

SKYLINE

THE MAGAZINE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN




Celebrating
50 Years
of Student
Success

UHD
SPRING 2024



Photo: Mitchell Loper



Come to campus and look out from the South Deck or from the seventh floor, or gaze out of a window in the W.I. Dykes Library. Do that, and you'll know why the new name for this magazine—Skyline—was chosen. You'll see Buffalo Bayou winding below, that endless Texas sky above, and in between, the tallest buildings in Houston shooting upward.

But the name isn't just about what you see. It's also about the idea of a skyline, as well as how it makes you feel. Hearing that word pulls your mind's eye upward and suggests progress, beauty, culture, and, above all, ambition. You'll see all those things in these pages, as they are qualities a typical student at the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) possesses in abundance.

Often, though, there's a gap between such ambition and success.

That is, of course, where UHD steps in for our students, and for the whole of Houston, providing degrees of value to those who want to better themselves and their communities.

But an obvious question remains. What is the purpose of this magazine? For us, Skyline serves not just as a window into the education all Gators receive, but also as a view toward their experiences.

A university should provide not just a higher education, but a sense of community, as well as impactful, engaging, and fun experiences with the world, experiences that connect what's learned in the classroom to what's going on outside of it. At UHD, fun, along with a culture of care, inheres in all we do.

So, what's our purpose? To show you the care, fun, and impactful learning every Gator experiences and to inspire you to join, give, or volunteer however you can, so that we can help the next generation of Houstonians reach upward and touch their dreams, just as Houston's Downtown skyscrapers touch the sky. ✍

SKYLINE

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UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN

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RIGHT: UHD's 45-foot tall, helium-filled mascot
Ed-U-Gator made its debut in the 74th Annual
H-E-B Thanksgiving Day Parade on Thursday,
November 23, 2023.

Photo: Sam Negrete



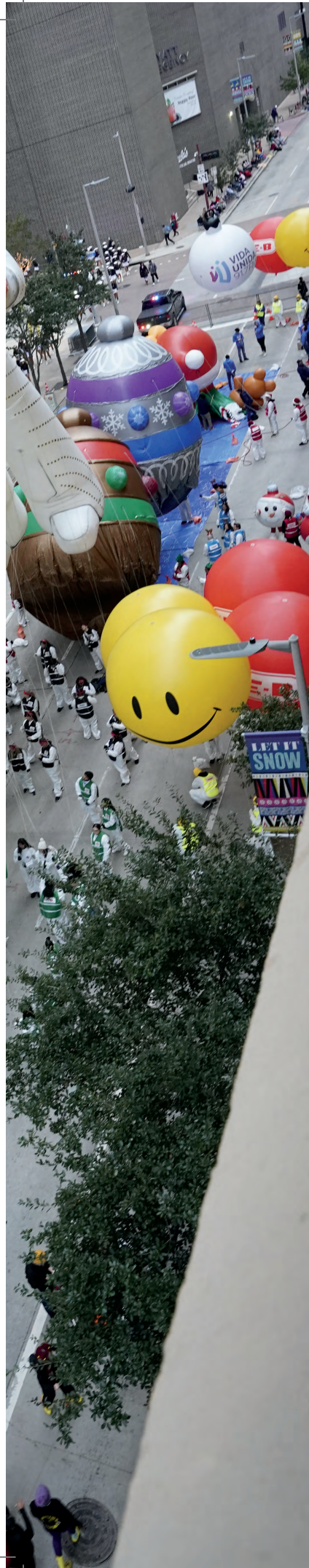


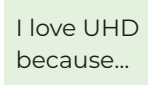


TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 6  **Agents of Consequential Change:
What Student Success Looks Like at UHD**
- 18  **50 Years of Learning**
- 26  **Things We LOVE About UHD**

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

- 4 Letter From the President
- 5 Building on Our Past, Shaping Our Future

STUDENT SUCCESS

- 6 Agents of Consequential Change: What Student Success Looks Like at UHD
- 12 Squad Goals: How Community and Friendship Fuel Perseverance and Passion
- 15 Social Work Students Train for Immediate Impact
- 16 Student's Art Goes BIG!
- 17 Setting the Example: Department of Urban Education Takes on Bilingual Education

50 YEARS OF UHD

- 18 50 Years of Learning
- 26 Things We LOVE About UHD
- 27 We Love Our Gators

FACULTY FOCUS

- 28 Floyd Newsum: 50 Years of Making Art
- 31 Orchestrating Unity: Orlando Williams Leads Chorale on 'Note'-Worthy Journey
- 32 Mitsue Nakamura Champions Peer-Led Team Learning
- 33 Risks and Rewards: Dr. Daniel Perez on Why Finance is Cool

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

- 34 2023 Alumni & Friends Celebration Dinner
- 35 Ties That Bind: Maria Estrada Helps Students Find Their Way
- 36 Alum Dr. Natalie Sirisaengtaksin Wins Service & Mentoring Award

STAFF EXCELLENCE

- 37 UHDPD Is Kicking Crime to the Curb
- 38 Spencer Lightsy Helps Gators Get Into the Groove
- 39 A Cut Above: 2023 Staff Awards

The University of Houston-Downtown closed out 2023 in celebration of our accomplishments and in anticipation of an even more productive future. Driven by commitment to educational excellence, UHD made notable progress on each goal of our Strategic Plan: A New Paradigm. The impact of our student success initiatives is evident; our graduation rates are on the rise.

This edition of our newly named Skyline magazine includes highlights from my 2023 State of the University address, celebrating our remarkable achievements this past year. Ranked one of America's 400 Best Colleges by The Wall Street Journal, UHD is now No. 3 in student experience and No. 1 in diversity. Within these pages, we showcase how we optimize student success and build community in this diverse space. You will find outstanding examples of student, staff, and faculty excellence in the classroom and beyond.

As to our alumni, we share stories representative of Gator excellence, grit, and service.

From the moment I started my presidency here at UHD, I have anticipated our 50th year anniversary with great excitement. Now, we are here: at the beginning of a full year of celebration. We invite you to join us for profound lectures by nationally renowned speakers, our 50th Anniversary Gala, and our 50th anniversary concert, featuring six-time Grammy winner Terence Blanchard. Details of these and other anniversary events, speakers, and performers are now at your fingertips. Visit uhd.edu/50years for the most current updates.

Our continued growth as a university requires the ongoing support and engagement of our community, including alumni, friends, faculty, staff, and students. As an outcome of our combined efforts, UHD is the university of choice for increasing numbers of Houstonians who now see and understand that the University of Houston-Downtown is more than a university in Houston; UHD is a university for Houston, committed to enriching the social, cultural, and intellectual life of our great city.



Loren J. Blanchard, Ph.D.
President, University of Houston-Downtown



Photo: Colt Melrose Photography



Building on Our Past, Shaping Our Future



For his 2023 State of the University address on Sept. 26, President Blanchard outlined UH’s substantial progress over the past year while sharing his enthusiasm for the University’s upcoming 50th anniversary year.

“Implementation of our strategic plan was in full swing this past year with student success at its center,” said Blanchard. “Enhancing student success requires more than faculty excellence, robust academic advising, and built-in career services. Through restructuring our Student Success and Student Life Division, we are more holistically addressing student needs.”

Other accomplishments included:

- The opening of the Basic Needs Center.
- Major strides in student mental health care, with additional counselors and the training of faculty and staff, including 50 UH police officers, in Mental Health First Aid.
- The restructuring of student advising, an enhanced Academic Recovery Program for students on academic probation, increased scheduling of bottleneck courses,

the addition of evening tutorial services, and the creation of journey maps for each degree plan.

“We aspire to develop new degree programs, moving from 46 to 50 undergraduate programs and from 12 to 20 graduate programs by 2028,” stated Blanchard. Other goals include increasing the target six-year graduation rate for 2024 to 36% for first-time in college students; expanding the early alert system for all students, not just freshmen, to provide services before students fall behind; and increasing alumni connections over the next year by 80%.

Blanchard added, “In 1974, the University of Houston acquired the assets of South Texas Junior College, opening the doors of the University of Houston-Downtown College—later to become our beloved UH. And here we are, on the cusp of the 50th anniversary of the University of Houston-Downtown. I couldn’t be more excited as we continue to build on our history in becoming the anchor institution for Houston.”

ABOVE, L TO R: Dr. Meritza Tamez, Provost Deborah E. Bordelon, President Blanchard, Commissioner of Higher Education Harrison Keller, Lynette Cook-Francis, and Eugene Bernard

Photo: Luz Castilla Hincapie



Agents of Consequential Change

What Student Success Looks Like at UHD

BY LAURA WAGNER

When President Blanchard arrived at the University of Houston-Downtown in 2020, he set a course for new levels of success through four specific priorities:

Strengthening Justice for All

Empowering Student Success

Supporting Institutional Excellence and Infrastructure

Reaching Our Full Potential as an Anchor Institution

Blanchard believed that through these priorities, known collectively as the Institutional Compass, UHD could create the standard of an urban university that would address the needs of higher education. Today, significant progress has been made in all four priority areas, including Student Success, the theme of this inaugural issue of Skyline.

So how do we gauge that success? Graduation rates? Certainly. Employability after graduation? Unquestionably. Those are measures by which any university could justifiably claim student success. But at UHD, we have a more profound benchmark as well, one that considers the positive impact our students have by engaging with their communities—both as students and as citizens.

What follows are interviews with just four of the thousands of UHD students who strive every day to be agents of consequential change. These individuals are succeeding both because of and despite challenges they've faced in life. They are committed to carrying forward lessons learned from those experiences and their time at UHD to make a meaningful difference for the greater good. They are changemakers. They are UHD.

We invite you to read their stories and be inspired.

Photo: Gabriela Perez

Bryan Alvarado

WHEN SENIOR BRYAN ALVARADO received a full-ride scholarship into UHD's Honors Program, he was thrilled to learn it came with a 30-hour-per-year volunteer requirement. "That was a big draw for me," he said. "I saw it as an opportunity to help other people like me."

And help he did—Alvarado's record of volunteerism is a blueprint for outstanding community service. The first member of his family to attend college, Alvarado was accepted into several universities, but chose UHD for its service focus and for the personal growth potential it offered. "This is a place where there's so much support for students."

His approach to life centers around the adage, "Luck is when preparation meets opportunity." As he explained, "Nothing is ever just about luck. You have to work hard to put yourself in situations that make it possible for beautiful things to happen."

A self-described "volunteer-minded person," Alvarado was recognized with an award in 2021 for volunteering more than 120 hours. He tries to take time out of every week to help others and credits UHD for opening his eyes to the opportunities, particularly those available through the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL).

After graduation, Alvarado plans to work full-time for his current employer, a wholesale insurance broker—and of course, to continue to volunteer. "I definitely want to return to the CCESL," he said. "I was given so many opportunities there, I want to give back and do more."

Alvarado advises prospective students to seriously consider UHD. "We may not have a football team, but if you really want to succeed and are passionate about making a change and leaving a lasting impact, UHD will help you do that."

BELOW: Bryan Alvarado is making his own luck. Major: Insurance & Risk Management

Photo: Craig Loper



Monica Cosby



Photo: Nicki Evans

GROWING UP, MONICA COSBY TOOK the concept of latchkey kid to a new level. Born in Houston, Cosby grew up in Brownsville, Texas, and lived with her parents until high school, when both parents returned to Houston for work. “My parents couldn’t make a living in Brownsville, and they didn’t want to uproot me.”

The result? “It made me very resourceful and independent. I had to figure out how to take care of myself.” Navigating college bureaucracy was her first hurdle.

“My mother was from Mexico. Her attitude was, ‘You have running water and a computer—what more do you need?’” But Cosby’s grades kept her out of the highly competitive nursing programs. She earned a B.S. in Rehabilitation Services and Counseling, then discovered an accelerated, intensive LVN program. “It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done, but I learned I could persevere.”

She graduated and joined a home health care company. The work was important but not chal-

lenging enough. “I learned in my LVN program that I can do hard things—I wanted to do more.”

She earned her RN, then found UHD’s Nursing program. Cosby appreciated UHD’s commitment to first-generation college students and students from diverse backgrounds. “I identified with the school’s values,” she said. “And I was excited by the affordable tuition.”

After graduating, Cosby plans to work with critically ill patients—a very hard thing. “I want to do challenging, engaging work that matters.” Her mother’s example inspires her. “Immigrants are so often painted as a negative force. My mom is the opposite of that. Her guiding principle is, how can we be better people and of service to others? That’s how I was raised, and that’s how I approach life.”

Her ultimate goal is to be a leader in her field and represent Black and brown women. “So many women of color lack confidence. I wish I could tell them: You can do so much! Be tenacious. Don’t ever give up.”

ABOVE: Monica Cosby is doing hard things. Major: RN to BSN

Rachel Cranmer



SHUTTLED AMONG FAMILY MEMBERS from the age of three weeks and faced with threats to her well-being throughout her youth, Rachel Cranmer had a hard start in life. But in 2024, she'll graduate with her bachelor's degree in Spanish and minors in Criminal Justice and Spanish Translation. Her superpowers? Determination, resilience, and plain old hard work.

Cranmer married and started her family at a young age. During the early years of her marriage, she had the opportunity to travel and live in Mexico. "I'm not of Hispanic origin, and I'm not a native speaker, but it came easily to me," she said. Cranmer managed to complete her associate degree in Spanish in 2012 while caring for her three young children. But after facing domestic abuse, Cranmer divorced her husband and embarked on a long path to self-sufficiency. School was not an option. "I wanted to be there for my kids," she said. Cranmer dedicated all her hours to her children and to working multiple jobs before finally having the resources to return to her studies in her mid-thirties.

What kept her going? "My rough upbringing and marriage pushed me to work harder," she said. "My kids say I've taught them to be resilient and to work hard. That was my goal, to set that example."

After graduation, Cranmer hopes to make an impact at a government agency, translating and interpreting for an entity such as the FBI or Drug Enforcement Agency. "I want to help make our communities safer, get dangerous criminals off the street, and keep drugs out of our kids' hands."

As to advice for those facing challenges, Cranmer offers this: "Anything's possible if you persevere and work hard. The rewards will come—just keep your eye on the long term."

LEFT: Rachel Cranmer is keeping her eye on the long term. Major: Spanish

Photo: Mitchell Loper

Alexandria Flores



Photo: Mitchell Loper

WHEN ALEXANDRIA FLORES was 10 years old, she packed a small suitcase, climbed into a car with her mother and brother, and left California in the rearview mirror. “I knew then I would have to start thinking like an adult,” she said.

Battling a reading disorder and a speech impediment, she struggled in Houston’s overcrowded classrooms. “My mom worked all the time, but she would come home after a 10-hour day, read my schoolbooks aloud to me, and ask me questions,” she said. “She taught me to understand material, not just memorize it—I figured out how to study in a way that made sense for me.”

After earning her associate degree at Lone Star College, Flores enrolled at UHD, where she flourished. A December 2023 graduate, Flores had a 4.0 and was on the Dean’s List—again. She also knows her life mission: serving communities by understanding their needs. “How can you serve a community if you don’t understand it? I want to advocate, to bring light and support to issues that

are prevalent in Houston communities.”

Flores has already made a significant impact through her volunteer efforts. Most recently, she used a community grant from UHD’s CCESL to partner with a local nonprofit on a project called “Empower Through Literacy.”

“The project provided resources to an out-of-school tutoring program for K-7th graders,” Flores explained. The grant enabled her to host a family event with students where she filled backpacks with school supplies, activities, and books to celebrate the improvements students have seen from sticking with the program.

Her life experiences taught her two important lessons: “Take every opportunity that comes your way,” she advises. “And believe you have the power to make change. There’s a children’s book called ‘The Dot’ where a teacher tells a student, ‘Just make a mark and see where it takes you.’ That’s what I want to tell people: You can take one idea—even just a small one—and you can do amazing things.” 📌

ABOVE:
Alexandria Flores is
making her mark.
Major: Social Work

SQUAD

HOW COMMUNITY AND FRIENDSHIP
FUEL PERSEVERANCE AND PASSION AT UHD

GOALS

BY HAYDEN BERGMAN



STUDENT SUCCESS

A large body of research indicates the crucial role of positive emotions in education. Feelings such as interest, curiosity, passion, creativity, and engagement, if present, make the educational experience gratifying, and they increase a student's focus and attention to detail. Such emotions also increase crucial cognitive skills like memory, decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

So, fun and friendship must be a central part of the university experience. That's why at UHD, there's something for every student to explore: gardening, gaming, sports, or something else. What follows are the stories of just three of the more than 90 student organizations on campus.

Friendship, true friendship, can bring about a sense of purpose and duty. The UHD chapter of **Kappa Delta Chi**, some 20 members strong, knows this. It is, after all, spelled out plainly on their webpage: "The purpose of Kappa Delta Chi shall be to promote the traditional values of Unity, Honesty, Integrity, and Leadership of its members. An organization dedicated to service for institutions of higher education and underrepresented communities with special emphasis on the Hispanic/Latino population; a servitude based on love and friendship."

Jennifer Salazar, the sorority's President, says that the members support one another "in tackling significant challenges and seizing opportunities within the UHD community." Activities like mental health talks during midterms help with this, said Salazar: "We open the floor for any sister to share burnouts, academic defeats, and the triumphs of life."

Because of such a strong support system, members are able to focus on developing the soft skills that will make them valuable to employers, skills like working with a team, leadership, and time management.

Between organizing volunteer events, recruiting members, and serving the student community, Salazar said the business side of a sorority can



Photos: Nicki Evans

take a toll. "It's a challenge," she said, "But it's worth it. We trust each other, have fun together, and help each other out."

For the **Women's Soccer Club**, playing on the squad this year was an exercise in perseverance, as several of the university teams in their league fell out due to difficulties fielding a team. The result? No league, and no official games. They didn't quit or fold, though, and instead held several informal scrimmages, practicing as they normally would.

"Our team came together," said Nathalie Ireta, Women's Soccer Club President. "We worked, fought hard, and never gave up. On the field, I learned the value of teamwork, communication, and perseverance. Off the field, the friendships I formed provided a support system. It's a bond that goes beyond the game."

For Gabriela Romero, the team's Vice President, soccer is as important socially as it is physically, saying that playing on the team "has allowed me to grow socially and allowed me to find connections with a diverse group of people. The team feels like family." It also allows space for them to learn skills like leadership and organization, Romero said.

And despite the challenges faced this year, the team is proud of what they've accomplished by holding the club together. That way, Romero said, they not only have lifetime friends, but they also "leave a legacy for those who come next."

ABOVE: Kappa Delta Chi members laugh during a photo session on the Buffalo Bayou Greenway next to UHD's Downtown campus.

OPPOSITE: The women's soccer club team will compete against other club teams in the Houston Club Sports Conference and the Lone Star Sport Club Conference.



Photo: Mitchell Loper

At its core, literature is communication—one party speaks (through a page or an audio book), while the reader or listener actively participates. But literature can go beyond even that exchange, as evidenced by UHD’s **Bayou Review**, a student-run literary and arts magazine founded in 1987.

The fall 2023 semester’s student editors—Katie Cortes, Carollann Lockley, Stanley Freelon, and Rosmany Garcia—all found just such fellowship by producing the latest issue of the Bayou Review. For Cortes, the work is “a collaborative effort that takes everyone,” since each student must balance their editing work with their coursework to meet their publishing deadline. “It’s a lot of work,” she said, “But the chance to provide a platform for artists worldwide is worth it.”

That’s right. While the Bayou Review uses many submissions from those on campus, they also engage with artists from well beyond Downtown Houston, with contributors hailing from the likes of India, Washington, D.C., and Tallahassee.

Lockley said that reading things that contributors were passionate about like love or family was

especially rewarding. She went on to say that the magazine lets the editors give back to the campus community by “giving students an opportunity to do something they never thought they could do. Writers, photographers, visual artists—they all publish with us.” Freelon echoed that sentiment, saying that being on the editorial team is a dream realized. “It’s what I always wanted to do but never did.”

This sort of monthslong editorial work also helps students work with others and communicate effectively. And it encourages them to take ownership of their opinions and argue for them, if need be, with other members of the group, all in the service of their common goal.

For her part, Garcia said one benefit of working on the team is the chance to read work that has different perspectives, and that doing this allows her to “see how people view [a theme] in such different ways.”

It’s an unfortunate myth that the pursuit of letters is a lonely, isolated one. Look no further than the Bayou Review, and you’ll realize that couldn’t be further from the truth. ✎

ABOVE: (left to right) Carollann Lockley, Rosmany Garcia, Katie Cortes, faculty advisor Stalina Villarreal, and Stanley Freelon.

Social Work Students Train for Immediate Impact

A MAJOR SHORTAGE IN THE behavioral health workforce means many area children and teenagers experiencing trauma and loss—especially in Houston’s Hispanic community—are not getting the personal attention and care they deserve.

During the fall 2023 semester, the Social Work program in UHD’s College of Public Service stepped in to help provide that much-needed service, collaborating with the Trauma and Grief Center at the Hackett Center for Mental Health and the Lucine Center for Trauma and Grief.

On Sept. 14, 60 UHD Social Work majors, many of whom speak both English and Spanish, participated in training for Trauma and Grief

Component Therapy, an evidence-based intervention for youth exposed to trauma and loss. Under the leadership of Dr. Dawn McCarty, UHD Professor and Bachelor of Social Work Program Director, the training prepared the students to provide 400 hours of field practicum work in social service agencies across the community.

“As an anchor institution for Houston and the second-largest university in the region, UHD thrives through collaborations like this Trauma and Grief Component Therapy training,” said McCarty. “Our Social Work students are making a tremendous difference in these young lives by having an immediate impact on the mental health and well-being of children who have experienced the traumatic loss of a loved one.” 📖



Photo: Marc Williams



Photo: Nicki Evans

UHD Student's Art GOES BIG!

A first-generation college student majoring in Fine Arts, Giselle Oviedo showed a talent for visual art as a child. “My parents would always tell me not to draw on the walls. I would never listen to them,” joked Oviedo. When she joined the more than two dozen muralists featured in Downtown Houston’s Big Art, Bigger Change Murals initiative last May, she teased her parents: “Look at me

now. I’m getting to draw, color, and paint on the walls.”

Now Oviedo’s 8-by-11-foot “Reaching Up,” which took 11 days for student volunteers, friends, and family to help execute, appears on the northeast wall of Zydeco Diner at the corner of Louisiana and Pease streets. “Reaching Up” was selected from 10 proposals following a call for the city’s college students to submit work, and UHD was the only school with a student selected. 🦋

SETTING THE EXAMPLE

Department of Urban Education Takes on Bilingual Education on All Fronts



Photos: Luz Castilla Hincapie

What better way to inspire a love of reading and writing across generations than by bringing entire families together to write and illustrate their own stories? In partnership with Aldine ISD, UHD's Bilingual E-Library, the brainchild of its Director, Dr. Maria Bhattacharjee, and Dr. Irene Chen, Professor of Urban Education, is improving the connectivity and literacy of Houston's Hispanic community. Made possible by a two-year, \$2.5 million grant by the U.S. Department of Commerce, the program is also training UHD bilingual, pre-service and in-service teachers at the same time with far-reaching and long-lasting results.

Yet the UHD Department of Urban Education's pursuit to bolster literacy and provide classroom-ready bilingual teachers in underserved communities in the Houston area doesn't end there. Thanks to the receipt of a U.S. Department of Education Title V Grant for \$2,588,121 over five years, UHD is placing highly qualified (and certified) teachers in schools with students whose demographics match their own. Investigated by Dr. Elizabeth Stackhouse, Assistant Professor of Bilingual Education, and Dr. Ron Beebe, Professor and Chair of Urban Education, the program supports training and wraparound services for pre-service teachers seeking certifications in critical areas of need, such as bilingual and ESL education.

"When it comes to collaboration, partnerships, and community outreach, the Department of Urban Education is a model example," said President Blanchard, "and our Bilingual Education Program is one of the largest producers of bilingual teachers in the Houston area. As a Hispanic-Serving Institution, our commitment to bilingual and ESL education is an extension of our commitment to our students and the communities they call home." 🦋



50 Years of Learning

UHD CELEBRATES A HALF-CENTURY
AT THE CONFLUENCE OF BUFFALO AND WHITE OAK
BAYOUS, THE BIRTHPLACE OF HOUSTON

By Holly Beretto

From its perch at the top of Main Street, next to Buffalo Bayou, the University of Houston-Downtown has had a front-row seat to many Houston happenings over the last half-century. It's seen the ebb and flow of the city core—businesses leaving Downtown for the Galleria and beyond only to return, bringing with them restaurants and bars for after-work socializing. It's seen the return of rail transportation, as the street cars disappeared, only to be replaced much later by the METRO light rail line, with a stop at the university's own front door. It's seen buildings razed and constructed, then razed again to make way for yet more new construction.

Through it all, UHD has remained—a witness to the changes, yes, but more than that, an active agent in keeping the heart of the city beating and flourishing in its own right, educating generations of Houstonians and imparting the values of determination, dedication, and pride in Downtown.

UHD's One Main Building began its life as the Merchants and Manufacturers Building (M&M Building), a massive edifice sited where the Buffalo and White Oak bayous meet. Those waterways would power the city from its founding in 1836, delivering goods from across the country to Houston and serving as shipping lanes for Houston's cotton, timber, and other exports.

As the city moved into the 1920s, shippers

ABOVE: Postcard heralding the M & M Building, now UHD's One Main Building.

and merchants needed a base of operations in Houston, and the answer was the M&M Building. Located at One Main Street, the 11-story structure opened on April 18, 1930. Retired UHD Professor of History Dr. Garna Christian wrote that a Houston Chronicle reporter touted the building as “a modern combination office and warehouse ... unique in the Southwest.” It cost more than \$6 million to build, had 40,000 windowpanes, and spanned 60,000 square feet, making it the largest building in the city at the time. Sitting on 11 acres, the building could fit 90,000 people, offering space for merchants to showcase their wares in close proximity to their offices. The building would remain one of the backbones of Houston commerce for nearly 30 years.

Meanwhile, as the merchants and manufacturers prospered in their building on the bayou, across Downtown another entity was getting its start. South Texas Junior College began in 1948, as the educational arm of the Young Men’s Christian Association, better known as the YMCA. When it launched, it was the largest private two-year college in Texas, helped along in its growth by a post-war America and a GI Bill that offered an education to the service members who fought in World War II.

The college was originally housed at 1600 Louisiana Street, in the YMCA’s gothic tower of

a building. But as more students came seeking an education, it was clear more room was needed. South Texas Junior College was also looking to borrow a page from South Texas College of Law’s book and officially separate from the YMCA, which the law school had done in 1963.

For that break to happen, however, the school needed a home. And the institution wasn’t looking for just anywhere. It wanted a place that had access to public transportation, along with a lot of room to grow. Leaders nixed spots near Hermann Park and other locations around the city.

It would turn out that the answer was just up the street, sitting there above the bayou.

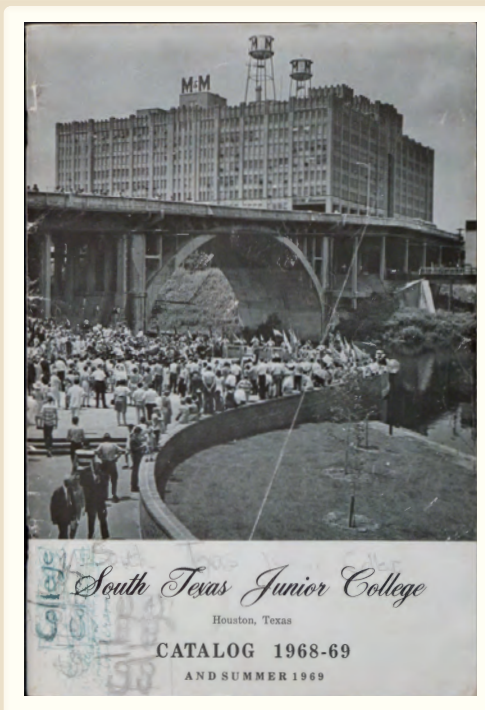
By the 1960s, the M&M Building had lost its former glory. Where its mall and courtyard spaces had once bustled with merchants showing their wares and manufacturers making deals with industry bigwigs, now it was little more than a hollowed-out shell.

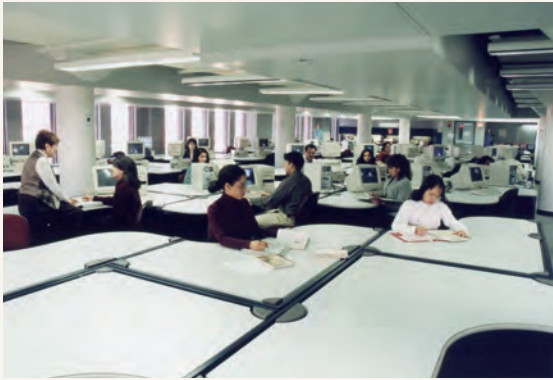
But the M&M Building was exactly what South Texas Junior College needed. While the space might’ve been a bit rough around the edges, its bones were still intact. Structurally, the building was sound. And that 60,000 square feet meant ample space for a growing college population. The college moved out of the YMCA and into the building on the bayou in 1967. The



THIS PAGE
Left: A catalog from South Texas Junior College, for the academic year 1968-1969. It includes the names of courses, faculty members, and policies/procedures.

BELOW: Students stand in line waiting to register for the upcoming semester.





THESE PAGES: Students use the then-new study and computer lab on the ninth floor of the One Main Building.

Construction workers build the skylights that line the third floor of the One Main Building and provide sunlight for the many student organizations that use that space for recruiting members.

Two female students enjoy their dorm room. UHD remodeled the Harley Hotel into dorm rooms for students before demolishing the building to build the College of Public Service on the site.



following year, it broke from the Y entirely and became an independent institution.

That independence came with its own challenges, however. Enrollment at the college soared as the 1960s drew to a close, a direct result of the college deferments offered to young men who had to register for the selective service. Having more space in the M&M building was a blessing after the smaller confines of the YMCA, but a growing institution that wanted to keep growing needed to keep acquiring more space to do so. The college purchased the M&M Building outright, then took over the Houston Terminal Warehouse and Cold Storage Company, located on the west side of Buffalo Bayou. In 1972, the Houston Endowment gifted controlling interest in the space—valued at \$700,000—to the college.

At the same time, enrollment was on a downward slope. As the war in Vietnam wound down, students who once sought the corridors of academia instead of combat now opted for jobs, not education. Dwindling enrollment meant dwindling funds and increasing debt.

A UNIVERSITY IS BORN

In the early 1970s, South Texas Junior College began exploring a merger or partnership with another educational institution to address its financial insecurity. The University of Houston stepped in, agreeing to take over the college's assets, and created the University of Houston Downtown College.

A press release from July 24, 1974, announced the initiative: "The University of Houston will expand its historic role of providing higher education in the downtown area by acquiring

the properties of South Texas Junior College, effective August 1 ... The University's school will become the Downtown College of the University of Houston in its new location at One Main Plaza." W.I. Dykes, the president of South Texas Junior College, became the interim president of the new school, and its curriculum, with courses in the liberal arts and pre-professional programs, would remain unchanged.

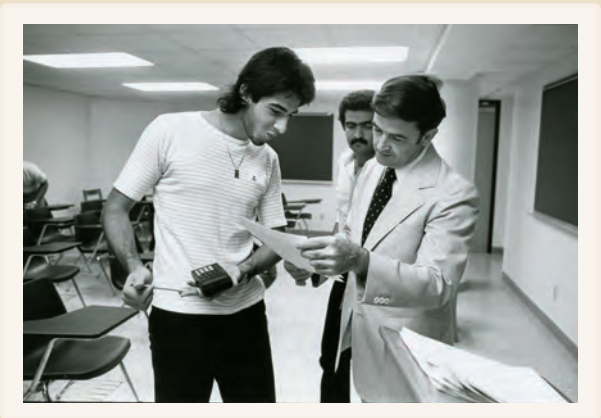
That purchase cemented the foundation and the future for UHD. Even though it was—and remains—a separate entity from the University of Houston, being part of the UH system gave the school ties to a robust system of universities.

The first graduating class of 320 students would cross the stage of the Albert Thomas Convention Center, located where Bayou Place now stands, on May 14, 1976, and UHD's first four-year degree, a B.S. in Criminal Justice, was awarded.

A SCHOOL FOR THE FUTURE


By 1979, the school became a distinct university within the University of Houston System. In 1981, the school sought authorization from the state of Texas to offer four new degree programs: a B.A. in Social Sciences, a B.S. in Natural Sciences, a B.S. in Behavioral Science, and a B.A. in Humanities.

Ensuring an education that reflects the needs of the student body continues today. Dr. Hsiao-Ming Wang, Professor of Criminal Justice, came to UHD in 2001 to help launch the school's Master of Criminal Justice degree. "The commonality for both our graduate and undergraduate programs is that we provide strong



University of Houston
DOWNTOWN COLLEGE

First
Commencement Program
1976



THE ALBERT THOMAS CONVENTION CENTER
612 Smith Street, Room 107
Friday, May 14, 1976, at 8:00 P.M.







UHD by the Numbers

1

Number of buildings on
the UHD campus in 1974

8

Number of buildings
on campus today

3,537

Total student enrollment
in 1974

14,208

Total student
enrollment for 2022



PREVIOUS PAGES: Construction of the Academic Building.

ABOVE: The completed building.

THESE PAGES: Changes in technology over the years are evidenced in these College of Science and Technology photos.

opportunities to local students,” he says. “I’m proud to be part of UHD because our program succeeds.”

Dr. Ruth Robbins, Professor of Finance and Management Information Systems in the Marilyn Davies College of Business, agrees. She’s been with the university since 1981 and notes there’s always been a business major during her tenure, and now there’s much more. “Times have changed, and opportunities are much broader,” she says. She loves that students who complete their work with UHD have a variety of career paths. “It’s gratifying to see our students go on to do great things in their lives.”

In 1983, the school formally shortened its name to the University of Houston-Downtown—and become the fastest-growing campus in the state. About a decade later, the Academic Building was built and opened in 1995. Two years later, the Jesse Jones Student Life Center opened and provided a place for students to relax, exercise, and enjoy themselves between classes.



Across the decades, one constant for UHD has been embracing change to ensure it meets the needs of the student body. In 2003, the Willow Street Pump Station was restored and served as an events center and exhibition room. By the time the university reached its 30th anniversary in 2004, the University of Houston Downtown Center, which was the old Harley Hotel at the corner of Main and Commerce streets transformed into dorms, was razed—making room for the Commerce Street Building to house the newly created College of Public Service. The College of Business would move into a new spot three years later, as UHD formally dedicated the Shea Street Building. Later, it was renamed the Marilyn Davies College of Business, after a generous \$10 million endowment from leading Houston businesswoman Marilyn Davies. In 2019, UHD would add the LEED Gold-certified College of Sciences and Technology building to its campus. On the cusp of its 50th anniversary in 2023, UHD opened the state-of-the-art Wellness & Success Center.

Today, the University of Houston-Downtown is a thriving urban enterprise for higher education. From its location above the bayous that flow through Downtown, it has seen changes in the city's landscape and its own fortunes and direction. But the constant thread of providing students with an education that can transform their lives, the lives of their families, and the communities in which they live and work was, is, and will always be the heartbeat of UHD. 📖

Dr. Garna Christian's "40,000 Window Panes: The Story of the Merchants and Manufacturers Building" and University Archivist Bryan Salazar were invaluable resources in writing this article.



50TH ANNIVERSARY SIGNATURE EVENTS

Mark your calendar for these upcoming, ticketed events in celebration of 50 years of UHD!

UHD 50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA
7 P.M., SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2024

HILTON AMERICAS-HOUSTON, 1600 LAMAR STREET

An elegant evening is planned to celebrate 50 years of UHD with dinner, dancing, and awards highlighting the achievements of UHD alumni. Proceeds from this fundraiser will directly benefit UHD students through the Scholarship Fund.

8 P.M., FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2024
50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION CONCERT WITH TERENCE BLANCHARD

Grammy Award-winning composer and famed jazz trumpeter and pianist Terence Blanchard will perform in honor of UHD's 50th Anniversary. Blanchard has composed more than 40 film scores and performed on more than 50. A frequent collaborator with director Spike Lee, he has been nominated for two Academy Awards for composing the scores for Lee's films "BlacKkKlansman" (2018) and "Da 5 Bloods" (2020).

Things we love about UHD

When I graduated, I felt equipped and empowered to take off in my career. Now I am a leader making an impact in the community!

ELISABET I., ALUM

The numerous clubs, societies, and organizations that cover a wide range of interests, allowing students to pursue their passions and develop new skills.

FRINNE N., STUDENT

Because they let an inner-city kid earn an MBA while also being on their billboards and murals on campus.

TYRONE B., ALUM

I love UHD because I love our Gators: future teachers inspired by their communities, committed to being the educators Houston-area students need.

DIANE M., FACULTY

I love UHD because it gave me the chance of a lifetime.

FUNMI M., ALUM

No matter your age, everyone around you (from young students to professors) gives you the same respect and guidance you need.

MARIA C., STUDENT

I love UHD because it's affordable, close to home, and they have excellent professors! As a first-generation student, it's essential to be surrounded by people who understand how to help me succeed.

SUSANA S., STUDENT

I love my UHD family because work doesn't feel like work! We're a team and support one another. They're my home away from home!

JOANNA R., STAFF

I love UHD because it gave me the flexibility I needed to graduate and confirmed what profession I would excel in, and I met some really awesome friends along the way!

ERICA D., ALUM

The UHD community is family! I never feel undervalued.

INDIA S., ALUM

It's been a great experience, and some professors became my mentors and helped me make connections with others in my field.

NORA V., STUDENT

I am a GED recipient, non-traditional, first-generation college graduate. UHD provided the resources that allowed me to thrive!

LEWIS R., ALUM

I love UHD because of the small class sizes; it felt like a very close-knit community.

MEGAN W., ALUM

It gave me the ability to work and go to school and receive a quality, high-value degree!

MACK M. JR., ALUM

I love UHD because it is the great equalizer.

JOSE V., STAFF



Scan the QR code to listen to the Student Success Issue playlist!

Because I'm paving a new path for myself and my family.

LAURA H., STUDENT

I love UHD! It allowed me to have a full college experience without the price tag.

MONICA Z., ALUM

The W.I. Dykes Library is amazing, and student activities like UHD Book Club are delightful.

LINDSEY W., STUDENT

I love UHD because I chose UHD then UHD chose me. After I graduated, I accepted a full-time position. I love all the connections I have made and love giving back to UHD. Go, Gators!

MANDI O., STAFF

I love UHD because it gave me the ability to continue my education and fulfill my dream to finish school and my parents' American dream.

GABRIELA L., STUDENT

One reason I loved attending UHD was because the University always made an effort to give back. The food pantry helped me a lot especially after the pandemic. I will always miss UHD!

GABRIELLA S., ALUM

UHD was what I needed when I needed it. I went to financial aid, and they helped me figure out a plan.

MILLANEE R., ALUM

I love UHD because of the vibrant energy I feel every day I am on this dynamic campus.

CHRISTIAN P., STAFF

The professors! They go above and beyond to make sure you understand the material. Seeing their passion is one of the reasons why I showed up to class ready to learn.

DALILA J., ALUM

UHD gave my daughter the opportunity to further her education. I am a very proud parent.

AISHA S., PARENT OF STUDENT

I love UHD because of the smart and caring professors.

MARYLYN H., GRADUATE STUDENT

I love UHD because I am surrounded by caring people who want to see me prosper in life. I made the right choice in attending UHD to further my education.

CHARMAINE E., STUDENT

I feel I belonged. I have never been so confident about myself, and I don't think I would've had that if I hadn't chosen UHD. Everybody accepts me for myself, and I feel supported by the community.

INDI V., STUDENT

We Love Our Gators



The University of Houston-Downtown relies on the generosity of alumni, donors, and friends to secure

vital resources for its students, ensuring the delivery of an exceptional education. Your support empowers our students to pursue their passions and make a difference globally. Contributions to scholarships, research opportunities, and funds for unforeseen circumstances play a crucial role in assisting our students to accomplish their educational aspirations and shape the future of UHD. We sincerely appreciate your anticipated support!

Javier "Jay" L. Zambrano
Vice President of Advancement and University Relations



Scan here to support our Gators



UHD TREASURE
AND RENOWNED ARTIST
GETS HIS DUE
WITH RETROSPECTIVE

50 Years of Making Art

BY MARIE JACINTO
PHOTOS BY MITCHELL LOPER

The small, unpretentious lobby of the main galleries of the otherwise spectacular César Pelli-designed Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA) in Madison, Wisconsin, gave no indication of the transformational, almost magical exhibition on the other side of its doors.

The 8,000-square-foot space contained the first large-scale retrospective of renowned artist Floyd Newsum, who has served as Professor of Art at UHD for 47 years. From May 19 until Oct. 8, 2023, “Evolution of Sight” welcomed museum-goers into Newsum’s joyful world of artworks filled with family photographs and symbols of his personal history, veiled by richly layered color and textures.

“Evolution of Sight” reflected on the artist’s entire practice, including paintings and models of public art commissions, such as sculptures and relief installations. The retrospective examined how Newsum’s visual language evolved from initial naturalistic tendencies into varying degrees of abstraction.

“My career covers 50-plus years of creating works of art that are exploring color, marks, and surfaces in various mediums,” said Newsum. “I call my evolution in creativity a problem-solving event of expression of the soul.”

“I had known of Floyd Newsum’s work for many years and was fortunate to meet him while working in Houston several years ago,” said then-MMoCA Director Christina Brungardt. “As I learned more



ABOVE: *Ladder of Hope* (maquette), 2005, 18.75 x 6 x 1.25 inches with stand



about his practice, it was clear that a comprehensive retrospective exhibition of his work was vital so that others could experience the fullness and complexity of his paintings. When the opportunity presented itself to show Floyd's work at MMCoCA, we were honored that he entrusted us to share not only his 50-year career, vision, and artistry with MMoCA, but also his generosity of time with the community, youth groups, and visitors to the museum."

Organized by guest curators Dr. Lauren Cross, Gail-Oxford Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts at The Huntington in San Marino, California, and UHD's own Mark Cervenka, Professor of Art and O'Kane Gallery Director, "Evolution of Sight" followed Newsom's trajectory across six different thematic areas: Social Justice and Community; Angels and Souls; Women, Family, and Ancestors; Sirigu and Transcendence; Land, Sea, and Dance; and Contemplation.

Rather than curating a traditional retrospective, Cervenka looked back to Newsom's foundational pieces, and Cross brought attention to work made in the last few years. This collaboration resulted in a nesting exhibition of early works in conversation with the artist's most recent series.

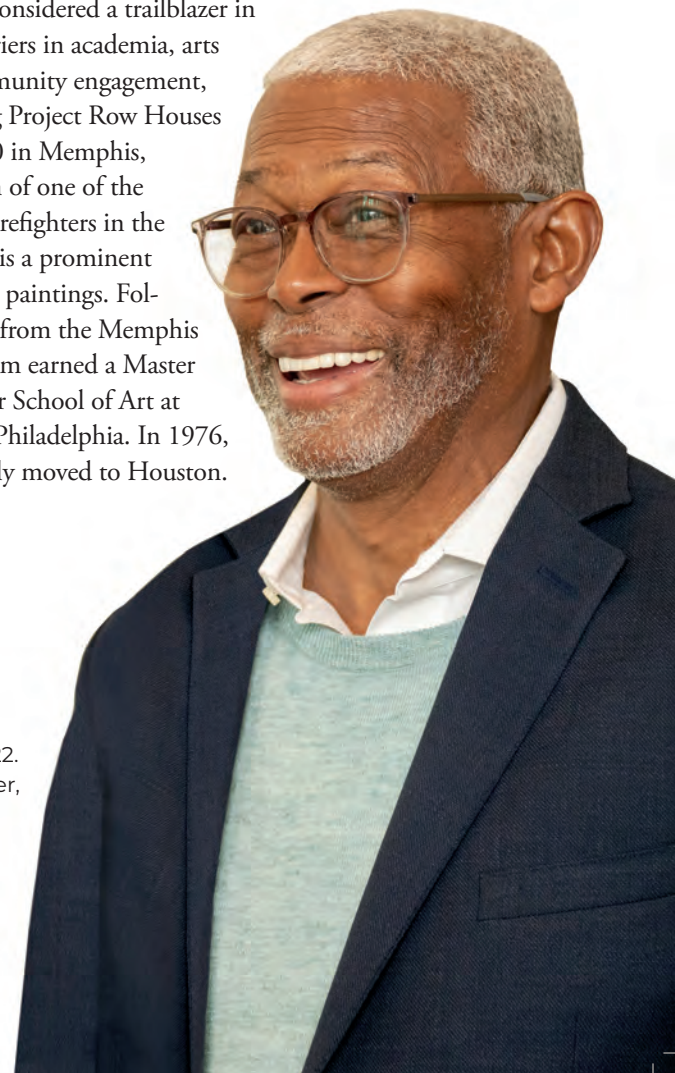
"Floyd Newsom is a leading artist whose work has been shown and represented in major institutions and collections across the U.S.," said Cross.

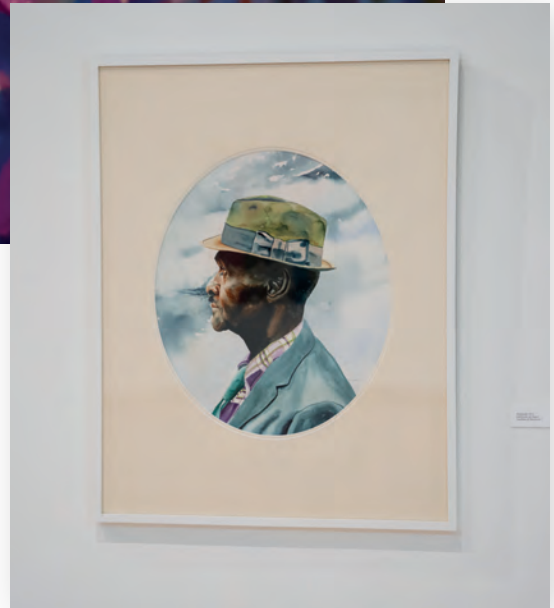
"Newsom's powerful message of hope transcends time and space and has remained relevant both historically and into the present."

Newsom is widely considered a trailblazer in his field, breaking barriers in academia, arts institutions, and community engagement, including co-founding Project Row Houses in 1993. Born in 1950 in Memphis, Tennessee, he's the son of one of the first Black American firefighters in the South, and the ladder is a prominent symbol in many of his paintings. Following his graduation from the Memphis College of Art, Newsom earned a Master of Fine Arts from Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia. In 1976, Newsom and his family moved to Houston.

ABOVE:
Sirigu 1919 (detail), 2022.
Acrylic and oil on paper,
72 x 88 inches.

RIGHT:
Floyd Newsom





ABOVE: *Reverend*, 1972.
Watercolor on board, 23 x 18 inches.

“A comprehensive museum exhibition of Floyd Newsum’s art was long overdue. With a career emerging from the heart of the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis in the 1960s, Newsum’s layered works have consistently included both overt and subtle responses to civil rights issues,” said Cervenka. “A bold, often intensely colored palette, sometimes offset with collaged elements, provides a foundation both for works addressing broad cultural observations and those seeking the more intimate focus of spiritual awareness and a profound recognition of love and family.” 🐾

TOP: *Blue Episode* (detail), 2020. Gouache and collage elements on paper. 44 x 60 inches.

ABOVE: Mark Cervenka; Floyd Newsum; Dr. Lauren Cross; and Dr. Azar Rejaie, Arts & Communications Chair, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, at the opening of “Evolution of Sight.”

Orchestrating Unity

Orlando Williams Leads UHD Chorale on 'Note'-Worthy Journey

by Hayden Bergman

Orlando Williams' first job in music was at Grace Missionary Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, where he and his cousin performed at the weekly worship service for 10 bucks a Sunday. He's making more than that now as the newly appointed Director of Choral Activities at UHD, but his passion for music—and the community it creates—remains the same. “I would go to church with my aunt, and you could hear the harmonies. I couldn't wait to get inside. When I got home, I would reenact what I saw, pretending to be the choir, choir director, the pianist, everyone.” Those experiences led to Williams getting a keyboard (a major investment by his mother), which became weekly piano lessons, and, in turn, a career in music.

Among his many qualifications is a Master of Music Education in Choral Conducting from Florida State University, as well as more than a decade of experience locally, including service as a collaborative pianist with Voices of Houston, a choral ensemble that seeks to build community through the performance and practice of the Negro Spiritual, one of the most significant forms in American folksong and culture. He also brings a robust knowledge of Western European and non-Western European music practices, including jazz studies, gospel, and world music.

And like his experience, his plans for the UHD Chorale are myriad. Williams staged a Winter Concert this fall and will host music and choir festivals on campus in the coming year. More than anything, though, Williams aims to “help people grow, develop, and feel included” and to share some beautiful music.

When Williams speaks of how music helped him find community, you can't help but believe him—his voice is resonant and has a refreshingly earnest timbre. “I saw how being in [the choir] changed our lives and enlightened us, and it felt like a family.” 🎵

Williams brings passion and extensive experience to the music classroom as he leads students through vocal exercises.

Photo: Craig Loper

MITSUME NAKAMURA

Champions Peer-Led Team Learning at UHD

BY LAURA WAGNER

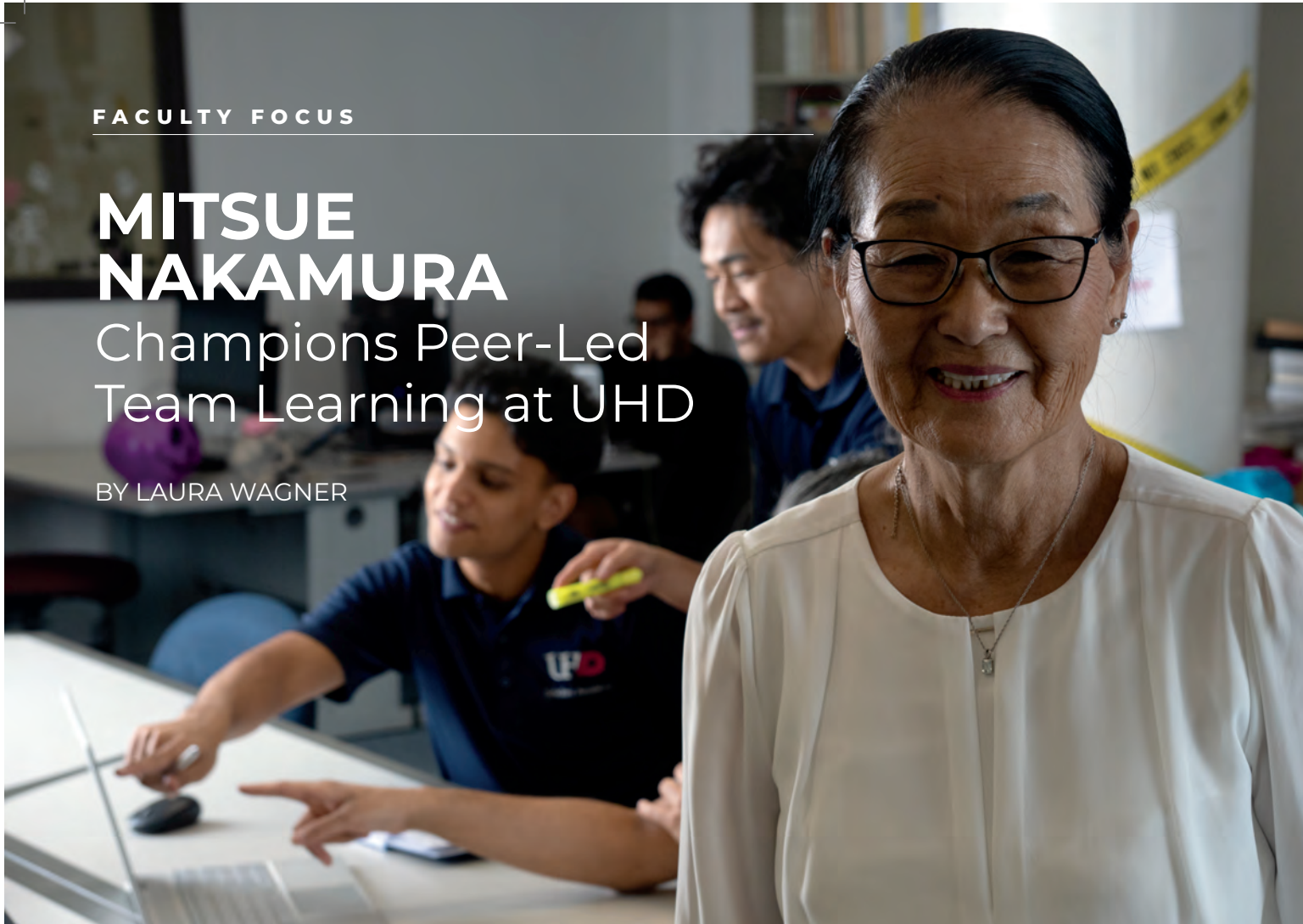


Photo: Craig Loper

UHD Mathematics Senior Lecturer Mitsue Nakamura came to UHD in 1988. “I was a mathematician—I didn’t know how to teach. My mission became, ‘How can I help students learn the Mathematics that I love?’” she said. “I threw out the idea of ‘instructing’ and began thinking of opportunities to learn with the students.”

That led her to Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL). In 2001, Nakamura introduced PLTL to UHD via a College Algebra class. “At the time, it was a bottleneck course,” Nakamura remembered. “Many students struggled to pass, but with PLTL, we had much greater success.”

The critical component of the method involves supplementing a faculty member’s lecture time with a workshop format led by trained student “peer leaders.” The results? Better problem-solving skills, improved retention of material, and more confidence in their learning.

That success caught the interest of Dr. Ongard Sirisaengtaksin, a professor in UHD’s nascent Department of Computer Science and Engineering Technology (CSET). “He

created materials for the first Computer Science workshop using these methods,” said Nakamura.

The two connected UHD to other universities using the approach. Dr. Dvijesh Shastri, CSET Professor and Assistant Chair, picked up the baton, fostering Sirisaengtaksin’s relationship with the Computing Alliance of Hispanic Serving Institutions (CAHSI). CAHSI uses PLTL to increase the number of Hispanic Computer Science students.

In 2011, a group of PLTL practitioners created the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society (PLTLIS) to support practitioners and institutions in implementing PLTL. Nakamura and Sirisaengtaksin were founding members; Nakamura continues to sit on the board.

After 20-plus years, Nakamura is still a PLTL champion. “I love to watch students succeed. With PLTL, students are not just participating as learners, they’re participating as leaders. Students become leaders as they learn this technique, and they will continue to be leaders in the future because of what they learn in PLTL.” 📌

ABOVE: Professor Nakamura pioneered PLTL locally and revolutionized STEM education at UHD through her student-led workshops. She and some of her student leaders are pictured above.

RISKS AND REWARDS:

Dr. Daniel Perez on Why Finance Is Cool (and Motorcycles)

BY LAURA WAGNER

Assistant Professor of Finance Daniel Perez isn't shy in front of a camera. He's appeared hundreds of times on television and radio, educating audiences on the economy, inflation, markets, and behavioral finance. In real life, though, he's quiet and yes, a little shy. But his passions run deep: teaching, research, service—and motorcycles.

While in graduate school, Perez discovered his love for teaching. “My mentors and professors at UT-Rio Grand Valley inspired me—I want to pass that on,” he said.

Perez offers a pragmatic approach in the



Photo: Craig Loper



Photo: courtesy of Dr. Perez

classroom, bridging theory and application. “My job is to inspire students to want to learn about finance, to love the discipline,” he explained. He offers hands-on investment portfolio simulations to prepare students for the real world. “I’m an academic, but I’m very practical.”

Research is another passion. “Finance is cool,” he said, smiling as though he expects an argument. “I want to expand the body of knowledge in behavioral finance and investments.” As for service, among other efforts, he appears routinely on Univision, Fox News, Telemundo, and Houston Public Media, helping the community form opinions based on facts, not headlines.

UHD’s diverse campus and high-caliber faculty drew Perez here. But it was the spirit of UHD that clinched the deal. “The university is doing things right, growing the campus into a vibrant community that attracts quality students and quality faculty. It creates this virtuous circle, attracting more great people, continuously improving. That makes a dynamic campus—and also benefits society.”

In his spare time, Perez indulges his passion for motorcycles, riding all over the globe. Curious, we asked what music cool, motorcycle-riding professors listen to on the open road.

“Taylor Swift. ‘You Belong With Me.’ And Tina Turner. ‘What’s Love Got To Do With It?’”
Cool, indeed. 🏍️

ABOVE:
Dr. Perez on a motorcycle ride through Europe. He rides his Yamaha Super Tenere 1200 all over the world and has been on rides through Alaska and eight countries in Europe.

LEFT:
Dr. Perez hopes to inspire his finance students through his teaching, while showing them the pragmatic, real-world uses for financial knowledge.

Launching UHD's 50TH ANNIVERSARY: 2023 Alumni & Friends Celebration Dinner



UHD's 50th anniversary year celebrations got a soft launch when more than 400 UHD alumni and friends gathered in the Houston Marriott Marquis ballroom on Tuesday, Oct. 3, 2023, for the annual Alumni & Friends Celebration Dinner. In anticipation of UHD's 50th anniversary, two check presentations of \$50,000 each were made—one from steadfast supporter Marilyn Davies and the other from T-Mobile—bolstering the total funds raised to more than \$300,000.



1

During dinner, UHD recognized then-Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner as its Distinguished Friend of the University with Houston's First Daughter, Ashley Turner, accepting the award on her father's behalf. Texas Dow Employees Credit Union (TDECU) was named Corporate Partner of the Year, and TDECU Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and UHD alum Hugo Lagarda ('18) was on hand to receive the award.

2



3

1. Rosalinda Martinez ('18); Dr. Blanchard; and Gabriela Smith ('18), owner of Big State Construction in Houston, recipient of 2023 Alum Entrepreneur Award.

2. JB Bobbitt ('05), UHD Alumni Council President; José Antonio Marin ('91), Chief Information Officer of US Med-Equip in Houston, recipient of 2023 Distinguished Alum Award; Javier "Jay" L. Zambrano, Vice President for Advancement and University Relations.

3. Shern-Min Chow, KHOU 11 Anchor; Dr. Blanchard.

Christa Arefieva, M.D. ('15) (not pictured) won the Alum on the Rise Award.



Photos: Victor Henson, Ricardo G Saint Surin

TIES THAT BIND

BY HOLLY BERETTO

Student success is personal for Maria Estrada, Assistant Director of Off-Campus Operations for UHD's Northwest Campus. "I like to say I came to UHD and never left."

Estrada graduated from UHD in 2005 with her B.S. in Psychology and became an academic advisor. As a first-generation college student whose parents emigrated to the U.S. from Mexico, Estrada's experiences allowed her to empathize with students. "Everybody understands the college experience differently. You have to explain things in a way they understand."

Estrada launched an ambassador program in 2016, recruiting students to assist at events. By

2017, there were 10 students. Today, she has to turn down applications.

"There was a need for students to feel like they belong," she said, noting that it's crucial for all members of the UHD community to feel connected, no matter where they are geographically.

Estrada has also made sure to be engaged herself. She's a part of several committees, and earlier this year presented on student success in Nashville.

Currently working on her doctorate at Sam Houston State University, she continues to create bonds at UHD. "I think about myself 20 years ago, and how much UHD helped me," she said. "I want everyone to have that experience." ✨



Photo: Mitchell Loper



Photo: Craig Loper

ALUM DR. NATALIE SIRISAENGTAKSIN WINS SERVICE & MENTORING AWARD

Outstanding faculty and impressive alumni are never in short supply at UHD, but they're rarely blood relations. Dr. Natalie Sirisaengtaksin (B.S. Biology, '08) carried the lessons she learned from her professor father at UHD to graduate school and her career.

Equipped with a degree in Psychology, Sirisaengtaksin enrolled at UHD to take classes toward her ultimate goal, pharmacy school. Her father, Dr. Ongard Sirisaengtaksin, was a professor in UHD's Department of Computer Science and Engineering Technology for nearly three decades.

A microbiology class changed everything. "I fell in love with science," she said, highlighting the exceptional support system she encountered at UHD. "The faculty believed in my potential, and that gave me the confidence to pursue

science and graduate school."

While working on her doctoral degree in Neuroscience at the UT MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Sirisaengtaksin's father passed away, but his legacy lived on. As a mentor and advisor to graduate students, she channeled his example and her own UHD experience into those interactions.

Now Assistant Director of Academic Affairs at her alma mater, Sirisaengtaksin mentors students as well as her peers. Her efforts were acknowledged with the prestigious Melva S. Ramsay Award, which recognizes exceptional service, unwavering professionalism, and dedication to students, faculty, and staff. "My goal is to make this institution better for everyone," she said. 🦋



KICKING CRIME TO THE CURB

BY HAYDEN BERGMAN

More than a decade ago, Beyoncé asked a question, then answered it: Who run the world? Girls. In 2023, the data is in, and it's clear that girls (or women, rather) run public safety. Research shows female officers use less force, receive fewer complaints, and foster stronger community relationships. These findings ring true at the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD), where women comprise 52% of sworn officers and 40% of the command staff, far exceeding the national averages.

Take the stories of Sergeant Stacey Berryman, Detective Deionne Jackson, and Lieutenant Vanessa Gay, for example. Berryman, driven by a desire to “create relationships and help others,” embodies the compassionate approach that women bring to law enforcement. Jackson said she finds joy in serving her community, while Gay, a UHD alumna, is proud to protect and serve UHD, which is “a place special and dear to my heart.”

Make no mistake: UHD's urban setting demands a capable police force, and Chief Casey Davis, Ph.D., recognizes the distinct advantage of a female-majority team. “Based on research,” he said, “We are poised to increase the safety of the university.” This safety stems not only from reduced use-of-force incidents and complaints, but also from the trust and understanding that female officers cultivate within the community.

The statistics are clear: Gender disparity in law enforcement undermines public safety nationwide. But at UHD, thanks to the unwavering commitment of women like Berryman, Jackson, and Gay, the campus thrives as a safe and welcoming space. This is a testament to the power of inclusivity and the vital role women play in building a stronger, more secure future. 🇺🇸

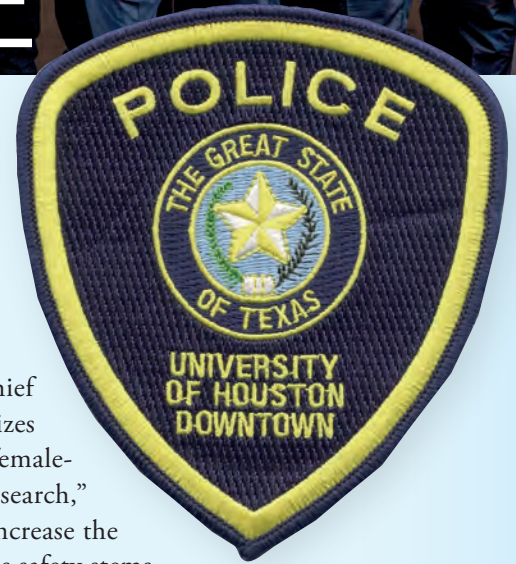


Photo: Mitchell Loper and Gabriela Perez with editing by Luz Castilla Hincapie



SPENCER LIGHTSY Helps Gators Get Into the Groove

Photos: Graig Loper

Six years ago, UHD alum and Associate Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations Spencer Lightsey attended a bass workshop. There he met five-time Grammy Award-winning bassist, songwriter, and record producer Victor Wooten. After Wooten challenged him to play publicly, Lightsey became a regular at House of Blues Houston and co-founded the UHD staff band Admission Possible with Chris Bell.

In fall 2022, Lightsey started the UHD student music group Gator Groove. “Spencer’s will to learn and listen is only overshadowed by his great character,” said Wooten. “His musical ability has grown at a rapid-fire pace because he didn’t wait until he was an expert before sharing what he knew.”

Lightsey asked the Wooten family to allow three UHD students to attend their Jam Camp volunteer week at the Victor Wooten Center for Music and Nature outside of Nashville. The Wootens agreed.

“The fact that he was allowed to drive three students from Houston to Tennessee said a lot about the people Spencer works for, who Spencer is, the kids, and their parents,” said Wooten. “They were three of the best students I could ever imagine. Not only were they good musicians, but they were even better people. Anything we asked, they just did. When we got jamming, they displayed their love for music and their love for each other.” The best part? “Watching Spencer with a big smile on his face, just knowing they were his students.”

“UHD is known for exposing our students to high-impact experiences,” said Lightsey. “Facilitating this trip was a means to achieve a University goal to nurture the innate talents of our students, while simultaneously equipping them to serve others.”



Photo: Adam Wooten

A CUT ABOVE

STAFF EXCELLENCE

PRESIDENT'S STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARD

Ruby LaCour-Tyler (center)

STAFF IMPACT AWARDS (left to right)

Goes the Extra Mile: Jesus Kargue

Student Success Award: Karlyli Juarez

Leadership Award: La'Tandra Semiens

Rookie of the Year: Jessica Acuña

2023 Staff Awards

These UHD staff members were recognized for their outstanding service and unwavering dedication to UHD and its mission to serve students and the community.



Photo: Mitchell Loper

When you first opened this issue of Skyline, you may have wondered what it is that makes UHD so special.

Having read these pages, it's probably clear that the question is not just what, but also who. Any accounting of this place, any real accounting of its merit and measure, must include the stories and photographs of the more than 14,000 UHD students as well as our nearly 70,000 alumni and our dedicated faculty and staff.

Stories, after all, are what connect us—we pass them around and use them to surprise, delight, or instruct each other in meaningful and fulfilling ways. When we pass such stories to one another, we strengthen the bonds of kinship, and such bonds are very much a part of the 50-year history of UHD itself.

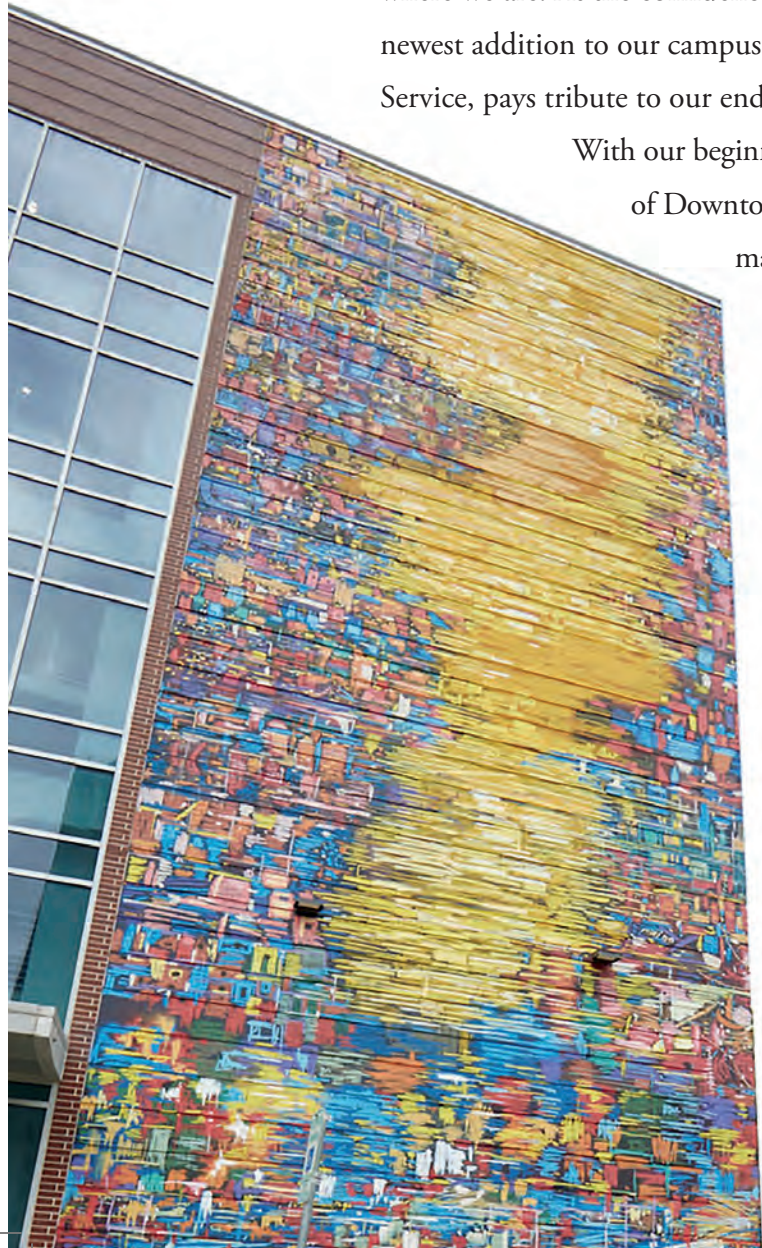
And as Gator grit defines the character of our people, that same grit is part of where we are. At the confluence of two bayous, we have overcome floods, and the newest addition to our campus, the mural “Accra Floods” on the College of Public Service, pays tribute to our endurance.

With our beginnings in a historic, industrial building near the heart of Downtown Houston, our place plays an enormous role in making us an anchor institution for Houston—and for attracting students from across the region.

Those students have chosen UHD as their university home for 50 years because it's more than just a place, it's a promise; one that we call on every member of the campus community to keep. One that will keep UHD growing and thriving for another 50 years and beyond. 🦖

Prominent street artist Moh Awudu collaborated with Ablade Glover and brought Glover's 1992 painting, “Accra Floods,” to life as a massive mural. Both international artists are from Accra, Ghana, a city that often experiences flooding.

Photos: Nicki Evans







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