in Alajuelita, Costa Rica, home to an estimated 12,000 poor Costa Ricans and Nicaraguan refugees.

The students and their faculty advisers—assistant professors Jerry Johnson and Barry Sullender with the Department of Natural Sciences—helped clinic workers register and treat children with worms and other parasites and mothers with various infections. They shadowed the overworked clinic doctor, psychologist and pharmacist. They created and performed a skit on the importance of education, adding bits of comedy to make the kids laugh.

“We knew these would be less fortunate people, but once you’re there and see the living conditions—and the area we were in had a lot of crime—you can see this certain sadness in the kids’ eyes,” Gonzalez said. “You can tell they’ve experienced things that children should not experience.”

Johnson said he saw his UHD students mature during the trip as they witnessed abject poverty from which there is no escape. “I cannot express how proud I am of the students,” Johnson said. “I could see the changes in them. One of them assumed the role of a leader; another assumed the role of a sage. I saw one open up and move from an introverted personality to become very outgoing. Another stepped beyond normal cultural boundaries. What more could you ask for in an educational experience?”

Despite the hardships of life in a refugee camp, the UHD team found their host families welcoming and kind. Students lodged in villagers’ homes on the same block, eating meals with the families, usually traditional Costa Rican dishes with black beans, white rice and chicken, meat or fish. They reported to the free clinic each day by 8:30 a.m. and always found a line of children and mothers waiting for medical care.

“The clinic can only see 15 people a day because of lack of resources,” Gonzalez said. “Mainly we saw children with parasites and dehydration and mothers with infections. It was nothing too complicated, more like family medicine. We helped ask questions, like ‘When was the last time they were de-parasitized?’” Some students speak fluent Spanish, while others communicated the best they could using English, limited Spanish and hand gestures.

Many Alajuelita youngsters acted as surrogate parents and brought their infant and toddler siblings in for treatment because parents were either working or looking for work.

Gonzalez changed her future career plans after shadowing the clinic doctor for a day. “Just the doctor’s way of approaching his patients… He called kids ‘carino,’ which means sweetheart. You could see how much he cared about everyone. He would let the children play with the stethoscope,” Gonzalez said. Before Costa Rica, Gonzalez planned to pursue her master’s degree immediately after graduating from UHD. Now she plans to join the Peace Corps for two years and continue the work she started on Spring Break.

“No words can describe the impact this trip had on my life,” she said. “It completely exceeded my expectations.”

While only six HPO students were able to make the trip, about 25 active members of the organization worked two semesters to raise money for the project. Events included a date auction last semester that brought in $1,300 and a throw-a-pie-at-a-professor fundraiser this semester that earned the club about $700.

Johnson hopes the HPO continues similar mission trip projects, but participating is an economic burden for students. Institutionalizing funding resources could help pave the way for future educational experiences he considers priceless.

“The patients treated at the clinic were poor beyond our normal standards of poverty,” Johnson said. “The health care provided was a gift for these people, no matter how meager the services the clinic could provide. Seeing true poverty will change your perspective on the life you lead—that was my hope for the students.”

Photos courtesy of Audrey Gonzalez.
Powerlifting Club
Team Wins Third National Collegiate Championship

The UHD Powerlifting Club Team members successfully defended their World Association of Benchers and Deadlifters (WABDL) National Collegiate Team Title on Feb. 6 at the University of Texas—San Antonio, earning their third consecutive WABDL National Collegiate Championship with a rare perfect score.

UTSA placed second to UHD as it has each of the last three championships. The UTSA Roadrunners were the favorites this year since they were hosting the national meet and had a number of defending champions returning to their lineup. UHD Powerlifting Coach John Hudson pointed the project rosers to result in a tie, in which case the victory would go to UTSA on a tie breaker.

The only chance for a UHD victory would be a perfect or near-perfect score and a couple of breaks along the way in favor of the Gators, Hudson said. UHD’s lifters came through under pressure, with the lifters selected to earn points all placing first, earning UHD a rare perfect score of 260 points.

Several other UHD lifters upset UTSA lifters, taking points away from the Roadrunners. In particular, the performances of Antonio Moreno and Rocio Ruiz, lifting at 132 Men and 132 Women weight classes, were key to getting UHD the breaks they needed to avoid a tie. Moreno upset two-time defending national champion Jaime Gonzales in the deadlift, setting a new National Collegiate Record in the process. Ruiz upset a much more experienced UTSA lifter in the bench press and the deadlift. Moreno and Ruiz took 12 points away from UTSA with their victories. UHD caught an additional break when the highly favored UTSA bench at 308 was upset by a lifter from another school. UTSA placed second with 244 points. This was UHD’s largest margin of victory in their rivalry with the Roadrunners.

UHD’s Linda Okoro continued to impress, winning overall Best Lifter honors for Women’s Deadlift and Women’s Total. UHD’s team continues to improve, and with the addition of experienced high school recruits in the fall of 2010, should become even stronger in the coming year, Hudson said.

This year’s WABDL National Collegiate Championships brought new names to the growing list of schools that UHD has defeated in team competition, including Northwest Vista College, San Antonio College and Louisiana State University. UHD will host the 2011 WABDL National Collegiate Championships.

Women
132:
- Rocío Ruíz —
  · 1st Place Bench Press, 99 lbs., National Collegiate Record and Mexican National Record.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 248 lbs., National Collegiate Record and Mexican National Record.
  · 1st Place Total, 551 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 2nd Place Total, 132 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 2nd Place Deadlift, 424.2 lbs.
  · 3rd Place Deadlift, 440.7 lbs., National Collegiate Record.

148:
- Linda Okoro —
  · 1st Place Bench Press, 170.7 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 347 lbs., National Collegiate Record.

181:
- Courtney Weaver —
  · 1st Place Bench Press, 275.5 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 358 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 1st Place Total, 633.7 lbs., National Collegiate Record.

198:
- Olga Hernandez —
  · 1st Place Bench Press, 165.2 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 270 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 1st Place Total, 407.7 lbs., National Collegiate Record.

Men
114:
- Jesus Sanchez —
  · 1st Place Bench Press, 225.7 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 347 lbs., National Collegiate Record.

123:
- Jose Martinez —
  · 1st Place Total, 771.5 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 440.7 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 2nd Place Deadlift, 402.2 lbs.
  · 2nd Place Total, 859.7 lbs., Texas State Collegiate Record.

132:
- Waldo Cardenas —
  · 1st Place Total, 909.2 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 2nd Place Bench Press, 380.2 lbs.
  · 2nd Place Deadlift, 551 lbs., Texas State Collegiate Record.

181:
- Waldo Villamil —
  · 1st Place Bench Press, 244.2 lbs.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 424.2 lbs.
  · 1st Place Total, 843.2 lbs.

259:
- Raul Hernandez —
  · 1st Place Bench Press, 308.5 lbs.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 418.7 lbs.

275:
- Jose Trejo —
  · 1st Place Bench Press, 336 lbs., National Collegiate Record.
  · 1st Place Deadlift, 551 lbs., Texas State Collegiate Record.

Team Accomplishments

UHD Powerlifting Club team member Linda Okoro has received the Capello Memorial Award for her outstanding performance in the deadlift at the World Association of Benchers and Deadlifters (WABDL) World Championships in Reno, Nev., last November.

Okoro won the 148-pound weight class of the Junior Women’s Division with an incredible 402.2-pound deadlift, Coach John Hudson said. The Capello Award is named for the late Jerry Capello of Oregon who held numerous world records in the deadlift and was still pulling nearly 800 pounds in his 50s. Capello was known for his determination, courage and never-quit attitude on the lifting platform, and the Capello Memorial Award is given to the lifter who best exemplifies the approach to lifting.

Okoro’s 402.2 lbs was described as “the hardest-fought” lift of the entire competition, Hudson said. “Her lift generated such excitement that Linda received a standing ovation and the competition momentarily halted as judges and other officials left their chairs to congratulate her,” Hudson said.

Linda Okoro has her sights set on breaking the Women’s World Record in the deadlift in 2010.
UHD Interns are Making a Name for Themselves in Washington

Tonya Chissell-Williams, a New Orleans native who lost family and friends in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and José Eduardo Sanchez, who helped raise his little brother and sister after his mother died, are Mickey Leland Congressional interns in Washington, D.C., this semester.

José is probably one of the smartest students I've ever taught,” said David Branham, UHD assistant professor of political science and coordinator of the UHD congressional internship program.

“Politics is part of our everyday lives,” said Sanchez, 21. “If we choose not to participate, then we have no voice, and the democratic process is not upheld. We lose the opportunity to help our families and our communities.”

Sanchez works in U.S. Rep. Gene Green’s office. He has counseled youth at the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, volunteered at the Houston Interfaith Workers Justice Center and worked as a teacher’s aide at the Montessori Country Day School. He applied for the internship to experience government from the policymaker’s side.

“When I applied, I knew that I wanted to be in Washington, D.C. right now,” said Chissell-Williams, who works in U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee’s office. “We are at the core of U.S. politics.”

Sanchez, Chissell-Williams and six others are included in the internship.

“It’s an exciting time to be in (Washington) D.C. right now,” said Chissell-Williams, who was raised in U.S. Rep. Mickey Leland’s district. “Leland’s dream.”

Leland, who died in a 1989 plane crash, was chairman of the House Agriculture Committee.

Sanchez’s mentor is Branham. In May 2005, Chissell-Williams completed an associate degree in computer information systems and enrolled in the University of New Orleans. In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. Many of Chissell-Williams’ friends and family died when their Ninth Ward neighborhood flooded. Chissell-Williams left New Orleans and resettled with relatives in Houston.

Family members pushed Chissell-Williams, 29, to return to college in 2007. From the beginning, she said she felt welcomed at UHD. “I am so grateful for UHD. I’ve really connected with all of my professors and they connected with me,” she said.

Branham said it took an incredible amount of energy for Chissell-Williams to make it to where she is today. “She has talents that make her special and her story is compelling. I expect her to be a success, whatever her pursuit,” she said.

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“I have this little group of people that keeps encouraging me,” said Chissell-Williams, a former intern with Houston City Councilman Jarvis Johnson’s office and winner of the 2009 Women Professionals in Government Beverly Kaufmann scholarship award. “I know that I can’t fail; I have to succeed. Too many people have passed for me not to fulfill my destiny. That’s what keeps me grounded and focused on my goal.”

Renée Cross, associate director of the CPP and director of the congressional internship program, said Sanchez and Chissell-Williams will get real-world experience on Capitol Hill that will provide long-term rewards. “Students such as Tonya and José, who are already committed to public service, are able to develop their skills and establish professional networks. This experience benefits them personally, and because of their commitment, it benefits the Houston community,” said Cross, who also teaches political science at UHD.

The students started work in January and will live in Washington, D.C., until May. When they complete the program, Sanchez will earn 12 credit hours and Chissell-Williams will earn nine post-baccalaureate credit hours. She graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science in December 2009.

Interns receive a monthly stipend, round-trip airfare and stay at Boston University’s Washington Center. They work an average of 40 hours a week with congressional staffers. Their responsibilities may include legislative research, project planning and attending events and meetings, as well as routine office duties. In addition, they attend a weekly seminar led by an on-site instructor and keep a journal of their experiences that Branham will grade at the end of the term.

When he returns, Sanchez wants to continue his work with nonprofits and further his education in international politics. Chissell-Williams is applying to the Texas Southern University master’s degree program in public administration.

Student Tells How Family Powered Their Way to Olympics

Olympic medalist and UHD student, Diana Lopez, has written a book with her brothers, Jean, Steven, and Mark called, “Family Power.”

The book, released in late 2009 by Penguin Press, chronicles their hard work as they became “America’s First Family of Tae Kwon Do.”

“We do everything together,” said Lopez, a junior majoring in interdisciplinary studies. “It made sense to write a book together.”

She won the bronze medal in the Korean martial art of tae kwon do at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Lopez and her brothers made history that year for being the first set of four siblings to represent the U.S. on the same Olympic Team, and for having three siblings win medals in the same sport.

Mark won the silver and Steven the bronze in the men’s competition. Jean coached the U.S. team. In the book, Lopez writes about her parents, Julio and Ondina Lopez, who left Nicaragua in 1972 in search of a better life in the United States. In writing the book, the siblings took turns writing chapters, telling their story from various viewpoints.

Lopez says “Family Power,” honors the reasons for their success — hard work and family. She wanted to share her family’s story with the world to help inspire others. They dedicated the book to their parents for “their love and guidance.”

“We support each other,” she said. “When one of us wins, we all win.”

She plans to graduate from UHD in 2012, and she plans on teaching kindergarten.

“Learning about childhood education is fun to me,” said Lopez. “It doesn’t seem like work. I love children. I enjoy taking the lessons from class and trying them out on my nieces and nephews. It really takes my mind off of my other life of tae kwon do.”
Chemistry Student Hopes to Revolutionize Medical Testing with his Research

Abdul Jangda, a UHD junior majoring in industrial chemistry, hopes his chemistry research centered on detecting metal particles in liquid by using special plastics capable of conducting electricity may someday cut the cost of many common medical tests. Jangda thinks a polymer with the right qualities could lower the cost of testing blood for sodium, potassium, glucose and other elements that doctors use to diagnose and treat patients.

In November, he competed at Sigma Xi – The Scientific Research Society’s national annual meeting held in The Woodlands. Judges gave Jangda’s presentation in the undergraduate chemistry category a superior rating. The judges commented that his work has many potential medical uses and appears to be relatively affordable. He tied with Derek Rhoades from Ohio Northern University for top honors. He tied with Derek Rhoades from Ohio Northern University for top honors.

Jangda developed the special plastic polymer while working with UHD Assistant Professor of Chemistry Mian Jiang.

“You have the opportunity to learn from others, to learn about graduate schools, and to become more familiar with different careers in industrial chemistry. The recognition encourages me to do more.” Undergraduates from across the country participated in the conference including students from Texas A&M, Rice, Stanford and Northwestern universities.

Jangda is enrolled in UHD’s Scholars Academy, a scholarship program for exceptional students who are focused on careers in the sciences, technology, engineering and math. The 25-year-old transfer to UHD in 2008 with an associate degree from Houston Community College and started research last year in UHD’s Center for Applied Polymer Science Research, directed by Associate Professor of Chemistry Byron Christmas.

Other UHD students who participated in the conference are Nameena Baig, Melissa Chan, Preeti Choudhary, Jarrett Kitchen, Julio LaTorre, Mustafa Mehmod, Christine Varghese and Desiree Wilson.

More than 200 students presented their research at this year’s conference, representing nearly 100 academic institutions.

UHD wins $100,000 Walmart Minority Student Success Award

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) has selected the University of Houston-Downtown to receive a $100,000 Walmart Minority Student Success Award to help build on UHD’s proven success in recruiting, retaining and graduating first-generation college students.

The award is funded by a $4.2 million grant to IHEP from the Walmart Foundation.

“UHD is honored to be selected in this nationally competitive process,” said UHD President Bill Flores. “We have a successful record of identifying barriers and challenges faced by students who are the first in their family to go to college. This award will help us to continue to lead as we implement this program, High-Impact Learning to Promote Progress for First-Generation Students (HILTOPP).”

UHD’s HILTOPP Program is designed to improve academic progress and success for first-generation, first-time-in-college students during their freshman years by providing a comprehensive set of “high impact” educational experiences focused on the foundational skills of mathematics, reading and writing.

UHD was one of only 30 Minority-Serving Institutions chosen for the award through a highly competitive application process that focused on strengthening efforts to support first-generation students. Competition extended to Hispanic-Serving Institutions.
Alum’s ‘Heavenly’ Idea Becomes her First Invention

Even Kight’s dream sits neatly stacked in two storage sheds near her Tomball home.

Kight, a UHD alumna, dreamed up a new product and now hundreds of her Heavenly Strollers — packed in rectangular boxes carrying her DK Innovations label — await shipment to the next tall parent who finds her product online.

In true “necessity-is-the-mother-of-invention” style, Kight got the idea for the new product while wheeling her niece, Heaven Leigh, in an umbrella stroller several years ago. Kight noticed her back started to ache.

That backache spurred an idea and she designed a stroller with vertically adjustable handles to fit anyone from 5 feet to nearly 7 feet tall. She named the product after her niece, designing it in black and red with a ladybug in the logo.

“There are so many fathers out there who are too tall for their strollers,” Kight recalled. “I did some research, and they did not have anything.”

“I really don’t know what gave me the confidence,” Kight said of her bold move to act on an idea. “I always knew I wanted to be in business for myself — that’s how I see myself in the future. I found a company in Tomball that could do the blueprints, and my patent attorney was kind enough to take payments.” Her parents loaned their savings to cover manufacturing costs and the shipment of her first 1,700 strollers.

Now Kight is gradually paying back her parents and has sold more than 350 Heavenly Strollers to customers around the country. A major retailer has expressed interest in the product she sells for $34.99 apiece plus $13.50 for shipping and handling. Her Web site — www.dkinnovationsinc.com — carries a long list of testimonials from excited parents:

“We are tall parents — my husband is 6’7” and I am 5’8” and all the umbrella strollers I tried were horrible. I had to slouch to push them and my husband couldn’t push them at all. This one solved the issue.”

From idea to marketplace, the project took several years. “Starting out, you tell someone the idea and get such positive feedback you think, ‘as soon as I get the product it will be an instant success.’ This has definitely taught me that things do not happen overnight,” she said.

Kight graduated from UHD in May 2006 with a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies. She took her courses at University Center in the Woodlands, a 40-minute drive from her Tomball home. She especially enjoyed the literary theory and linguistics courses because they made her analyze and study issues in depth.

“I’m the kind of person who likes to learn everything I can,” Kight said. A private school student until 8th grade, she feared she would be bored in public high school, so she passed college tests for English and math and enrolled in Tomball College at age 14. Three years later, she had an associate’s degree and stayed on at Tomball to take more science and humanities courses.

While she is marketing her invention, she is working as a receptionist and has thought about earning a graduate degree in marketing or statistics.

“You have to take some time to think about what you want. You have to forget any other influences and focus on what would be your passion in life,” Kight said. “Inside, there’s got to be a little spark that speaks to you, and you’ve got to take some time to find that.”

Kight’s parents help her cart the strollers to UPS for shipping, and her father, a frequent traveler, gives her business cards to parents struggling with umbrella strollers in airports around the country. She has received so many questions about patents and inventing that she is creating two new Web sites: www.inventoresource.net and www.theshouldmakea.com.

MSME Program’s First Grad Becomes its First Director

The University of Houston-Downtown has tapped John W. Presley Jr. to serve as executive director of its Security Management for Executives master’s degree program, UHD’s first executive degree offering.

Presley, who was one of the first students to complete the degree in August, is charged with building enrollment and support for the program that prepares students to integrate business and security functions in the corporate world at an executive level.

“UHD’s program is unique because many students who are in this graduate program already have experience and knowledge that add to classroom discussions and presentations,” Presley said. “I’ve served in the military, in local enforcement, as a FBI special agent and as a corporate security director. Each step of the way, I gained new perspectives on this ever-changing profession.”

Beth Pelz, dean of UHD’s College of Public Service, said she looks forward to seeing Presley expand the degree program that holds classes on alternate Saturdays. “We want to reach more security executives in Houston and across Texas. Our program is just three years old, but it already has a strong reputation in the industry,” she said. “John knows Houston and he will help us build relationships with Fortune 500 companies and others in the security industry. We are very pleased to have him working at UHD.”

UHD is taking applications now for openings in the program beginning fall semester in late August. Presley can be reached at presleyj@uhd.edu or at 713-221-5292.

Presley said more corporations are addressing security issues at an executive level. “I came into this degree with considerable private and public experience; this program expanded my contacts and left me well prepared to address corporate security functions as a member of the executive team in the boardroom.”

He lives in Katy and has a bachelor’s degree from Stephen F. Austin State University in addition to his MSME degree.
Student Research Conference Brings UHD Alum Vedangi Sample Full Circle

This year’s keynote speaker at the annual Student Research Conference is the first Scholars Academy alumn to return to UHD as the headliner, a switch from student presenter to main attraction and a precedent that conference organizers would like to turn into tradition.

Vedangi Sample, a 2003 UHD graduate, is a pre-doctoral fellow and graduate student in the Department of Pharmacology and Molecular Sciences at Johns Hopkins University. Changing her role from that of poster presenter to featured speaker is a challenge she embraced.

“It is such an honor,” said Sample. “I would never think I would be a keynote speaker at a Scholars Academy function. It’s always nice to go back to your alma mater.” When conference planners were setting up this year’s agenda, they discovered they had a growing pool of Scholars Academy graduates who were established in respected research programs or promising careers. Sample was among the first cohort of 12 Scholars Academy students.

Five years ago, UHD alumnus Christopher Matranga, (Ph.D. Chemistry, University of Chicago), a research scientist with the U.S. Department of Energy’s National Energy Technology Laboratory, was the first doctorate-earning UHD graduate to address UHD students in the Student Research Conference as a professional. UHD criminal justice alumna Vicki King, now an assistant chief with the Houston Police Department, was keynote speaker for last year’s conference.

“This year we had three or four former students we were talking about when Larry Spears said, ‘How about Vedangi?’ and we all said yes,” said Akif Uzman, Department of Natural Sciences chair, who tracked her down on Facebook. “She was easily in the top 5 percent in my general biochemistry class. She’s a very intelligent and poised young lady.”

Sample did research with Uzman and chemistry research with Byron Christmas, who also worked with Matranga when he was an undergraduate. Both alumni were industrial chemistry majors at UHD. “She was always very articulate and an excellent student,” said Christmas, UHD chemistry professor.

This year’s April 30 Student Research Conference featured research results from across the disciplines at UHD and showcased 100 posters and about eight oral presentations in a daylong event that united students, faculty, industry, staff and guests.

UHD biology major Preeti Choudhary, 18, a sophomore international student from India, presented her research poster on using dyes as sensors to track different compounds. Already she is a seasoned presenter and has taken her research to scientific conferences in Dallas, The Woodlands, Rice University and Montana.

For a shy student who answered only yes or no and barely spoke when she first arrived, Choudhary now looks forward to talking about her research and sharing information with students from around the country. She especially looked forward to discussing her research on home turf.

“I won’t be scared as much,” she said before the conference. “We are home, and you are always at ease at home. We know the facilities and the students in the Scholars Academy. It’s going to be easier.”

Sample also looked forward to coming full circle and completing the journey she started at UHD a decade ago when she traveled from her native India to study industrial chemistry, graduating summa cum laude.

She has about a year left in her pre-doctoral fellowship, in which she is studying fluorescent proteins and their potential in pinpointing disease processes and new drugs. She would like to work in the drug discovery field upon completion of her doctorate. She encouraged young scientists in the UHD audience to embrace the big picture in their research efforts.

“The thing I want people to take out of my talk is not to put blinders on, but try to see how your science or your subject can be applied to different disciplines,” Sample said. “When people study chemistry, biology or physics, it’s always so disjointed. The biggest thing I took out of graduate school is how interconnected all the sciences are. Learn something because you want to understand something — and good grades are going to happen.”

Presenting research as an undergraduate offered priceless experience in public speaking, clear thinking and fluency on her feet, Sample said.

“It’s training. It definitely gives you the confidence to speak in front of a lot of professionals. It gives you a platform to present yourself and how you want other people to perceive you in your field.”

Sample is the niece of UHD’s Sangeeta Gad, lecturer in the department of computer and mathematical sciences and director for recruitment and retention in the Computer Science/Saturday Academy.

UHD and Houston Honor HACU for its Support of Hispanic Higher Education

UHD President Bill Flores, right, presents a proclamation to HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities) President Antonio Flores from Houston Mayor Annise Parker declaring Feb. 11 as “Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Day” in recognition of HACU’s commitment to championing Hispanic higher education in the United States and abroad. UHD hosted a session of HACU’s “On the Road Forum.” Invitees included chancellors, presidents of colleges and universities, superintendents of Hispanic-serving school districts, corporate leaders and supporters of Hispanic Higher Education.

UHD will Show Spring Commencement Live on the Web

The University of Houston-Downtown will welcome families to its spring 2010 Commencement Ceremony at 6 p.m., Monday, May 17, in Minute Maid Park, home of the Houston Astros.

UHD President Bill Flores will confer degrees on students who will receive bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Many graduates will be the first in their families to earn college degrees. The University expects more than 15,000 to attend. The ceremony will include a student speaker as well as a special guest speaker.

Students should enter Minute Maid Park using the Atrium Entrance, and family and friends use the Right Field Entrance.

As a service to students with friends and family members who may not be able to attend in person, UHD will air a live Webcast of the event at http://www.uhd.edu/computing/rtc/rtv/uhdtv/commencement.html.

People planning to view the ceremony online should visit the Web site before the event to ensure their Internet connection speed is fast enough to view the event and that their computer is equipped to receive the feed.

UHD has more than 25,000 alumni and now enrolls nearly 13,000 students.
A Decade Later, UHD Finance Degree Again Opens Doors to Opportunity

is a tradition in many families, and Deltra Hayes and her niece, Teniqua Davenport, are keeping that tradition alive, pursuing their passions for finance a decade apart.

“We’ve got to think long term,” Hayes said. “We have to change for the better.” Hayes was a young wife and mother of two small children when she enrolled in UHD’s College of Business with high hopes for the future. She dropped her toddlers off at school each morning and zipped over to UHD for business classes, graduating with a Bachelor’s in Business Administration in finance. Ten years later, she is established in a fulfilling career managing retirement plans for universities, hospitals and corporations across Texas.

Davenport moved to Houston 2 ½ years ago to follow in her aunt’s footsteps, working 40-hour weeks at a financial firm while taking as many as 18 hours of night classes in the College of Business. She’ll graduate with the same degree this May and hopes to parlay her experience, finance degree and current job into a career in financial compliance and operations.

“My aunt has really been an inspiration and taught me how important it is to earn a degree,” said Davenport, 29, who moved here from Dallas. “Without her, I would not have gotten this far. You need the support and push, someone behind you to say, ‘Keep going.’ She’s been there pushing me along the way.”

Davenport has seen her aunt’s rapid career advancement. “One day I can be there,” she said.

Hayes is vice president of relationship management for VALIC’s Southwest Region. She manages 48 groups across Texas, handling retirement plans of $20 million and higher. Like the maven described in Malcolm Gladwell’s milestone book, “The Tipping Point,” she thrives on information sharing, trying to spread best practices from client to client so their retirement plans grow and attract more employee participation.

She follows legislative changes and trends in the industry, assimilating the information that will keep the Retirement Plans of her group sponsors on track. Her job is her practice, she said, and her favorite tagline accompanies her e-mails: “Do a good job because you want to, not because you have to. This puts you in charge instead of your boss.”

Hayes daily puts into practice two things she said were discussed frequently in her UHD finance classes—implementation and execution. “You have to be organized and pick up the little pieces and turn that into best practices,” Hayes said. “Execution is everything.”

Her work on how to create forums for discussions to secure and invest retirement savings affects employees at every level of an organization, and Hayes has contact with employees from the bottom up. “Nobody is too big or too little, because everyone has to save something,” she said.

Since she got her first job with AT&T at age 16, Hayes has practiced what she preaches and maxed out her retirement savings every year. She taught Davenport the importance of saving for the future, too. She and her husband of 25 years, Gabriel, pass along the same lesson to their son and daughter, ages 14 and 12.

She’ll return to UHD this May when the niece she mentored walks across the stage at Minute Maid Park to receive her diploma.

“One of the reasons I came to UHD is because I was more mature, and I knew I needed a serious environment,” Hayes said. “I found that and some of my best friends at UHD. The professors were serious about getting us in and out — it was almost like a family. We encouraged our niece to come back to school, because it’s never too late.”

Three Members of College of Humanities and Social Sciences Gain Recognition and Appointments

Three members of UHD’s College of Humanities and Social Sciences received recognition recently in separate appointments, grants and awards.

Jose Alvarez, associate professor of history, has been admitted into the Academic Fellows program of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. He and a handful of winners from across North America will travel to Israel for two weeks as part of their admission to the program.

Aaron Gillette, assistant professor of history, received a grant from the Goethe Institute to study German in Germany. He has also been awarded a prestigious fellowship to conduct research at the University of Siegen.

Edmund P. Cueva, professor and chair of the Department of Arts and Humanities, has been named to the Marketplace of Ideas advisory board of the Council on Law in Higher Education. The Marketplace of Ideas is a journal for analysis and opinion on the American Education system.

College of Business Receives $5,000

College of Business Dean Dan Bates, third from left, accepts $5,000 toward the COB Excellence Fund from Vinmar International, Ltd. President Hemant Goradia. At far left is Swatandra Jain, Vinmar senior vice president, and at right is Brij Kathuria, community ambassador for the Indo American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston. The chamber has supported UHD and College of Business activities for many years. Vinmar is an international petrochemicals and polymers company headquartered in Houston.
Club Sports — UHD Student Athletes Play for the Love of the Game

UHD students who sign on for one of the 10 Club Sports teams here have no promise of scholarships, personal gain or glory — only the chance to work hard, sweat and struggle to balance workouts, classes and busy lives that sometimes include jobs and children.

“They’re playing for the love of the game,” said Richard Sebastiani, director of UHD Sports & Fitness. “We want them to win — we want the best for them. But as long as they give maximum effort and never quit, I don’t care what the scoreboard says, they are all winners in my book.”

When Sebastiani first joined UHD 25 years ago, the university had no athletic traditions or NCAA competition like some other schools. Team sports within UHD developed into an Intramural program, which remains a popular activity for many students. Other students, however, yearned for the competitive field of inter-school matches.

UHD Club Sports - a middle ground between intramurals and NCAA competition - evolved slowly with a handful of students, two teams and volunteer coaches. They competed statewide, which was expensive and time-consuming. Sebastiani said students often used their own money to cover travel costs. He and another local recreational sports director launched the idea to unite the many local club sports programs under one umbrella so teams could compete locally, saving time and money but preserving the flavor of rival team competition. They created the Houston Club Sports Conference, with Sebastiani acting as commissioner, a post he still holds eight years later.

“This has really grown exponentially,” Sebastiani said. Competition today includes 10 women’s volleyball teams, 21 men’s and women’s soccer teams, 24 men’s and women’s basketball teams and more. Competitors include schools like Lone Star College, Houston Community College, the University of Houston, Rice University, Houston Baptist University, and Texas Southern University.

“We planted that seed, and look how it’s grown,” Sebastiani said.

Today nearly 100 UHD athletes compete in Club Sports, including about 30 students on the national championship UHD Club Sports Powerlifting team. This newest group’s impressive performances have made it a recruitment tool for UHD, and members’ outstanding performances in national meets led to a recent feature spread in the Houston Chronicle.

Club Sports athletes must be in good academic standing and be enrolled in at least six credit hours; 12 hours for baseball.

Instead of volunteer coaches, Sebastiani now has a coaching staff, many of them already connected to UHD through their jobs, teaching or education. Women’s basketball coach Stefany Mitchell works in UHD’s Office of Student Services & Enrollment Management, and cycling coach Mercedes Gonzales is a UHD admissions counselor. Powerlifting coach and athlete John Hudson is an assistant professor of English. Others are UHD alumni, like Roderick Garner, who coaches the baseball team.

“We try to hire coaches who are qualified, and if there’s a UHD connection, that’s great,” Sebastiani said.

“We’re not the most traditional campus, but here we’ve made it our business to make sure students don’t feel like they’re missing out on something,” Sebastiani said. “These athletes love sports, and they are proud to represent UHD. They are willing to put it on the line.”

For more information on Club Sports, Intramurals and other programs offered by UHD Sports & Fitness, visit its Web site at www.uhd.edu/sportsandfitness/

Mentoring Program Helps Freshmen Adapt to University Life

Five freshmen with outstanding academic achievement during their first semester at UHD received $250 Barnes and Noble gift cards to help defray the cost of their textbooks for Spring 2010. Each student was paired with a faculty mentor to help them set and reach high goals as they made the transition from high school to university. Students and faculty mentors are, from left, Maria Aguilar; Sara Farris, associate professor of English; Carolina Cervantes; Amanda White; Merrilee Cunningham, associate professor of English; Sara West; Diana Lorenzana, academic adviser; Angelica Vegas; and Bonnie Blumberg, lecturer in computer and math sciences. This year’s program includes 20 faculty mentors (including UHD professors, administrators and professional staff) and 48 students.
Sisters Joy and Linda Okoro share a UHD Club Sports connection.

Dynamic Sister Duo Pumps Up Powerlifting and Basketball Club Sports Teams

Amid the noise of powerlifters’ gladiator grunts, the clang of iron weights and the beat of bouncing basketballs, sisters Joy and Linda Okoro sat side by side on a weight bench and joked about how they ended up in UHD’s gym.

“Tell them about that HCC meet,” Joy urged her younger sister. Linda was one of two Houston Community College (HCC) weightlifters competing against UHD’s Powerlifting Club Sports team, a growing program that Coach John Hudson had started from scratch. Midway through that meet three years ago, the outmatched HCC bench press competitor left, but Linda stayed.

“UHD actually had a team, and it recognized a sport that existed only as a bench press competition at other schools,” she recalled. “I wanted in. I asked Coach everything I could about how I could be part of the team. Powerlifting brought me here.”

Some of Joy’s classmates had persuaded her to join the Club Sports basketball team when she started at UHD in 2006. As a seasoned guard, Joy loved the workouts and camaraderie. UHD’s Sports & Fitness arena offered her a welcoming world. Joy talked up the program to her sister.

“I’m very competitive,” Joy said. “Club Sports is fun – you really get a chance to compete against the bigger schools. We really love to play basketball.”

During high school, the sisters had no ready outlet for athletics at the Michael DeBakey High School for Health Professions, which focused on academics, but they loved sports. Linda is a self-described gym rat with a passion for the fitness culture. Joy simply loved to play and was thrilled to find a like-minded group of friends at UHD.

However, even she was stunned at the intensity with which her sister embraced UHD Powerlifting. Nine years ago, Linda underwent spinal reconstruction surgery for scoliosis, a procedure that included inserting metal rods and pins. Deadlifting has given her strength inside and outside the gym, Linda said.

Her powerlifting prowess — she deadlifted 402.2 pounds in the World Association of Benchers and Deadlifters last fall — has made her one of the top young female deadlifters in the nation, with potential to get even better, said Hudson, who is also an assistant professor of English at UHD.

Linda’s ultimate goal? “To shatter every record that’s ever been set. That way some other girls coming behind me have something to look forward to,” she said.

Joy will complete post-baccalaureate psychology classes at UHD, then use her undergraduate degree in science to pursue an advanced degree in dentistry. She looks forward to keeping fit through the many basketball leagues around Houston. Her basketball coach, UHD’s Stefany Mitchell, will lose a valuable team asset.

“Joy is probably one of the most energetic and positive people I’ve ever met,” Mitchell said. “She’s always smiling, and she wants everyone else around her to smile. She never gets mad.”

Linda plans to combine a fashion merchandising major from HCC with a business degree from UHD to launch her own designing enterprise. In the meantime, she would like to recruit more women to a sport that tends to intimidate. “I’d love to see more females on this team,” she said with a grin. “I wish girls weren’t so scared.”

National Show Taps UHD Talent for Hispanic College Quiz

Students from UHD participated in the 2010 “Know Your Heritage: Hispanic College Quiz,” a television game show supported by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and produced by Central City Productions in Chicago.

“It was a great opportunity,” said UHD Vice President of Student Services Ed Apodaca. “UHD students are always up for a competition and they represented us well.”

Contestants answered questions tied to the material in “Hispanic Firsts: 500 Years of Extraordinary Achievement,” by Nicolas Kanellis. The 372-page reference book chronicles individual and group accomplishments, notable events and places in Hispanic art and design, business and commerce, education, film, government, labor, literature, media, the military, the performing arts, religion, science and technology, sports and theatre.

Taping began April 10 in Chicago. Teams from eight colleges and universities competed for a chance to win scholarship funds for their institution. Each team had four members. A $10,000 scholarship award goes to the winning school. The second place winner receives $5,000 in scholarship funds.

UHD’s coach, Michelle Falcon, assistant director of Student Activities & Events, said the team can’t reveal its ranking until the show, hosted by NBC news anchor Zoraida Sambolin, airs between Sept. 13 and Oct. 19, around Hispanic Heritage Month.

“We are fortunate to get support from faculty, staff and administration who have experience with academic competitions,” she said. “Our students are hard working and focused. I have no doubt they will make us proud.”

Schools were randomly selected from 32 HACU member institutions that entered the contest, said Norma Jean Revillo-Garcia, HACU executive director of communications and marketing, who awarded the winning trophies in 2009. She says the contest is more than a competition. “I saw the students on different teams bond right away even though they were competing,” she said. “It’s good national exposure for the schools and the teams.”

Other participating institutions are: Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (Tifton, Ga.), Arizona Western College, California State University-Los Angeles, Colorado State University, Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College-CUNY, Los Angeles Southwest College and Trinity University (San Antonio).

Alternate Institutions are: Austin Community College and Columbia Basin College (Pasco, Wash.).
Deloitte Foundation Larry G. Jones Scholarship Endowment Fund

Deloitte partners and dignitaries presented a check for $150,000 to UHD College of Business faculty, students and Dean Don Bates, standing, for right, to endow a scholarship to honor and in memory of Larry G. Jones, who was a longtime supporter of UHD. Jones, who was a managing partner of the Houston office of Deloitte & Touche LLP, supported a number of Houston organizations benefiting young people. He chaired UHD’s Red Rose Ball two years, headed the President’s Advisory Council and was an active supporter of College of Business activities.

UHD Partners and Dignitaries Present Scholarship Check

Deloitte partners and dignitaries presented a check for $150,000 to UHD College of Business faculty, students and Dean Don Bates, standing, for right, to endow a scholarship to honor and in memory of Larry G. Jones, who was a longtime supporter of UHD. Jones, who was a managing partner of the Houston office of Deloitte & Touche LLP, supported a number of Houston organizations benefiting young people. He chaired UHD’s Red Rose Ball two years, headed the President’s Advisory Council and was an active supporter of College of Business activities.

Alumni Notes

Alumnus Robert Quarles (’08, B.S. in Political Science) started a new position in August 2009 as field director for U.S. Congressman Pete Olson, R-Sugar Land. Quarles works out of Olson’s Sugar Land office.

Alumna Salma Akbar Rivzi (’04) received the regional top teacher award at the 2010 National Engineers’ Week Future City Competition. Rivzi, a science teacher at Al-Hadi School of Accelerated Learning in Houston, coordinated her school’s participation. The team had the highest overall combined score of Houston-area schools at the contest.

Alumna Hazel Camilla Hill (’03) is a second-year graduate student with Liberty Online Learning and is working toward her master’s degree in the professional counseling program.

Alumnus William “Blake” Cook (’02, B.S. in Criminal Justice) is a special agent with the U.S. State Department’s Diplomatic Security Service and recently returned to the United States after a one-year assignment at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait. He is now assigned to the Philadelphia office of the Service.

Alumnus Scott Belshaw (‘04, Social Science) received his Ph.D. in juvenile criminal justice from Prairie View A&M University and is currently an assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of North Texas. Belshaw teaches undergraduate and graduate students in the criminal justice program. He has published numerous articles in criminal justice and education related journals.
UHD Faculty Awards Recognize Outstanding Teaching, Creativity and Service

When Lisa Morano’s junior high English teacher suggested she become a teacher years ago, Morano thought it was a terrible idea.

“I didn’t want to do something as unimportant as teaching ‒ I wanted to be an oceanographer and ride whales and seals in the summer,” said Morano, longtime associate professor of biology and microbiology. “I briefly thought about being a dentist, but I hate spit.”

Graduate school changed her mind and unearthed a passion for teaching. On April 6, she received this year’s Faculty Teaching Award, an announcement that inspired several students to craft a petri dish mobile as a congratulatory gift.

“I wanted to end up at a school just like this where I can spend my days teaching and doing scholarship with students,” said Morano. Today she considers teaching among the worthiest and most important of occupations.

Morano shared the spotlight this year with Service award recipient Marvin Williams, professor of finance, accounting and computer information systems, and Scholarship/Creative Activity award honoree David Ryden, who called it “one of the highlights of my career.”

Ryden’s most recent book, “West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1785-1807,” made the end-of-the-year list in a respected academic journal, assuring its place in undergraduate libraries nationwide. He said active and ongoing research and writing are critical to his role as teacher.

“There’s so much ambiguity to history,” he said. “Issues and topics are constantly contested, and the people who have the greatest facility understanding these debates are those actively engaged in thinking about historical problems and social change.”

Ryden said he strives to teach students the process of analyzing and writing as he maintains his role as active economic historian.

UHD’s Service Award recognized 23-year veteran Williams, who has taught thousands of students and mentored many young faculty members during his long tenure. He teaches online and face-to-face tax courses, but he also dedicates considerable hours working on and often leading committees at the university, college and department levels.

Whether the topic is tenure, a presidential search or the all-important College of Business re-accreditation process, Williams provides a trusted presence on committees that help shape the university’s future.

“If I’m helping the university, helping the college, helping my department, then I’m willing to do it,” Williams said. “I have a desire to do service to help move the university forward in any way I can.”

This year’s three honorees are among a select group of outstanding faculty members. Teaching award finalists this year were Maria Bhattacharjee, associate professor of teaching, and Tim Redd, assistant professor of mathematics.

Scholarship/creative activity award finalists were Floyd Newsum, professor of art and UHD artist in residence, and Yvonne Kendall, associate professor of music. Service award finalists were Susan Henney, assistant professor of psychology, and Larry Spears, professor of chemistry.

Your Gift Really Matters

When you make a gift to the university’s Annual Fund you join thousands of alumni, parents, friends, students, faculty and staff who have chosen to partner with the UHD to preserve the university’s commitment to excellence and opportunity for all.

All those gifts - the majority of which are under $100 - add up in a big way. Your gifts are used every year to fund scholarships, operating expenses, outreach programs, recruitment and retention of key faculty, classroom technology and so much more.

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Even if you can only give a few dollars, you can make a difference at UHD. Every gift matters. For more information, visit the Web site www.uhd.edu/advancement.

Help form a Veterans Alumni Group

Attention Veterans! UHD alumni and Veteran Michael Records, UHD coordinator of Veterans Services, is forming a Veterans Alumni group to network and to help mentor current Veteran students. He would like to hear from veterans interested in participating.

Contact him at Recordsm@uhd.edu or phone: 713-226-5581.

Memorial Service Held for Faculty Member Joe Kortz

William (Joe) Kortz, assistant professor of Bilingual, ESL, and Educational Technology in the Department of Urban Education, died this spring and a Celebration of Life service was held in his memory March 4 in Commerce Street Building for the UHD community.

Kortz wrote 13 books and many publications, was a consultant of Kits Instructional Technology, recipient of the Manchester Who’s Who of Professionals and Business Executives (2005) and was recognized by the American Biographical Institute as Man of The Year in Education for his outstanding contributions to education (2009).

College of Business Professor Emeritus Jim Tinkler Dies

Professor Emeritus James Cecil Tinkler, who built the UHD Petroleum Land Management program and won the Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1987, died this spring at the age of 81.

Tinkler was a UHD professor for 12 years and an independent landman and negotiator up until a recent illness. Tinkler served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War. He is a graduate of the University of Texas in Austin as well as the UT Law School there. Before joining the UHD team, Tinkler was a petroleum landman and international negotiator for Conoco for nearly 30 years.
UHD’s new name — City University or Houston City University?

Faculty, staff and students are considering whether the future lies in embracing “City University” or “Houston City University” as UHD’s new name after hearing research results from a national communication and brand consulting firm in mid-April.

UHD hired Stamats to conduct research and recommend names for UHD that were based on what alumni, faculty, staff, students and prospective students know and understand about UHD. They began work with focus groups and email surveys of all alumni who have their email addresses on file with the University and email surveys of all faculty, staff and students.

Alumni with email addresses on file will be surveyed again before the Regents meet in the fall to make a final selection. Stamats representatives Chuck Reed and Erick Sickler said either “City University” or Houston City University” would end confusion between UHD and UH. In addition, both names reflect UHD’s unique connection with and reflection of the nation’s fourth largest city. The names also offer UHD room to develop academic programs that could set national standards for urban institutions. “We believe you could create destination degrees and offer something here that may not be available anywhere else,” Sickler said.

“The beauty of ‘City University’ is its simplicity. But either name reflects your unique connection to the city and would serve the institution well,” Reed said.

UH System Board of Regents Chair Welcome Wilson attended four informational sessions on campus and assured audiences that either name would be acceptable to the Board and UH System Chancellor Renu Khator.

University administrators have considered changing UHD’s name to end confusion between UHD and the University of Houston for more than eight years. Alumni may learn more about the research process and next steps on the Web. Videos of sessions with the consultants, UH President Bill Flores and UH System Board of Regents Chairman Wilson are available on the UHD Public Affairs Web site, http://www.uhd.edu/publicaffairs/namechange/.

The name recommendations took into consideration several factors. All groups surveyed identified UHD with the vibrancy of the city and city culture, and UHD’s service projects and community engagement projects serve the city. UHD embraces the energy of the city in many ways and has partnerships with city-based organizations like the Buffalo Bayou Partnership and the Greater Houston Partnership. Classrooms extend into the city and programs provide expertise for modern cities.

An alumnus put it this way in the open-ended comment section in the survey: “The University is in the City, but more importantly the City is in the University.”

Meet President Flores

UHD alumni can discuss the two names with President Flores as well as the current state of the University at one of these upcoming alumni meetings.

SOUTHWEST

Tuesday, June 29
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.
UH System at Sugar Land
BH ROOM 103B
14000 University Blvd.
Sugar Land, Texas 77479

NORTHWEST

Wednesday, June 30
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.
UHD Northwest
(Lone Star College-University Park)
Conference Center, Ontario Room
20515 State Highway 249
Houston TX 77070

NORTHEAST

Tuesday, July 6
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Italiano’s Restaurant
217 F M 1960 Bypass Rd E
Humble, TX 77398

BAY AREA

Wednesday, July 7
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Bally’s American grille
2320 MGA Parkway
Seadrakes, Texas 77586

Alumni may RSVP for their choice of events at 713-221-8595 or alumni@uhd.edu

Please include the names of those attending and preference for date and location.

Participate in Straw Poll on New Names for UHD

UHD wants to know what you think about the new names recommended for the University. Please take a moment to participate in an online straw poll available on the UHD Web site at http://namechangestrawpoll.uhd.edu

Click on Name Change Straw Poll. Give your opinion on City University and Houston City University. The poll will remain open for UHD alumni until 11:30 p.m. Friday, May 21.

These graphic treatments are not actual logos but provide visual suggestions of how a new logo might appear. Mockups show primary logos for official letterhead and formal communications, informal logos for promotional items like hats and T-shirts, horizontal logo styles to provide a more casual look, and departmental logos that would incorporate the new name with colleges and departments.