



# UHD

MAGAZINE  
SUMMER/FALL 2022

The Compass for  
**EXCELLENCE**

# SEE IT THROUGH

When you're up against a trouble,  
Meet it squarely, face to face;  
Lift your chin and set your shoulders,  
Plant your feet and take a brace.

When it's vain to try to dodge it,  
Do the best that you can do;  
You may fail, but you may conquer,  
See it through!

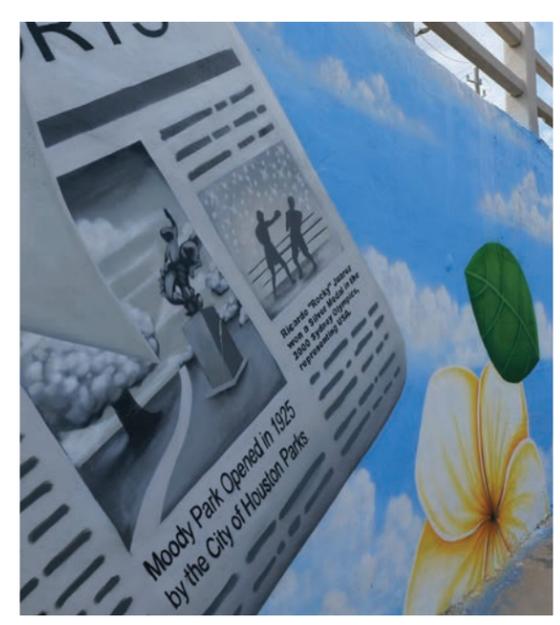
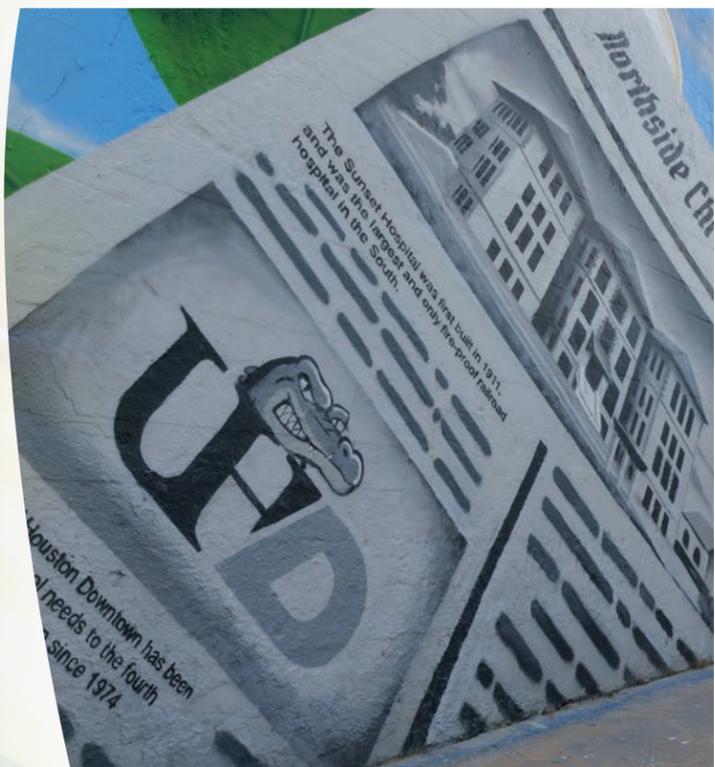
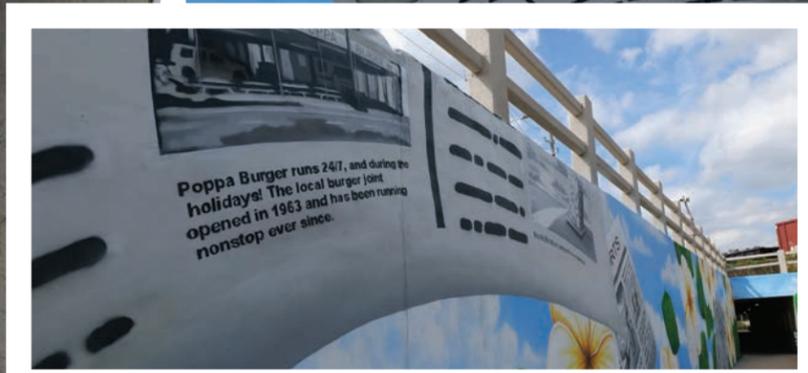
Black may be the clouds about you  
And your future may seem grim,  
But don't let your nerve desert you;  
Keep yourself in fighting trim.

If the worst is bound to happen,  
Spite of all that you can do,  
Running from it will not save you,  
See it through!

Even hope may seem but futile,  
When with troubles you're beset,  
But remember you are facing  
Just what other men have met.

You may fail, but fall still fighting;  
Don't give up, whate'er you do;  
Eyes front, head high to the finish.  
See it through!

Edgar Guest, 1881-1959



Learn more about the Hernandez Tunnel on p. 24.

# PRESIDENT'S LETTER



When I joined the University of Houston-Downtown in March 2021, my first priority was getting to know the Campus Community. I embarked on a “Listening Tour” to hear from the people who could best relay the history, landscape, and potential of UHD—resulting in UHD’s Institutional Compass’ Four Points of Excellence: Strengthening Justice, Strengthening Student Success and Equity, Supporting Institutional Excellence and Infrastructure, and Growing As An Anchor Institution.

In this issue, you will learn how, over the past year, these Four Points have been realized through the extraordinary accomplishments of our students, our faculty, our staff, our alumni, and our dedicated supporters and partners.

This edition showcases particular instances of excellence in our students, like our Newman Civic Fellowship recipient, and our faculty, a record four of whom earned Fulbright Awards this year. As to our alumni, supporters, friends, and partners, you will see in these pages that follow outstanding examples of people who believe in this University and the essential role it plays in the Greater Houston area and beyond.

And there is more to come! Our new strategic plan, which was built around our Four Points of Excellence, is now complete. Our new Mission and Vision statements eloquently capture the spirit of our University and all that we hope to achieve for our students and our community.

**Mission** | The University of Houston-Downtown is a community of diverse faculty, staff, students, and regional partners dedicated to nurturing talent, generating knowledge, and driving socioeconomic mobility for a just and sustainable future.

**Vision** | The University of Houston-Downtown will be an inclusive university of choice for Houstonians seeking to contribute to the social, intellectual, and cultural lives of their communities.

This Vision reveals the paradigm we will use to ingrain a culture of institutional and inclusive excellence at UHD in everything we do—educating students, generating socially impactful knowledge, and engaging in consequential outreach to our city and region.

We aspire to become a model public, urban university. The stories captured here are just a sample of what we have already achieved toward this goal. Join us—help us—work to create the just and sustainable future we know is within our reach.

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

PHOTO: Colt Melrose Photography

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# The Compass For Excellence

By Laura Wagner

During the past year, President Blanchard and the University Community have focused significant energy on UHD's Institutional Compass, using it to set a course for new levels of success and to guide efforts toward the institution's Four Points of Excellence: Strengthening Justice, Strengthening Student Success And Equity, Supporting Institutional Excellence And Infrastructure, and Growing As An Anchor Institution.

**The result?** An escalation of initiatives that are leading the way to outperforming expectations in the University's most meaningful metric: student success.

## Strengthening Justice

UHD is committed to reducing barriers that have traditionally impeded access to higher education, including financial, health, social, and environmental disparities. Through our programs, policies, curricula, and support, we must aspire to create a more just educational community focused on ensuring our diverse University population is equipped for success beyond our classrooms and well into the future.

### Breaking Down Financial Barriers

With adequate financial support, students can focus more on learning to support themselves and their families. Through the generous support of partners who share UHD's commitment to removing financial barriers, the University has received millions of dollars in grants and awards to support students. **"UHD serves a population as diverse as that of our city," said Dr. Michelle Moosally, Associate Vice President of Planning & Curriculum. "We are committed to providing access and opportunities to students to help them obtain a college education, including First Time In College and working adult students."** UHD provides financial support in the form of scholarships, grants, and loans to roughly 82 percent of full-time students each year. (See Gator Gifts, p. 35.)

### Wellness On Campus And In The Community

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, health equity means every individual has the opportunity to "attain his or her full health potential" and no person is "disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstances." UHD provides campus services for students' physical and mental wellness and pursues outside support to help address the unique stresses facing Houston's diverse population.

✦ Associate Professor of Psychology Dr. Katrina Rufino is working to improve campus mental health at UHD with the support of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grant. The three-year, nearly \$300,000 grant is specifically aimed at promoting mental wellness and suicide prevention on campus through a range of student-focused initiatives and community partnerships in collaboration with the UHD Counseling Center. **"We have big plans and big goals," Rufino said. "We discovered that during COVID-19, our students suffered from increased sleep**

**disturbance, anxiety, insomnia, and depression. But the pandemic has also empowered people to talk about mental health in new ways and to check in on each other."**

✦ UHD's health and wellness efforts reach far past the campus borders. The College of Public Service's Service, Teaching, Aging, and Research Lab (STAR) provides students with outreach opportunities serving Houston's elder community. Through an initiative with the Collaboratory for Aging Resources & Education, the Adopt a Grandparent program connects UHD students with local senior citizens at risk for social isolation. **"The students help remind the older participants that they are valuable members of society, and the training the students receive—plus making the actual phone calls—provide real-world preparation for aspiring social workers seeking to work with geriatric clients," said STAR founder and UHD Social Work faculty member Dr. Angela Goins.** The program is just one of STAR's partnerships that allow UHD social work students to provide meaningful outreach to the ever-growing community of elder Houstonians. STAR's ultimate goals are to promote issues impacting older adults, develop policies that support healthy aging, and better train the senior services workforce, one UHD student at a time.

### A Lasting Impact

Through UHD's Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning (CCESL), students are connected with service opportunities in the Greater Houston community to improve their ability to think critically about the world around them. **"Strengthening communities is a strategic priority of UHD. This commitment comes to life through the involvement of our students and the work of our faculty and staff," said Caroline Smith, Associate Director of CCESL.** The Center's programs allow students to see community needs in real time and contribute to eliminating the barriers that prevent those needs from being met.

## Fostering Critical Conversations

Launched by President Blanchard in 2021, the President's Distinguished Lecture Series on Justice, Equity, & Inclusion continued in 2022 with a three-part Student Success & Equity Summit.

The series opened with scholar and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, founder of the 1619 Project. Her presentation, "Inclusive Excellence, The Way Forward: Truth, History, and the 1619 Project," offered a perspective on the need for all Americans to review an unvarnished history of slavery and acknowledge the contributions of Black Americans to America's economic success.

Featured speakers also included award-winning educator Dr. Timothy Renick's presentation, "Inclusive Excellence, The Way Forward: Recommitting to Student Success," which addressed ways institutions create barriers that impede the student experience and how schools can strategically address and reduce those barriers.

Dr. Tia Brown McNair shared the importance of building relationships with students as one of the main components of academic success and the closing of equity gaps. (Read more about the series in Gator Bites, p. 26.)

## Strengthening Student Success And Equity

As a Hispanic- and Minority-Serving Institution, UHD is transforming today's diverse student population into tomorrow's leaders, trained to work in a multifaceted, ever-changing world. To ensure UHD can meet this critical mission, it must address equity in and out of the classroom so that all students can maximize their education.

### Leading By Example

When it comes to student success, President Blanchard's actions speak louder than words. As Chair of the Governing Council of the Houston Guided Pathways to Success, he's leading a key collaborative effort among local universities to assist transfer students in completing their degrees on time and with little debt. **"It is an honor to accept this position and to further advocate for the many students within our region seeking higher education opportunities," President Blanchard said.** (Read more about Houston GPS, p. 26.)

For National Hispanic Heritage Month, the Center sponsored, "A Celebration of Hispanic Heritage, Hope, and Achievement," featuring more than a dozen events. The celebration included the Gator Achievers Series, Latinx Success with UHD alumni Manual Rojas, MBA, and the Center for Latino Studies Community Partners' Fair.

The Center also sponsored a timely presentation by queer scholar and UHD Department of Criminal Justice faculty Dr. Jace Valcore addressing hate speech, hate crimes, and the increasing victimization of Asian-heritage and transgender individuals. These events highlight the University of Houston-Downtown as a place that embraces diversity in all forms.

### Success: Male Students Of Color

Two UHD student programs focus specifically on men of color in education. The Men of L.E.G.A.C.I. was established to increase the retention and graduation rates of men from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds. Call Me MISTER focuses on guidance and opportunities for minority men in the field of education. With the support of these programs, UHD hosted the Greater Houston Area Men of Color Collegiate Symposium last Fall. **"Our mission at UHD is to do what few dare to dream—reverse the longstanding institutional and economic oppression of marginalized populations and accelerate their success," said Dr. Vida Robertson, Director of UHD's Center for Critical Race Studies.**

## Diversity & Inclusion For The Most Diverse Campus

A key component of removing barriers to equity is providing access to education about the issues underrepresented communities face. UHD's Center for Diversity & Inclusion offers programming specifically designed to support UHD's diverse campus—named the most diverse university in the region in 2021.

The Center celebrated Black History Month with a series of programs to honor Black Americans and reflect on their contributions to U.S. culture. Events included the screening of a documentary and discussion of the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a pivotal leader of the Civil Rights Movement, and a presentation by Lora King, daughter of police brutality victim Rodney King, about her father's story and its impact on race discussions in America.

## Supporting Gator Success

New students, including transfer and First Time In College students, can struggle with the byzantine requirements of navigating higher education. UHD's Gator Success Center (GSC) serves as a hub of programs, workshops, and events that specialize in helping students with goal setting, time management, career guidance, and more. Success coaches work with students to sharpen college-success skills such as developing good study habits and communicating effectively with professors. **According to Jason Holiday, Associate Executive Director of the Center, "The GSC's goal is to help students acclimate to the University and obtain the skills necessary to be academically successful in the classroom."**

### Promoting Wellness For Success

The UHD Wellness & Success Center is designed to help students optimize their time on campus by providing new resources for learning and leisure. Opening in early 2023, the Center will redefine the student experience at UHD,

offering expanded recreational and fitness facilities; additional areas for studying and socializing; spaces for learning about health and wellness; and a demonstration kitchen for lessons on nutrition.

UHD recently received a grant from the Trellis Foundation for Gator students facing mental distress. By partnering with the Houston Food Bank, Workforce Solutions, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, The University of St. Thomas, and national leaders in mental wellness, UHD will provide students with best-in-class approaches to counseling services, workforce programming and placement, domestic violence awareness and support, as well as nutritional and financial assistance—all of which will provide a means of support by which students can find academic, personal, and professional success. **Per a Trellis representative, the grant is a testament to the innovative work UHD is doing to support students to and through their post-secondary journeys.** (Read more about the Wellness & Success Center, p. 28.)

## Supporting Institutional Excellence And Infrastructure

Faculty and staff are key ambassadors to what UHD stands for in this city, state, and nation. We must provide these critical stakeholders with personal and professional growth to ensure they can further advocate for the University both on campus and in the community. Further, the University must solidify its financial structure to invest more meaningfully in its people.

### Engaging Faculty & Staff

One of the strategic goals for UHD over the next five years is to ensure the University's faculty and staff are fully engaged. In Fiscal Year 2021, UHD retained CBIZ Talent and Compensation Solutions to conduct a faculty and staff compensation study. The objective of this study was to continue the Institution's efforts in providing competitive salaries to attract, retain, and motivate qualified employees who will enable the University to maintain a competitive position and provide students with excellent service. A funding pool was established at the start of Fiscal Year 2022 to assist the University in attracting and retaining exceptional faculty. UHD also implemented an alternative work arrangements policy for positions that can be performed remotely, allowing employees more flexibility in the workweek and fostering a modern workplace that

maximizes productivity and flexibility for supervisors and staff. **"Investing in our faculty and staff is another way of investing in our students," President Blanchard said. "We want to provide them with professional development opportunities to ensure high quality in teaching, research, and service. Our ability to do so will depend on placing greater institutional emphasis on support for our faculty and staff."**

### New And Renewed Spaces

Safe, clean facilities with appropriate resources that support a healthy learning, teaching, and working atmosphere are essential components of a quality university. UHD received \$45 million in Capital Construction Assistance Projects funding from the Texas Legislature for transformative campus projects,

including upgrades and buildouts to the Girard Street Academic Support Center to make it more accessible to students, and enhancements to the One Main Building, the University's oldest and largest campus structure.

**"UHD is an institution on the rise and investing in this project is crucial to our mission and growth as a campus community. I thank those legislative leaders who strongly recognize the University's value within our region and continue to advocate for our campus and our students," President Blanchard said.**

## Exemplifying Excellence: Four Fulbrighters Named

UHD faculty confirmed the obvious—they are second to none—with four Fulbright Awards for the 2022-23 award year—a record for UHD! Spain, Ecuador, Tajikistan, and the United Arab Emirates will host UHD faculty members from three UHD Colleges for teaching, learning, and research opportunities. UHD students will also reap the benefits of their faculty's global experiences when they return for the Fall 2023 semester. (Read "The Fab Four" on page 18.)

## Job Market Asked, UHD Answered

Institutional Excellence rests in part on offering education programs that meet the demands of the job market—and therefore, the demands of future students. In Fall

2022, three of UHD's Colleges will launch job-market-aligned degree programs, including options in Artificial Intelligence, Human Resource Management, Strategic Communication, and Medical Humanities. Also, the College of Sciences & Technology is offering a graduate certificate in Quantitative Analysis and Modeling of Risk and Finance. The College of Humanities & Social Sciences is premiering a concentration in Health and Wellness for its Bachelor of Science in Health & Behavioral Sciences. (Learn more about new degree offerings, p. 30.)

## Broadening Our Impact

To grow UHD's student community, it takes more than a village. It takes an entire campus. In a classic UHD example of collaboration and teamwork, Enrollment Management has partnered with all faculty and staff in launching an initiative aimed at enrolling a record 15,500 students for the Fall 2022 semester. The initiative will also involve assisting students with registering for 152,000 credit hours—a number that will accelerate them to timely degree completion. This kind of University-wide effort shows how much faculty and staff believe in UHD's power to provide transformative educational opportunities to its constituents. **"It's important that everyone recognizes the part they play in driving UHD's enrollment. Even those who are not in student-facing positions are vital to our efforts," said Dr. Daniel Villanueva Jr., Vice President of Enrollment Management.**

## Growing As An Anchor Institution

To fully realize the potential of UHD to make an impact, it must immerse itself in the work and partnerships that create wealth, equity, and stability. To do this, it must address complexities among various cultures through civic engagement and by unifying our community. No longer should the University only be a stage for civic engagement and community service, but it should position itself as a key player in these arenas.

## Stronger Together Against COVID-19

UHD continued to partner with Texas-based H-E-B to sponsor free campus COVID-19 vaccination clinics and with health services provider Curative to offer free, unlimited testing on campus. In Spring 2022, UHD began offering a \$5 a week COVID-19 testing incentive to students, faculty, and staff, paid out in GatorCash, UHD's on-campus currency. The goal is to further encourage Gators to keep themselves, their families, and the Campus Community healthy.

## Doing Their Civic (Intern) Duty

Seven UHD students took their service to a new level as participants in the inaugural City of Houston Mayor's Summer Internship Program. The students worked with Mayor Sylvester Turner and his staff on initiatives that influence the City of Houston and its communities. Designed to provide UHD students with valuable experience in learning and serving in various capacities in local city government, students explored career possibilities in local government, gained expertise in helping community initiatives, developed marketable skills, and deepened their professional networks.

## Joining Forces To Advance Human Spaceflight

The University of Houston System and NASA's Johnson Space Center are expanding a longtime partnership to work collaboratively on joint research, technology development, technology transfer, training, and educational and outreach initiatives. As NASA endeavors to travel deeper into space, these efforts will be carried out through the undergraduate, graduate, and joint research programs at the four UH System universities. And, students will be the beneficiaries. The NASA Office of STEM Engagement will work with UHD to target students (pre-service teachers) primarily in the College of Public Service's Department of Urban Education to identify learning opportunities and provide connections to NASA's missions and work through seminars, campus-wide open houses, classroom visits, and more.

## Climate Week Collaboration

UHD was the official university partner for Houston Climate Week 2021. Hosted by the Mayor's Office of Resilience and Sustainability, the event offered a platform for local experts to discuss critical policy concerns as well as issues of inequity. Speakers included leaders from the City of Houston, UHD, elected officials, local government agencies, the energy industry, the healthcare field, local and national not-for-profit organizations, academia, and stakeholder groups. UHD faculty and students were among the panelists and moderators participating in the week's events. **"Resiliency, sustainability, energy, and transportation are topics that resonate with all Houstonians, including the students, faculty, and staff at UHD," said President Blanchard. "Each day, we work to address these exact issues through research, scholarly activities, community engagement initiatives, and critical conversations."**

## Addressing Food Insecurity On Campus—And Beyond

UHD students select from fresh produce, meats, and other groceries at the UHD Food for Change Market, thanks to UHD's ongoing partnership with the Houston Food Bank. The program allows students to pick up 40 pounds of free groceries each week at the on-campus market regardless of their financial status. Last October, UHD partnered with Qatar Charity, UH-Clear Lake's Diplomacy Institute, and the Houston Food Bank to tackle food insecurity beyond the campus at a drive-through Food Fair open to all Houstonians.

## A New Paradigm

With President Blanchard's arrival in 2021 came a new vision for the future of the University of Houston-Downtown in the form of the strategic plan, "A New Paradigm." The shift to a new paradigm begins with considerations of what it means to be an urban, public institution of higher education, to rank among the nation's top Hispanic- and Minority-Serving Institutions, and to contribute to the well-being of residents in the most diverse city in the U.S.

These attributes position UHD not only for further growth, but for successful growth. The new paradigm will enable UHD to achieve our Mission of being "a community of diverse faculty, staff, students, and regional partners dedicated to nurturing talent, generating knowledge, and driving socioeconomic mobility for a just and sustainable future." **UHD**

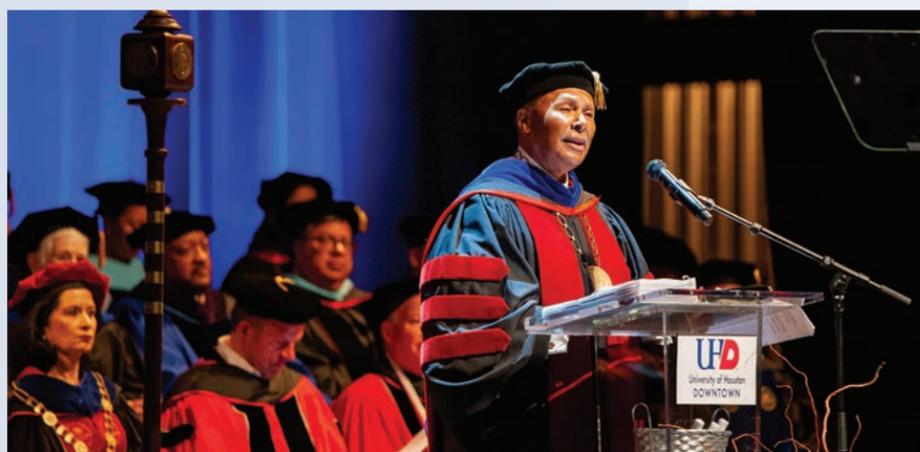
# An Invested Future

## Dr. Loren J. Blanchard Celebrated As UHD's Seventh President

By Sheryl E. Taylor

The University of Houston-Downtown formally inaugurated Dr. Loren J. Blanchard as UHD's seventh president in May with an Investiture Celebration.

In the academic setting, an investiture is a formal ceremony of conferring the authority and symbols of the office upon a university president. Traditionally, such ceremonies are held at the conclusion of the president's first year in office.



The daylong event commenced at Houston's Wortham Theater Center with the Investiture Ceremony, which hosted a wealth of leaders, friends, and guests from across the state and nation, including Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, University of Houston Chancellor Dr. Renu Khator, University of Houston System Board of Regents Chairperson Tilman Fertitta, U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, President of the University of Detroit Mercy Dr. Antoine Garibaldi, The Reverend Gregory Han, Dr. Robin Davidson, former Houston Poet Laureate and UHD Professor of English, Father Orrin Halepeska, award-winning musical guest Bridget Bazile, 14 nationwide university delegates, UHD alumni, students, faculty, and staff.

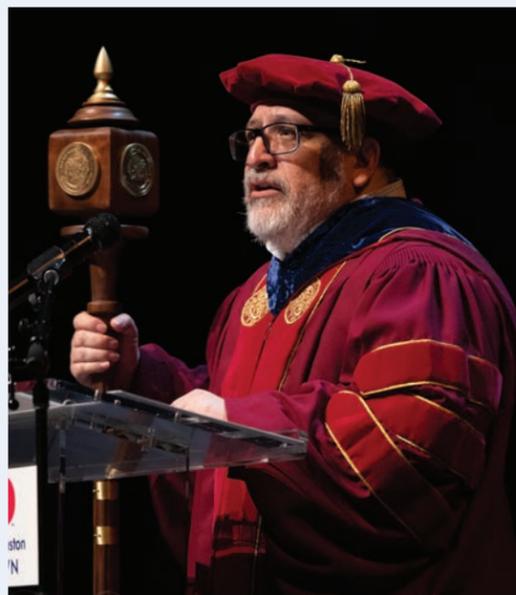
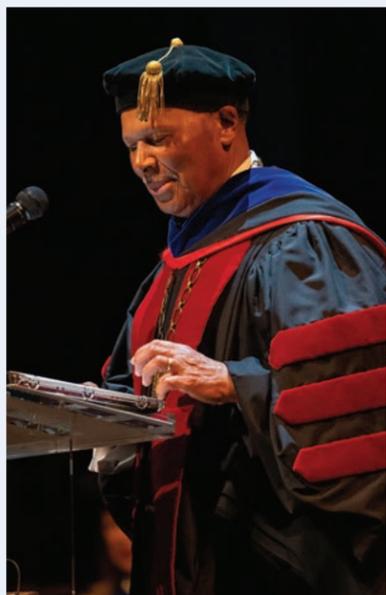
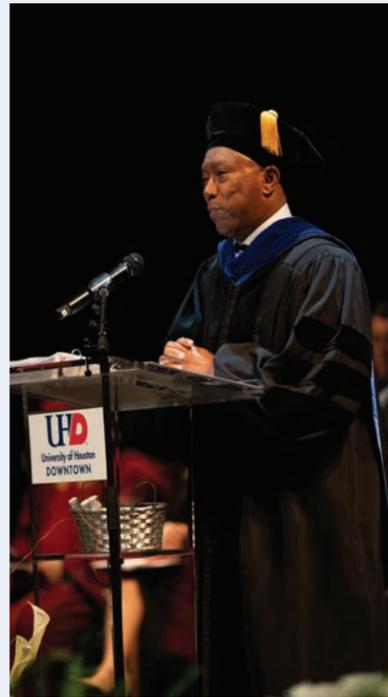
Additionally, congratulatory videos were featured from Texas State Senators Borris Miles, Carol Alvarado, and John Whitmire as well as Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis, State Representative Mary Ann Perez, and others.

**"To say that I feel overwhelmed is an understatement," said President Blanchard. "Overwhelmed with gratitude. Overwhelmed with joy. Overwhelmed with optimism for all that lies ahead for the University of Houston-Downtown."**

**Blanchard joined UHD on March 15, 2021. Since his arrival, he has established UHD's Institutional Compass, which is designed to chart a course for new levels of success, including strengthening justice, strengthening student success and equity, supporting institutional excellence and infrastructure, and growing as an anchor institution. (See The Compass For Excellence story, p. 4.)**

“President Blanchard is a dedicated scholar ... a champion of public higher education with a more than impressive CV, but most importantly, a leader with a sincere passion for changing the trajectory of lives and communities through education.”

**Dr. Renu Khator**  
Chancellor  
University of Houston System



“I know that President Blanchard is driven and wants to take the University of Houston-Downtown to another level, and he will accomplish those goals while developing strong relationships with the University Community and the City of Houston. He understands the sacrifices that families of first-generation students make so their sons and daughters can obtain a degree. He will make those dreams become a reality because of his commitment to his students.”

**Dr. Antoine Garibaldi**  
President  
University of Detroit Mercy



“An education is inherently an expansive and expanding experience. It is not merely a transaction of information. It is an investment in the potential of the human spirit. It is not only the study of a subject. It is the shaping of ideas. It is not just a syllabus, reading list, or project. It is the gathering of a community. It is my hope that this invocation, the act of invoking, of calling forth, calls forth our best efforts, our highest hopes, and our deepest convictions in service to learning, scholarship, and excellence in all its forms.”

**The Rev. Gregory Han**

“I’ve had the distinct opportunity to observe a leader with a steady hand guiding this institution through some turbulent times, but watched him do it with seeming ease, steeling himself with the resolve of a leader on a determined mission. What I admire most about Dr. Blanchard is his conscientiousness and capacity to connect with his fellow man, and beyond that is his resolute focus on not simply leaving UHD better than he found it but taking our beloved institution to even greater heights.”

**Laolu Davies-Yemitan**  
('05, MBA '22)  
Chair, UHD Alumni Council

The UHD Campus Community came together for a BBQ luncheon to celebrate the momentous occasion of its newly installed President. The evening capped off with the Alumni & Friends Celebration Dinner at the Four Seasons Hotel Houston. Close to 500 guests, alumni, and friends joined together at the Four Seasons Houston for an evening honoring outstanding alumni and dedicated supporters of UHD. Guests kicked off the evening with a fun-filled cocktail hour complete with a silent auction, wine pull, photo booth mirror, and artwork exhibition featuring UHD faculty artists. This event supported the UHD Compass Points Fund, an investment in the success of UHD students guided by the UHD Institutional Compass.

**“The UHD Community was honored to celebrate the Investiture of President Loren J. Blanchard and our extraordinary alumni,”** said Jay Zambrano, Vice President of Advancement & University Relations. **“For almost 50 years, our organization has uplifted and empowered alumni across industries, many of whom are leaders in the community. Each Gator Alumni honoree is an inspiration to our community and a testament to UHD’s contribution to our city, state, and nation.”**

Univision’s Grace Olivares, who served as emcee, hosted a special welcome from UHD President Blanchard, a presentation of this year’s alumni award recipients, and a special moment of recognition and appreciation of UHD Alumni Council Chair Laolu Davies-Yemitan ('05, MBA '22).



**“Now, UHD means so much more to me as an alumni. After graduating so many years ago, UHD has come so far in providing added student services, facilities, and degree programs,”** said Phillip Ellison ('94), who received the Alumni Service Award. **“It’s really created a legitimate footprint in the Houston community.”**

The special event honored outstanding alumni and dedicated supporters of UHD:

- ◆ Distinguished Alumna: The Honorable Paula Mendoza ('95, MBA '17)
- ◆ Alumni Service Award: Phillip Ellison ('94)
- ◆ Alumni Entrepreneur Award: Marcus Bowers ('11)
- ◆ Alumna On The Rise: Maria Del Pilar Montes (MBA '17)
- ◆ Distinguished Friends Of The University: Tommy Harper and Harry Gee

**Distinguished Alumna Award recipient The Honorable Paula Mendoza ('95, MBA '17) shared, “We do things because we love it. We do things because we want to provide others with the same opportunities that you had, but to be recognized by my University, by my alma mater, it touched my heart.” UH**

# GATORS DOING GOOD

By Sam Byrd

UHD students aren't afraid to dig in and perform the necessary work to improve the world around them. Meet two Gators who have demonstrated this through dedication, grit, and determination in making a difference where it's needed most. Their stories represent the caliber of education and service taking place throughout the College of Public Service and at UHD.



sydney

**“Compassion is definitely needed in working with and understanding vulnerable populations,” Medina emphasized. “First is understanding the level of empathy that ties into care ... that can’t be taught in a lab. It must be gained through practice and exposure. As social workers, a lot of our curriculum is through understanding the institutional structures that don’t support our vulnerable populations. That’s why we need students dedicated to service.”**

Medina’s mission is to end food insecurity. For her capstone project, she worked with Interfaith Ministries to partner with Best Elementary in the Alief Independent School District, which is in a food desert. The average family income for the area is less than \$35,000 per year.

“There’s a plethora of issues and barriers for these kids and their families,” she said. “How could we not develop a project to help them? I fell in love with the community!”

Using simple and cost-effective methods, Medina led a team that provided the elementary students with snacks each week. They also taught healthy lifestyles through practices like yoga and meditation. And, also provided seeds and taught students how to grow herbs in a water bottle.

**“We saw firsthand how this community needed help, and we empowered them,” Medina said. “This field experience confirms what I’ve learned in the classroom. It happened right in front of me. UHD’s Social Work program has given me the tools to make a sustainable impact.”**

**Sydney Medina’s** whole life was engineered for her to become a social worker. After all, it runs in her family.

“Both of my parents were civil servants. My father was a military police officer who was very involved in the community. When I was younger, we delivered toys to orphanages in the Dominican Republic,” she recalled. “My mom earned her master’s degree in social work. It was because of her that I knew I wanted to pursue the same work but on the macro level in the community.”

At UHD, Medina is one of the few undergraduate students taking part in a program that links students with health workers. She believes the working world experience is paying off, especially in terms of being compassionate with clients.

Up next, Medina plans to bring her enthusiasm for effecting change on Campus as co-president of Texas Rising @ UHD—a project of the Texas Freedom Network—dedicated to building the power of young people in our communities and at the ballot box. She is also joining the platform on advocating for LGBTQ+ rights and reproductive rights.

**V**eronica Hernandez took a different route to social work. She served, both domestically and abroad, in the Marine Corps for five years before returning home to Houston and enrolling at UHD.

**“I chose UHD because of the programs and resources, and it’s in the heart of the city I love. I wanted to be close to home and to the community after being gone for so many years,” Hernandez said.**

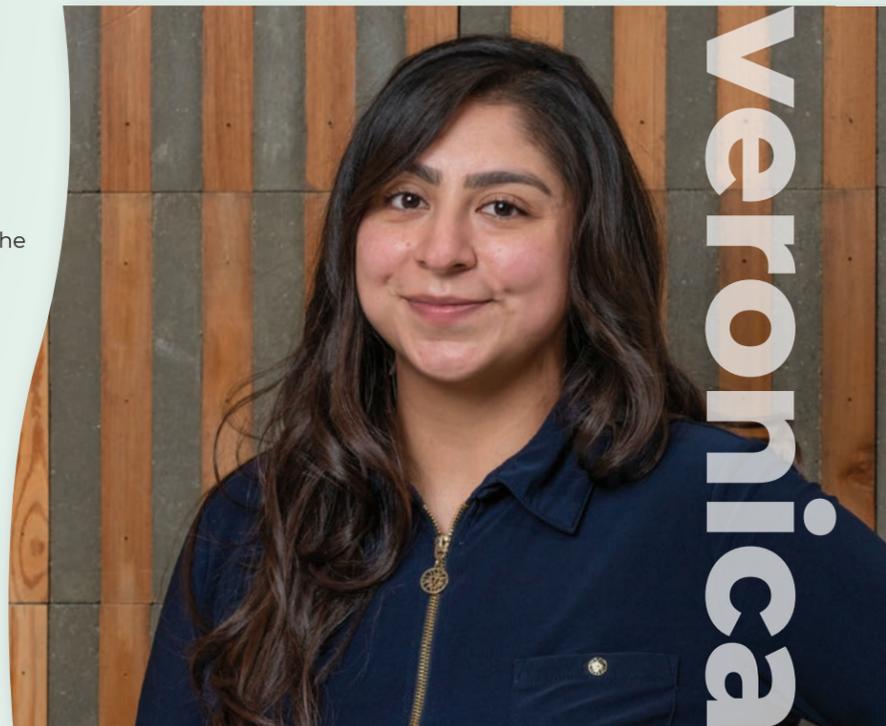
Springing off her military experience, Hernandez was originally enrolled in a major where she felt she could use her past to benefit her future, but she realized something was missing. It was through church that she eventually found her calling.

**“I was struggling to find inspiration and my passion. I started attending church more often and volunteering within my community, where I realized that I could be a positive change. I switched my major to social work,” Hernandez said.**

Her passion project involves aiding the area’s aging population, who are sometimes isolated. The severity of loneliness has been further exacerbated by COVID-19. Thanks to her involvement with Interfaith Ministries, she’s been able to make a difference with these citizens. To accomplish this, Hernandez took part in visits with elderly citizens as well as installing devices like Alexa that provide a digital sense of companionship.

“We’ve had some clients who are fully aware and excited to be introduced to a smart device that mimics a human voice and creates interaction. Many live alone and want that companionship. We program and install the devices, but the best part of my job is the interaction I get to have with our senior citizens,” she said.

Hernandez echoes Medina’s sentiments that by taking part in field practice, the experience provides an extra layer of training.



veronica

**“Just experiencing firsthand how it all comes together and how it changes lives, it’s been a blessing,” she said. “It’s also given me a greater appreciation for my own blessings. There are millions of people in our communities who are impoverished and struggling. Nothing gets fixed overnight or with one person. It takes a community, and being associated with Interfaith Ministries has allowed me to ignite that passion and that drive for change.”**

For Hernandez’s future, she’s letting her faith lead the way.

When not focusing on her academics, Hernandez plans to involve herself more heavily via her church in a tutoring program as well as caring for her community’s homeless population.

These two women are inspiring representatives of the many UHD students who are evolving into future leaders in their communities ... a true calling for the good of humanity. **UHD**

# The Fab Four: UHD Wins Big With Fulbrighters

## CLASSICS REBOOTED A New Spin on Ancient Tragedies

By Sheryl E. Taylor



Dr. Edmund Cueva

This wasn't Dr. Edmund Cueva's first time receiving a congratulatory letter from Fulbright. In fact, three years ago the Universidad de Buenos Aires invited him to be a Fulbright Senior Scholar for Argentina; however, the collapse of the country's economy resulted in the rescinding of all Fulbright Awards and invitations.

This time around, Cueva set his sights on places where he could conduct archival research, and ultimately chose the University of Murcia—the third-oldest university in Spain. His Fulbright will run late January 2023 through early May.

"I selected the University of Murcia because of its great collection of works dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century specifically addressing the Spanish colonies in the Americas," said Cueva.

In addition to his archival research, Cueva will teach at the University of Murcia. He proposed two graduate courses, "On the Reception of Great Tragedy in Latin America" and "Latinx Translations of Greek Drama."

Through these graduate courses, Cueva will be **"introducing an entirely new concept that has never been done before,"** said the Professor of Classics & Humanities. Also, he wants these students to know that **"the influence of the Classics has not disappeared and is very alive in the Spanish-speaking Americas. In fact, it is extremely influential in political protests, upheaval, or social unrest. They look to the Classics to reinvent them, to be shielded in their protests' tradition."**

In turn, "it will help me in my research, which is the other component of the Fulbright Award," he emphasized. "This will provide the final push toward the completion of my book manuscript, which looks at the Greek and Roman Classics in the country of Ecuador when they liberated from Spain as a colony in 1822." Over the past two years, he hasn't come up with a working title for the book, but he's hopeful that he will discover the perfect one during his research.

Cueva's book will show that "before the war of independence from Spain, the educated Ecuadorian elite, who were trained mostly by the missions created by the Jesuits and the Franciscans, knew the Classics," said the Ecuador native. "This solidifies the fact that these elites had a direct connection to the Greco-Roman world before the war. After the war of independence, the literature among the ruling class brought back the European influence, and the elite continued to use the training of the Classics as a sign of power and belonging among their class."

Cueva joined the University of Houston-Downtown by way of Cincinnati in 2009. He previously served as Chair of the UHD Department of Arts & Humanities (now History, Humanities, and Languages) in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences.

**"Our students exemplify the promise for a bright and successful nation,"** said Cueva. **"Moreover, I wanted to be part of UHD because it serves as the major entry point in Houston to social and economic advancement for underserved, underrepresented, and marginalized communities."**

His congratulatory letter from Fulbright ended simply: "The United States Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which oversees Fulbright Program operations throughout the world, joins the Board in congratulating you. We hope your Fulbright experience will be deeply rewarding professionally and personally, and that you will share the knowledge and experience you gain with many others throughout your life."

And Cueva gladly accepts this rewarding opportunity. **UHD**

## Her Environmental VISION

By Laura Wagner

The Fulbright Scholar Program might be described as the Oscar of scholarly research and teaching awards: It is an honor to be one of the finalists. But, as with an Oscar, it's even better to win. Natacha Poggio's initial Fulbright status was "Alternate," which made the change to "Selected" all the sweeter.

**"It's a great honor to have come this far in such a rigorous selection process on my first try,"** said the Assistant Professor of Graphic Design in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences' Department of Arts & Communication. **"I believe it's a sign of the importance of the work I'm proposing."**

As a Fulbrighter, Poggio will head to Guayaquil, Ecuador—a port city known as a gateway to the Galapagos Islands—where she will work with students at the Universidad de las Artes. Her dream is to empower students and community members to become informed environmental advocates.

The teaching component, Poggio explained, "will entail undergraduate lectures and workshops highlighting aspects of visual communication for environmental awareness—specifically the protection of marine ecosystems from human impact." Design topics include visual literacy, composition, color, typography, editorial illustration, infographics, layout, and photography. **"The goal is to teach students how to create environmental communications messages across media types,"** she added. **"Editorial design workshops will serve as hands-on training experience."**

One component of her research project is a student-designed digital publication with compelling environmental messages for distribution to coastal communities. Another involves teaching local fishermen sustainable fishing practices for catch and release to protect sharks and other fish in the marine biosphere. "Artisanal fishing is an important focus for the local environmental nonprofits because it's a practice that will be handed down to the next generation of fishermen, creating long-lasting change," Poggio said.

Given the university's proximity to the ocean, Poggio believes the environmental communication messages will **"raise awareness about endangered species suffering from climate change, environmental pollution, and indiscriminate fishing."** Ultimately, she hopes the campaign will develop a sense of ownership and community among the students and the local nonprofits Poggio has connected with during her past trips to Ecuador. **"Beyond teaching design, it's about building on the emerging sense of environmental advocacy among the community so they can carry on this important work,"** she said.

Poggio credits her time at UHD for inspiring a change in her approach to teaching that influenced her Fulbright application. "While there is no design program at UHD (yet), I still want to empower my students to be good citizens—to become better advocates for the planet and its inhabitants, to seek opportunities to advocate for their education, and to advocate for social issues," she said.

**"UHD students are very receptive to this idea—they are mature and committed—they have a purpose. They have the willingness and interest to change their lives and their world for the better,"** she noted. **"I will bring back what I learn from the exchange in Ecuador and share with my students."**

Poggio will travel to Ecuador twice this year. She was awarded a \$47,905 Sappi Ideas That Matter Grant for "Yasuní: Our Rainforest, Our Life"—a project that took her to Ecuador last summer. Poggio is one of six recipients this year, making it her third time receiving Sappi's prestigious and competitive award.

**"Ecuador is one of the most beautiful places on earth, above and below the water." She added, "I have scuba dived there, so I have seen that unique beauty firsthand. I am committed to empowering the stewards of this incredible place on the planet—the local inhabitants—to protect this treasure—not only for themselves, but for the rest of us." UHD**



Natacha Poggio



Dr. Shahnaz Savani

## Creating A Sense of Community FOR MENTAL HEALTH

By Sheryl E. Taylor

It's been barely a year since Dr. Shahnaz Savani was named a Fulbright "Alternate" for a research project she holds dear: the gift of a renewed commitment to life in the tiny, landlocked country of Tajikistan.

Surrounded by neighboring countries of Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan sits in the heart of Central Asia with a population of more than 9.6 million. Interestingly, it was part of the Soviet Union from 1929 until it earned its independence in 1991. The country is a bit smaller than the state of Wisconsin, half the size of Italy, and remains the poorest country in Central Asia. The dominant religion is Islam, a religion that forbids suicide—yet Tajikistan has one of the highest rates of suicide in the world.

**"These countries in Central Asia are Muslim, and there is a strong prohibition against suicide and suicide attempts," said Savani. "People who are suicidal do not get the help they need, and their families are ostracized and shamed as a result. Available resources are extremely limited, and there is a great deal of complexity as to why suicide rates are so high."**

Savani traveled to Tajikistan in 2013 as a volunteer to conduct mental health needs assessments of the community and set up a crisis hotline. The work informed her doctoral dissertation and ultimately inspired her to continue with her service work in the region. That's where the Fulbright came in. Three years later she joined UH.

As a newly minted U.S. citizen in 2019, Savani was eligible to apply for a Fulbright, which she did for the first time in 2020. Three decisions can be handed down by the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board: "Selected," "Not Selected," and "Alternate." She was recognized as an "Alternate" for the 2021-2022 cycle, but her tenacious spirit never waned. She applied again in 2021 and was "Selected" for the 2022-2023 cycle.

Her research project, "Creating Capacity: Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Badakhshan" will begin this August at the University of Central Asia in Khorog, Tajikistan, where she will host three undergraduate courses: Understanding Suicide in the Global

Context, Global Mental Health, and Research Methods. For her research component of the Fulbright, Savani will be taking a deep dive into "Attitudes and Barriers to Seeking Help for Mental Health."

For her undergraduate classes, Savani hopes to provide students with the opportunity to engage with the topics of mental health and mental illness, and suicide prevention and intervention, which is needed in the Badakhshan province where they live.

**"I want these students to learn how to conduct research by going out into the communities," the Lecturer of Social Work explained. "Through this initiative, I am creating a cadre of students and professionals who will have the scientific knowledge and education about mental health and mental illness, and suicide prevention and intervention to move this forward in Badakhshan."**

Savani also noted that "in the entire province of Badakhshan, where the rate of depression and suicide is extremely high, there is not a single university that offers a single course on mental health and/or suicide prevention and intervention."

**"There is research to suggest that there is a correlation between courses being offered at the university level and a reduction in the stigma of mental health in the community," she noted. "Even though there is criminality involved (suicide is a criminal offense in Tajikistan), my hope is that healthcare providers will begin to look at the problem and realize that services in mental health and wellness, and suicide prevention and intervention are desperately needed. The overarching theme is that the dissemination of knowledge and education diminishes the stigma surrounding these 'taboo' topics."**

Post-Fulbright, Savani plans on returning to the U.S. and continuing a professional connection with the University of Central Asia: "My strong hope is to have this project become sustainable with an educated community around mental health and mental illness that will contribute to reducing the suicide rate."

**The dedication page of her Ph.D. dissertation, "A Renewed Commitment to Life: A Grounded Theory Study of Suicide Attempts in Badakhshan," sums up her commitment to this cause: "This dissertation is dedicated to the people of Badakhshan, whose faith and resilience have kept me going." UH**

## Investing For Good COVID's Effect On Investing Trends

By Sheryl E. Taylor

Dr. Rahul Verma rounds out this historic moment for the University. He is the second Fulbrighter in the Marilyn Davies College of Business, and the first scholar in Finance to earn the Fulbright Scholar Award for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since 2008.

"It's an incredible honor to be a Fulbrighter," said Verma. He credits Marilyn Davies College of Business (MDCOB) Fulbrighter Dr. Candace TenBrink and Dr. Charles Gengler, Dean of MDCOB, who encouraged him to apply and guided him through the process.

For Verma, the award is meaningful for two reasons: **"Professionally, I am honored since it is one of the highest accolades that a faculty member can achieve in higher education. It feels great to join a diverse global community of accomplished individuals," the Professor of Finance noted. "Personally, I wanted to come out of my comfort zone to enhance my professional and career development, to gain international academic experience, and to embrace being immersed in a new culture."**

Verma is traveling to Ajman University (close to Dubai) in the UAE. For this Fulbright cycle, more than 60 disciplines were available from anthropology to sciences and technology, but only two slots were available in the UAE.

His research area is behavioral finance (how people make financial decisions via biases and irrationalities). So, he began to delve into ESG (environmental, social, governance) investments, which is one of the hottest topics in finance

Through his research, he noticed that the UAE, a traditionally oil- and gas-based economy, began diversifying in other areas such as banking, tourism, and sustainability. This trend is remarkably similar to Houston's economy (energy capital of the world), which is diversifying into innovation and life sciences.

Verma's project, "Behavioral Finance and ESG Investing: Pre and Post COVID-19 Analysis," will take a deep dive into ESG investing to determine if it's rational, irrational, or a fad. "The primary driver is risk mitigation since the onset of the pandemic, which has pushed environmental and societal issues higher up the risk spectrum," he said. "The study will provide empirical tests on the rationality of ESG investing in the U.S. and UAE during the pandemic and analyze the impact of culture and will ask questions such as: What motivates investors to hold ESG investments? Are arguments promoting bigger profits and better social returns irrational? Is there hype surrounding ESG investing?"

In addition to his research, he will teach two graduate courses, Investments and Fundamentals of Finance. "The key thing in the world of finance is to take the topics and apply them in life," Verma said. "You must bridge the gap between theory and the real world, which can be a challenge. It is important for me to stay on top of world events to create a relatable link for my students to understand."

Verma hopes that his work will be impactful for the host institution and its students.

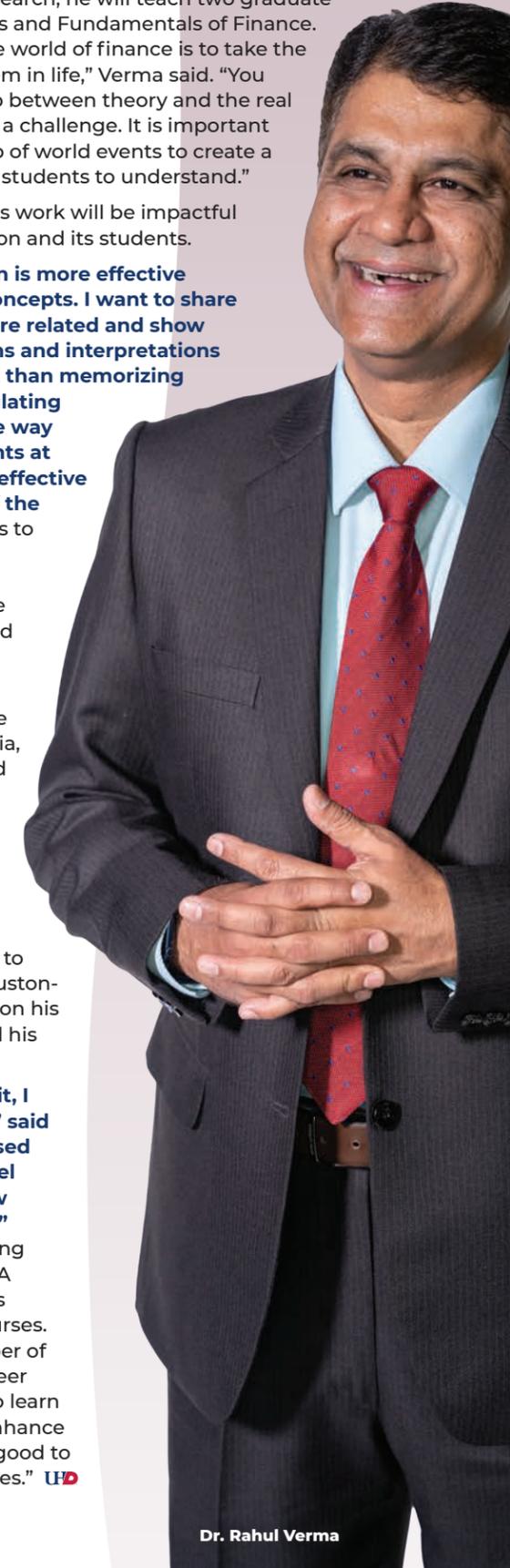
**"Business education is more effective beyond textbook concepts. I want to share how the concepts are related and show how the implications and interpretations are more important than memorizing a formula and calculating numbers. I hope the way I instruct my students at UH can be just as effective on the other side of the world."** He also plans to share what he has learned during his Fulbright experience with his students and fellow colleagues back home.

Verma's arrival to the states, by way of India, in 2000 was followed by a Ph.D. from The University of Texas – Pan America (now The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) in 2004.

All it took was a visit to the University of Houston-Downtown to settle on his academic home and his first job.

**"After a campus visit, I never looked back," said Verma. "I'm impressed by my students' level of curiosity and how motivated they are."**

In addition to teaching for the College's MBA program, he also has developed a few courses. "A substantial number of my students are career changers wanting to learn how business will enhance their career. It feels good to add value to their lives." UH



Dr. Rahul Verma

# A PHILOSOPHY OF GIVING

By Sheryl E. Taylor



Terri Lynn Dunlap

She didn't attend the University of Houston-Downtown for all the bells and whistles. She chose it for the degree.

Born in Comanche, Texas (about an hour drive from Fort Worth), UHD Alumna **Terri Lynn Dunlap** has truly experienced the Lone Star State moving from Lubbock to Euless to Irving to finally landing with her family in Houston shortly after the sixth grade.

Dunlap grew up with her twin, Sherri, sister Denise, and dog Fred. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was in chemical sales. He branched out to found a chemical additive distribution company in 1976.

She began her college career at San Jacinto College followed by the University of Houston. She decided to hit pause on college after getting married. After a few life changes, she hit reset on college and chose UHD.

**"At the time, UHD was one of a handful of universities in the country offering the degree I wanted," she said. "So for me it was a no-brainer. The University was in my hometown and allowed me to work and attend school." While working four jobs, she earned a bachelor's in supply chain management in 1981.**

Following graduation, she worked for DataPoint in San Antonio, Motorola in Seguin, and settled at Compaq headquarters in Houston. Dunlap worked for Hewlett Packard Enterprise and predecessor companies Compaq and HP for 20 years before retiring in 2017 as a Senior Supplier Quality Engineer.

## The Giving Legacy

Sherri's sudden passing in 2010 prompted Dunlap to support some of her sister's treasured passions at her alma mater. Her twin earned a doctorate in horticulture from Texas A&M University (TAMU) and devoted her career to studying flood mitigation and strategies to prevent erosion. To honor her, Dunlap established two scholarships at TAMU that benefited underserved students who participated in the Caring Aggie Mentoring Program (CAMP) in which Sherri was an active member. The program followed students from third grade through high school to the university's STEM degree program.

"My sister was so loved, the students appreciated her compassion and honesty," Dunlap said. "They knew she truly cared about them."

Following that experience with philanthropy for her sister, Dunlap began thinking about a legacy for herself and her family. Working with Houston Public Media (HPM) and the University of Houston System, Dunlap created an endowment legacy that benefits HPM and honors her parents, Ava Ann and Robbie Wayland, as well as her sisters. The gift supports HPM operations and its award-winning programming.

## Her Next Chapter ... Now

It comes as no surprise to anyone who has twins in their family that a special bond exists like no other. For Dunlap and Sherri it was no different. Looking forward, the twin siblings had planned their retirement together in Panama.

When those plans changed, Dunlap decided two things ... to give back to her alma mater and relocate to Mexico.

"When I went back to school, my sister helped. I had savings and I refused to take out any loans," she said. "Plus, I started college with two \$500 scholarships with my father's blessings that 'once you're 18, you are on your own ... yes you should go to college, but I'm not paying for it.'"

At UHD, she established the Terri Lynn Dunlap Scholarship Endowment that supports high-performing students pursuing a degree in supply chain management in the Marilyn Davies College of Business. In addition to the scholarship endowment, Dunlap also made an estate gift endowment.

When asked why give back, her impassioned answer is filled with simplicity and truth.

**"Being a part of society requires you to do your part. How do you do that? You give back. Not just money ... give your time and of yourself. Get out of your head ... make it a better world," Dunlap emphasized.**

Giving back has not stopped for Dunlap—from helping her newfound friends and neighbors with groceries or rehabbing another friend's house. **"I have enough to survive, so why not give? It's a living legacy ... give what you can give, but give."**

Throughout her career, Dunlap traveled around the world—Singapore, Europe, China, Taiwan—so making the leap to live outside the U.S. wasn't a difficult decision, but the right weather was the challenge.

"I knew I needed to find somewhere unlike Texas, where there's low humidity and minimal heat," she said laughing. After visiting Costa Rica, Ecuador, and other cities in Mexico, she moved to Santiago de Querétaro, located in Central Mexico, on January 23, 2020 ... two months before the pandemic.

Known for its well-preserved Spanish colonial architecture and notable baroque buildings, she knew it was her new home away from her hometown. "It just spoke to me and of course the wonderful weather ... 70 degrees during the day, no humidity and 50 degrees at night ... and the food," she added. **UHD**

## Terri Lynn Dunlap Scholarship Recipients

### Renzo Roman Business Administration/ Supply Chain Management (2021)

"This scholarship is an incredible opportunity for so many students to achieve their goals and make their dreams come true. Because of Ms. Dunlap's generosity, she is making this world a better place. I want to show my appreciation by exemplifying excellence in my professional and personal life as my gratitude to Ms. Dunlap and my alma mater.

### Riyan Rattan Management and Information Systems and Insurance & Risk Management (2022)

"It's important to have an abundant and generous attitude that gives others hope. Everyone deserves an opportunity to make a change in their life when given a second chance. Giving back to UHD not only nurtures our growth, supports future generations' educational journey, but it also lessens the financial burden. To help others feel such a sense of gratitude and hope reinforces what it means to experience human kindness."



## The Community Tunnel



The Greater Northside Management District and UP Art Studio, in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, unveiled a mural that honors the late Judge Alfred J. Hernandez, who grew up in the neighborhood and was the first Hispanic elected judge in Harris County. The mural, painted by Guatemalan-born Houston artist Gelson Danilo Lemus, appears on each side of the tunnel's south entrance and features images of Hernandez and his favorite plumeria flowers. The mural also includes images celebrating the relationship that UHD shares with the Greater Northside community.

"We are pleased to unveil this new mural that helps tell the story of our Greater Northside history," said Rebecca Reyna, Executive Director of the Greater Northside Management District. "It elevates the Hernandez Tunnel as a welcoming gateway for all who come to explore and celebrate our neighborhood."

## Gator League



Scipio Spinks

He's pitched for the Houston Astros and Saint Louis Cardinals, and now Scipio Spinks is a proud Gator. During his career, the former major leaguer played alongside and against some of the all-time greats (Bob Gibson and Joe Morgan, to name two). Now, he's imparting the lessons learned in the big leagues to UHD ballplayers. **"This is a special group of players. All I want to do is to give them the inspiration and the will to go out there and play the game to the best of their abilities," Spinks said.** Spinks joined the Gators in 2020 as the team's skipper. Despite a promising start, the pandemic cut the season short. Fast forward to 2021 and 2022, and he was back in the dugout guiding the Gators during practice, tournaments, and league play. While he's no longer on the mound at stadiums, Spinks is thrilled to be back in baseball, and even more enthusiastic to be coaching at UHD.

## American Heart Association Honors Students

The American Heart Association honored students from across the nation at its 2021-2022 Spring Symposium, "Hispanic-Serving Institutions Scholars Program," which invests in aspiring Hispanic researchers and healthcare professionals. Undergraduate students enrolled in biomedical and health sciences at Hispanic-Serving institutions participate in academic and career-enriching experiences for a full academic year. These scholars learn about health disparities in Hispanic communities, how cultural sensitivity can provide safe and reassuring clinical spaces, and why inclusivity is essential in science. Two Gator students were named among the 30 recipients—**Araceli Garza** (senior Biology major) and **Irvin Solano Teran** (junior Biological & Physical Science major). The students in the program conduct research under the tutelage of faculty mentors. "To power the bright future for all, we are fully committed to supporting the careers of diverse researchers and healthcare professionals through academic resources and enriching experiences, including scholarships and mentoring," said Nancy Brown, CEO, American Heart Association.



UHD Students  
Araceli Garza & Irvin Solano Teran



President Blanchard  
& UHD Student Ashly Garcia

## Rodeo Scholar

Each year, more than 800 scholarships are awarded to Texas students by the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo™ (HSLR). As one of the largest scholarship providers in the nation, the Rodeo has presented more than 20,000 scholarships valued at \$260 million since 1957. Ashly Garcia was awarded a four-year \$20,000 scholarship. Before becoming a Texan, Garcia and her family arrived in the Lone Star State from El Salvador when she was eight years old. **"I researched colleges to determine the best one that would fit my needs—from affordability and financial aid options to the degree I wanted to pursue for my eventual career to staying in state to be near my family," Garcia said. "UHD had it all! Especially the wonderful Marilyn Davies College of Business ... it's such a great school ... one of the best in the state. All those factors blended together ... it was a win-win!"**



## President's Distinguished Discussions



Nikole Hannah-Jones



Dr. Timothy Renick



Dr. Tia Brown-McNair

The President's Distinguished Lecture Series made its debut in 2021 with noteworthy speakers addressing topics affecting our community. Conversations have addressed COVID-19 and health equity among communities of color, creating diverse organizations, and environmental issues in Houston.

The series (sponsored by the UHD Office of the Provost) is supported by a \$75,000 grant from ECMC Foundation, and has proven popular on campus and in Houston. President Blanchard has overseen the development of these discussions and attributes its success to the power of the presenters. Additionally, he cites UHD's strategic priorities (those points on the University's Institutional Compass) as guiding these conversations.

**"As our students, faculty, and staff are aware, the University is guided by an Institutional Compass that leads us toward key priorities or 'Points of Excellence,'" he said. "This lecture series addresses these points through relevant dialogue and discourse with thought leaders on campus and in our community. We are grateful for the support of ECMC in supporting the growth of what promises to be a signature event at UHD and in Houston."**

The Spring 2022 President's Lecture Series on Justice, Equity & Inclusion kicked off the year with three luminaries:

Acclaimed journalist and scholar **Nikole Hannah-Jones** presented, "Inclusive Excellence, The Way

Forward: Truth, History and the 1619 Project" to a virtual UHD audience of more than 700. After the presentation, Hannah-Jones met with a small group of UHD students for a frank discussion of challenges unique to the Black community and the critical role students of color will play in the future leadership of the U.S. "I can only imagine the light you will be for future students," Hannah-Jones told the group.

- The series continued with award-winning educator **Dr. Timothy Renick**, who addressed ways institutions can bridge equity gaps to increase student success in his presentation, "Inclusive Excellence, the Way Forward: Recommitting to Student Success."
- Part III of the Summit featured **Dr. Tia Brown McNair**, Vice President in the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Student Success at the American Association of Colleges and Universities in Washington, D.C. McNair spoke about the importance of building relationships with students and closing equity gaps in her presentation, "Inclusive Excellence, The Way Forward: Recommitting to Student Success." **"I love the connection that UHD is making in students' lives," said McNair. "It's a sign of the University's commitment to the Institutional Compass and its Four Points of Excellence. Students are affected the most when we are sharing our own stories with them—it's the number one reason for student success."**



## Forging The Way Forward

UHD President Loren J. Blanchard began the New Year laying the groundwork for the University's key priorities with strategic partners at the local, state, and national level.

**Strengthening Student Outcomes with Houston Guided Pathways to Success (GPS).** Blanchard was named Chair of the Houston GPS Governing Council. Since 2015, the Houston GPS initiative has assembled area colleges and universities to join forces to enable students to graduate on time without excess credit hours and with little debt. In his new role, Blanchard will use his decades of experience in higher education to help achieve Houston GPS' efforts, which reflect his Strengthening Student Success And Equity priority.

**Educating Legislators.** President Blanchard welcomed representatives from the Texas State Legislature to learn more about the University and to better understand the day-to-day impact their

decisions have on UHD—especially on the funding that supports students. **"The University must continue to communicate its value as an institution of higher education to Texas legislators [to] benefit from more equitable state funding," Blanchard said.**

### Envisioning Educational Equity EMERGE 2022.

Blanchard joined fellow higher education leaders on a panel at the National Forum for Black Public Administrators' conference EMERGE 2022: Resilience, Strategy, & Value. The panel's topics—College, COVID, and Educational Equity—generated lively discussions on how students are coping with the changes in higher education that the pandemic has brought about and what can be done to create meaningful educational experiences for students of color. All three events illustrate Blanchard's emphasis on the role of community partners in UHD's future: **"Through strategic partnerships, we can enhance our role as a premier urban institution of higher learning and strengthen our mission of educating our most precious stakeholders—our students."**

## Center for Latino Studies Hosts Latina Entrepreneurship Academy

The largest and oldest Hispanic organization in the country and its local Houston council are collaborating to provide women with the resources and skills necessary to become successful entrepreneurs. The League of United Latin American Citizens (more commonly known as LULAC) Institute and the Coca-Cola Foundation selected Houston's LULAC Council 60 as a recipient of the LULAC Latina Entrepreneur Academy grant. As an awardee of this \$7,000 grant, LULAC Council 60 hosted a Latina Entrepreneur Academy at UHD's Center for Latino Studies. The Academy (along with LULAC and Council 60) fostered successful Latina entrepreneurs by training, motivating, and inspiring Latinas to build their own businesses or enhance existing ones. "Through this program, we hope to pave the path for these women to become business leaders in their communities

and create positive change," said Sindy Benavides, LULAC National Chief Executive Officer. "We at the University of Houston-Downtown Center for Latino Studies are proud to partner with LULAC Council 60 to bring the Latina Entrepreneurship Academy to Houston. **"Research shows that investing in women exerts the highest positive impact on the overall well-being of the community. In this light, we view the Latina Entrepreneurship Academy as a vital part of empowering Latina women to establish and grow successful businesses, but also advancing the economic potential of the broader Latino community," said Dr. Bonnie Lucero, Associate Professor of History and Director of the Center for Latino Studies.** LULAC is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to advancing the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, housing, health, and civil rights of Hispanic Americans through community-based programs operating at more than 1,000 LULAC Councils nationwide. In Texas alone, there are more than 190 LULAC Councils. Across the nation, Councils are represented in 37 states with 135,000 members, including 12 Councils in Greater Houston.



## UHD Center For Critical Race Studies Partners With Houston's Project Row Houses

UHD Center for Critical Race Studies and Houston's Project Row Houses are collaborating to host Round 53: "The Curious Case of Critical Race ... Theory?" Created in the 1970s by legal scholars, CRT was developed as a tool for scholarly analysis of the structural and racial disparities that endure in our society and engender differential experiences of law and policy across lines of difference.

**"This project was significant because it gave us the opportunity to bring our academic insights on critical race theory to Houston's local community in an engaging and creative format," said Dr. Felicia Harris, Assistant**



**Director of the UHD Center for Critical Race Studies (CCRS) and Associate Professor of Communication Studies.**

She further emphasized the impact the University has on Greater Houston communities, noting how UHD threads education into timely and relevant conversations that are impacting those communities every day. **"UHD students gained hands-on experience working with an organization that highlights the importance of education, creativity, and awareness in community transformation."**

## Wellness & Success Center

The keys to the new Wellness & Success Center (WSC) will be handed over to the Campus Community at the close of the Fall 2022 semester just in time for its official opening in January.

Before the new WSC, the Jesse H. Jones Student Life Center served the University as a hub for student activities for 25 years.

In the intervening years, student enrollment has nearly doubled and increased the demand for more exercise classes and sports and wellness options.

The WSC is almost twice the size of the original facility—featuring over 100 pieces of new equipment, an indoor running track, customized bouldering wall, a large multipurpose space with demonstration kitchen capabilities, and study/meeting spaces. The WSC also will expand upon its current offerings to include yoga, Zumba, bootcamps, personal training staff, healthy workshops (mental/physical health/nutrition), as well as continue to support the highly competitive club sports and intramural programs.

**"All credit goes to the former students who voted to fund the Wellness & Success Center," said Dr. Rhonda Scherer, Associate Director of UHD Sports & Fitness. "Their trust and value of a healthy UHD community illustrates the quality of our Gator alumni."**

UHD Sports & Fitness ultimately plans to offer limited community memberships. Affiliates or friends of the University will be eligible to purchase a half year or annual membership.

**"This facility will be a game changer, pun intended, in terms of the greater quality and space of exercise facilities and programs that will be available for the University Community," said Richard Sebastiani, Director of UHD Sports & Fitness. "It also demonstrates UHD's commitment to student wellness on campus. We expect the WSC to make a positive impact on student recruitment and retention in addition to improving the quality of student life on campus."**

## Broadway Star In The Spotlight @ UHD

There's never a dull moment in the world of theatre or for that matter, on the UHD campus. Timothy Klein, Associate Professor of Drama, invited Broadway star Josh Tower to campus for a Q&A session with his students in Drama 1304-Acting II class. Tower was on tour with the multi-award-winning "Hamilton," played at Houston's Hobby Center. Tower plays pivotal character and villain Aaron Burr ... the man who killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804. Klein's and Tower's 25-plus-year friendship began in the '90s during graduate school at The University of Carolina at Chapel Hill. **"I want my students to experience that there's a larger world outside of UHD," said the Director of O'Kane Theatre. "This unique opportunity to share a space with a Broadway star is truly special. And I'm so glad that Josh said 'yes!'"** For Tower, taking time away from the stage to inspire future thespians is a natural fit. **"It's important to inspire the next generation of theatrical professionals," Tower said. "It's really cool to have the opportunity to share my story and experiences that may pull one or two individuals into this business."**



Josh Tower

## Lora King Visits UHD

**"I want everybody to know that they matter; your voice matters; anything you post on social media matters; the hashtags matter," Lora King said. "You don't think people are paying attention, but people are always paying attention to you. You should always speak up and you should always be confident when you speak up because you do matter."** This was Lora King's advice to the UHD Community on her visit during Black History Month events. Just before her father Rodney King died in a tragic accident in 2012, she started the Rodney King Foundation to ensure his legacy lived on. She used her own money to deliver sack lunches on Skid Row in Los Angeles twice a month until her father encouraged her to create the non-profit. Now, through the Foundation, King continues her community service efforts by providing food for the homeless, diversity and inclusion training, mental health referrals, community resource navigation, and fighting for reform.



Lora King



## Job Market Asks ... UHD Answers

### 'Alexa—Fill Out My Application!' UHD Launches Master's Degree In Artificial Intelligence

In the past decade, cutting-edge technology has become commonplace as digital home assistants landed in living rooms around the globe. This Fall, UHD is paving the way for more artificial intelligence (AI) innovation with a new degree: Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence (MSAI), making the University one of only six graduate-level AI programs offered in Texas. This leading-edge program will combine theoretical knowledge of AI with hands-on training in AI-specific applications through hybrid, face-to-face, and online courses. Topics include knowledge representation and reasoning, machine and deep learning, cognitive systems, computer vision, robotics, engineering of AI systems, AI in biomedical and business intelligence, and more. **"More companies are seeking automation and AI-based decision-making approaches in their businesses," said Dr. Hong Lin, MSAI Director and Professor of Computer Science. "The demands for AI-skilled employees are growing rapidly, and our new program will give our students a prime opportunity to share their knowledge and talents in a number of thriving industries and markets."** The program concludes with a capstone project that allows students to collaborate with faculty and industry partners on real-world AI projects. Graduates of the program will be prepared to join the ranks of AI analysts, engineers, and specialists to explore new ways to use AI to tackle societal issues as diverse as cancer diagnoses and treatment, climate change, and cyber security.

### Medical Humanities Comes To Class

Arriving to a UHD classroom this Fall is a new concentration in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences' Bachelor of Arts degree program in Humanities. The Medical Humanities concentration is an interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary concentration that will have courses from the natural sciences, humanities, health sciences, social sciences, and communication studies. **"While not every student will pursue a career in medicine or affiliated health professions, we all, at some point or another, will be involved in some manner with healthcare—as a practitioner or consumer of healthcare or both," said Dr. Edmund Cueva, Professor of Classics & Humanities. "This degree is meant to investigate how humans experience and interpret illness, disease, health, and disability via art, music, history, literature, religion, architecture, philosophy, and the natural and social sciences. Indeed, the aim is to examine how culture, history, and societies react to and intersect with the parameters imposed by ancient and modern medicine. Medical Humanities is relevant and important to everyone."** The program concentration is poised to be of great significance especially in the current climate of COVID-19. Per the documentation submitted to the University Curriculum Committee for approval, "the current medical emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a keen focus on the need for a humanistic response and vision to the crisis. Now, more than ever, the reaction to this great threat must be crafted with careful and deliberate reflection based on human and humanistic principles that are meant to benefit everyone and not just a select few. This new concentration will help students approach contagion, illness, and disease and their effects on the global and local communities with a firm grounding in the insights that the humanities offer because they will be informed well about the human condition, suffering, personhood, and our relationship to ever-evolving medical and health technologies."

## New Bachelor's Program In Human Resource Management

UHD is the first higher education institution in Greater Houston to host a bachelor's program dedicated to Human Resource Management that addresses the increasing need for human resource professionals. According to the Texas Workforce Commission, the growth of human resources jobs requiring a bachelor's degree will increase between 15-20 percent over the next decade. Dr. Julio Canedo, Assistant Professor of Management, said the program is designed in alignment with the Society for Human Resources Management curriculum as well as input from human resource leaders in the Houston area. **"There is a great demand for qualified and talented human resource professionals in today's job market," Canedo noted. "With our University being located in the heart of Downtown, this new program provides for great networking and future career opportunities in the human resources field."**

### Answering The Call: New Master's In Strategic Communication

The adage that "most things don't happen overnight" is applicable to the creation, which began at least four years ago, of a new Master of Arts degree in Strategic Communication (MASC) in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences. And for UHD students, the wait is finally over beginning this Fall. The new 30-credit hour, fully online program will equip students with the cutting-edge strategic communication skills, research knowledge, technology competencies, and theories needed to create effective community engagement and messaging with culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse public audiences and stakeholders. While building on students' strengths, the program will prepare them to be advocates in their communities by focusing on major communication areas: strategic public engagement, stakeholder management, conflict resolution, and crisis communication. Additionally, the MASC has a special emphasis on community engagement to promote community advancement through collaboration and relationship-building by developing students' abilities to engage diverse communities in organizational, public, corporate, and interpersonal contexts. **"This program is targeted to communication studies' graduates as well as professionals in varied industries. I don't see limitations to its relevance and importance," noted Dr. Darius M. Benton, MASC Program Director. "Strategic communication is a unique blend between organizational communication, public relations, and media communications. The**



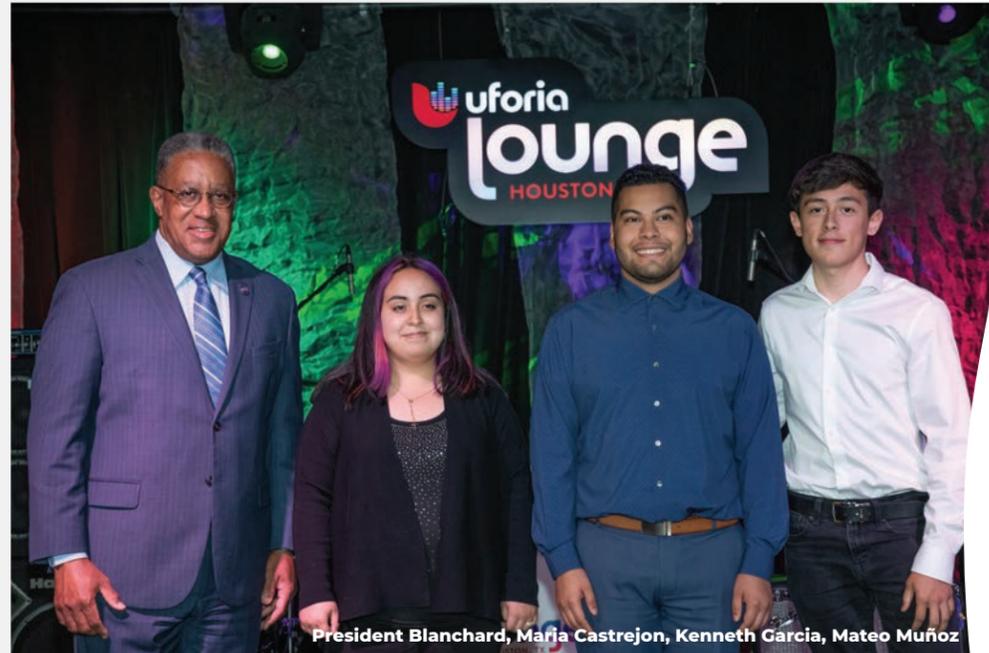
**community engagement component will enable graduates of the program to grow as advocates to produce effective communication campaigns for spaces, persons, and organizations that are meaningful to them and the communities they serve."** Once again, UHD is answering the call to fulfill the need for such a program. In Texas alone, the employment outlook is strong for strategic communication-related careers. For social and community service managers, the projected growth is 26 percent for 2018-2028, and in the U.S., it's 17 percent for 2019-2029. **"We realize that there's a significant need to offer a unique niche with our community engagement component of this program," added Benton. "UHD is determined to remain relevant to the communities we serve while also building students and scholars beyond their matriculation at UHD."**



## 'Tu Futuro' Is 'Your Future' For UHD Students

Univision Houston, the city's leading Spanish-language station group, and the University of Houston-Downtown announced the two recipients of the Tu Futuro ("Your Future") Scholarship program for 2022. This year's honorees, **Maria Castrejon** and **Kenneth Garcia**, will receive a full scholarship to pursue a four-year undergraduate degree at UHD. All applicants had to meet UHD admission criteria and submit an original essay sharing their story of how a college scholarship would enable them to positively impact their community. Representatives from Univision Houston and UHD selected the winners from more than 400 scholarship applications. The scholarship program was sponsored by Fresh Dental Care.

**"UHD's partnership with Univision embraces our mutual dedication to student success and access," said Dr. Daniel Villanueva Jr., UHD Vice President for Enrollment Management. "The Tu Futuro Scholarship opens the door to our University in so many ways, especially in helping our students achieve their academic dreams for a brighter future in our region, city, and communities."**



President Blanchard, Maria Castrejon, Kenneth Garcia, Mateo Muñoz

**Maria Castrejon**, a senior student at KIPP Connect, KIPP ISD, plans to major in nursing and hopes to create opportunities for low-income and minority patients. **Kenneth Garcia**, a senior at Alief Early College High School in Alief ISD, hopes to become an orthopedic physician to help his community.

Launched in 2021, the Tu Futuro Scholarship program is for high school seniors residing in the Greater Houston area. The full scholarship award covers four years of undergraduate studies at UHD. The 2021 scholarship recipient was Mateo Muñoz, who is now a business major at UHD.

## Gator Gifts

UHD serves an essential role in Houston's education community. Local and national businesses and organizations agree and show their support for the University's students and mission through generous donations. Recent support includes the following:

### Grow with Google



UHD is now one of 35 Hispanic-Serving Institutions receiving a grant to participate in the Grow with Google HSI Career Readiness Program (GwGCRP)! Designed to help students prepare for the workforce through semester-long digital skills training and career workshops, the program expects to train 200,000 Latino students by 2025, thanks to a \$2 million investment in the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). **"Partnering with Google and HACU, UHD Career Centers will provide our Gators additional resources to strategically prepare for their careers in today's digital economy, regardless of the industry or career path they pursue," said Kathy Knapp, Director of UHD Main Career Development.** Whether preparing for an internship or first job, students will have an opportunity to join interactive video and in-person lessons; participate in activities that help them master key digital and real-world skills; and meet with career coaches and/or peers for follow-up discussions.

### More Gator Gifts

**The C.T. Bauer Foundation** continues to shape futures and make dreams come true for students in the Marilyn Davies College of Business for the fourth consecutive year with a gift of \$635,000 for the Ted Bauer Undergraduate Business Scholars Scholarship program, which will now serve 35 students (juniors and seniors) for two years. The proof of the students benefiting from the scholarships is in the numbers. As the third cohort of students prepare to graduate in 2023, they carry an average GPA of 3.64. The scholarship's namesake, Ted Bauer, was widely regarded as an ambitious business leader known for investing in students' success, a reflection of his philosophy that "People Are The Product."

**Houston PREP**, now in its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of opening the minds of local middle and high school students to the world of learning in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), received a gift of \$50,000 from The Powell Foundation, which has supported the program since 2013. UHD launched the program (modeled after the TexPREP initiative of The University of Texas at San Antonio) to inspire students from economically and socially disadvantaged populations to pursue STEM-related careers. **"Houston PREP provides learning experiences that go beyond the regular school classroom setting," said Sangetta Gad, Director of Houston PREP. "Our programs provide an interactive and exciting environment with teachers who bring innovation into the classroom and care about the success of every student."** Students participating in the free, four-year program are from local school districts including Aldine ISD, Alief ISD, Galena Park ISD, Houston ISD, Harmony Public Schools, and Spring Branch ISD. Teachers from some of the participating districts serve as instructors for the Houston PREP classes, along with recent UHD graduates. The Powell Foundation's funding emphasis is on public education, supporting efforts that strengthen the public education system and programs that ensure children of early childhood age through 12<sup>th</sup> grade are academically prepared to pursue post-secondary education.

GATOR BITES



## Houston Endowment Gifts College of Public Service \$730K For Voter Rights Initiative

By Sheryl E. Taylor

UHD Assistant Professor of Social Work Dr. Liza Barros-Lane's email signature includes a graphic that reads: "Voting Is Social Work." For UHD's College of Public Service (CPS), it's more than just words, and Houston Endowment agrees. The private foundation awarded CPS a \$730,000 grant for interdisciplinary work over the next three years.

Barros-Lane is joined by Dr. Jonathan Schwartz, Dean of CPS, and fellow faculty members Dr. Diane M. Miller, Associate Professor of Literacy, Department of Urban Education, and Dr. Fei Yang, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work, and Director of the Houston Laboratory for Crime and Justice. Miller and Yang served as co-primary investigators on this grant. Miller will lead the program that works in the high schools and Yang will serve as team lead for the justice initiatives in the community.

In the application to Houston Endowment, the College merged its community- and collaboration-oriented Vision Statement components with the faculty members' project-specific goals surrounding real-life opportunities for voting rights and civic empowerment initiatives.

**"The only way to create empowerment and the opportunity for positive change in the community is to build partnerships with all the stakeholders, which allows everyone to bring their expertise to the table. Faculty members working on this project have their own sets of expertise, but we need input from community experts, youth, and community organizations about what issues they care about, ideas for how to develop a program that works, and best ways to measure success," said Barros-Lane. "Our program philosophy is that empowerment requires reliance on the wisdom, experiences, and resources of each of the stakeholders. Through this partnership, we will build trust and esteem in our shared ability to successfully plan and execute a vision."**

This work builds upon the civic engagement work started earlier in the College of Public Service. In the Fall 2021 semester, CPS hosted two lectures to raise students' awareness and consciousness on voting engagement issues. The lectures featured two public policy experts giving non-partisan educational discourses on voting issues. University of Houston's Dr. Suzanne Pritzker lectured on the historical context

of voting in the U.S. and Texas, and Harris County Elections Administrator Isabel Longoria discussed voter turnout in Harris County in the previous election and voting policy changes in Texas.

The lectures were part of the College of Public Service's effort to promote an environment where civic engagement is a central part of students' educational experiences. The grant will enable the College to continue this work, specifically to:

- expand its civic engagement campaign to the community.
- train students to become leaders and organizers in promoting civic engagement in the community by developing a program to train CPS students to become civically engaged leaders in the Fifth Ward community at Wheatley and Kashmere High Schools.
- build on existing relationships with Wheatley and Kashmere High Schools to collaborate on student-led civic engagement activities, including community educational events around civic issues, engagement efforts, and information sharing at the State Capitol regarding issues that impact these communities.
- train CPS students to promote and support civic engagement among youth involved in the juvenile justice system.
- prioritize helping members of the unsheltered community to access legal IDs, which is necessary to engage in civic participation.

For CPS, it's a win-win to have the opportunity to change the civic landscape not only at UHD but for the communities it serves—and of course, Gator students. "We hope that our students gain an understanding that civic engagement relies on relationships and partnerships with people in the community," emphasized Barros-Lane.

**Dean Schwartz recognizes the value of this project for the College, and he sees the Mission and Vision of CPS as promoting equity and justice. "We believe that civic and voting engagement are an important part of making a positive difference in the community," he said. "This grant will provide an opportunity for our social work students to be leaders in these communities and to engage Houston youth in learning and advocating for change, which we hope will lead to a lifetime of civic engagement."**

# Gator GIFTS

**Enbridge**, a leading North American energy infrastructure company, made a \$20,000 commitment to the Marilyn Davies College of Business (MDCOB) Career Center for its Employer Partnership Program. Over a three-year period, Enbridge will support the Career Center's initiatives to prepare MDCOB students for professional careers.

**Marine Insurance Seminars Inc.** donated \$10,000 to fund scholarships in the Insurance and Risk Management program in the MDCOB. Marine Insurance Seminars Inc. provides education in the fields of marine and energy insurance and maritime law by offering continuing education for professionals and by supporting colleges and universities who are developing the marine and energy professionals of the future.

**TC Energy**, a North American energy company, made a \$10,000 commitment to the College of Sciences & Technology in support of the Diversity in STEM series created by the UHD SynergIE Program. Diversity in STEM seeks to provide students with opportunities to interact online with a diverse group of STEM leaders throughout the 2021-2022 academic year. This series included an on-campus event where students could obtain more information on research opportunities, learn about mentoring and building a support network, and participate in one-on-one visits with guest speakers.



TC Energy's Christopher Thomas, Sr. Manager, USGP Commissioning, participates in College of Sciences & Technology's Diversity In STEM Series.

**The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)** awarded \$300,000 to UHD students through its Reskilling Grant program. This award represents the third round of funding by the THECB under the program, which seeks to assist returning students in completing degrees that will lead to professional advancement. The Reskilling Grant program aligns with UHD's strong commitment to students seeking to return and complete their college education, including First Time In College and working adult students.

## Urban Education Awarded \$850,000 Grant

It may seem obvious to anyone that higher education is dedicated to student success. However, student success begins long before college. Ultimately, it starts with teachers. The need for diversity is essential, even critical. The College of Public Service's Department of Education was awarded \$850,000 from Houston Endowment for its Diversity, Access, Inclusion, Representation (D.A.I.R.) to Teach Program. "D.A.I.R. to Teach benefits the individuals who take part in the program—the college, university, and our partner school districts," said Christal Burnett-Sánchez, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Urban Education in the College of Public Service. **Dr. Matthew Fugate, Assistant Professor of Urban Education added, "Unfortunately, throughout our society there are systemic barriers that limit access and equitable opportunities for success for students of Color and other underrepresented populations. These barriers exist from early childhood through post-secondary education."** It may or may not come as a

surprise that there is a significant education disparity that exists in the representation of teachers of Color in classrooms across the U.S.—approximately 82 percent of the teaching workforce being white female. "Even though the teaching demographics across Texas are only slightly better, with 61 percent white teachers, there's a clear need for greater diversity in the teaching workforce reflective of the backgrounds and experiences of students in the schools," noted Burnett-Sánchez. Researchers have demonstrated that students of Color have more positive social-emotional, academic, and behavioral outcomes when they are in classrooms led by teachers who look like them. **"Future teachers who complete the program will reflect diverse backgrounds and serve as role models for their students, colleagues, and communities," emphasized Burnett-Sánchez. "Most importantly graduates of the program will benefit all the students whose lives they touch."**



## Faculty Member Leads The Charge For Change

Ralph Waldo Emerson perhaps said it best. It's not about the destination. It's about the journey. Meet Dr. Lizette Burks, who was selected as one of 12 committee members for the inaugural National Board on Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Standards Committee to develop the first set of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) standards for NBPTS that will be implemented into K-12 areas to certify teachers nationally. She also serves as co-chair of the committee to review public comments on these standards. In July, she co-presented the completed standards to NBPTS Certification Council and to the NBPTS Board of Directors. **"What originally drew me to this opportunity is that it comes back to policy," Burks said. "I've seen a lot of DEI ramp up after the public murder of George Floyd, and the continuous headlines of Black men being murdered publicly has been an impetus for DEI and NBPTS' work in education spaces.** The standards we are writing encompass all areas of teaching," she emphasized. "They aren't superficial ... they delve deeper into self-growth for teachers. DEI work is not an action item you check off and say, 'I did this.' **It's about understanding your real identity, reckoning what your reality is and the reality of other communities you don't belong to. Once you figure out what that looks like, you become more culturally competent to help all communities thrive.**"



Dr. Lizette Burks

## UHD Ranked Among Universities Offering Best Online Programs



U.S. News & World Report released its annual list of top universities and academic programs, and the University of Houston-Downtown once again is ranked among the institutions offering the Best Online Programs in the nation. UHD rose in the rankings in the categories of Best Online Master's Criminal Justice Programs (No. 27 and No. 15 for Veterans) and Best Online Bachelor's Programs (No. 80). This is the fourth year in a row that the University has been recognized in these categories. The University's online Master of Science in Criminal Justice was UHD's first web-based academic program and continues to flourish. Based within the College of Public Service, its courses support students' mastery of criminological theory and focus on program evaluation and criminal justice administration. **"I'm excited that we have once again earned these designations, especially in the time of COVID-19 when online education was more relied upon than ever," said Dr. Ashley Blackburn, Interim Associate Dean and Professor of Criminal Justice.** These rankings complement other accolades received by the University over the past year including a recent nod from U.S. News & World Report as one of the Top Performers on Social Mobility and a No. 1 ranking as the most diverse institution of higher education in the southern region of the U.S.

## A Fellow Indeed

### KAYLA MAZARIEGO NAMED 2022 NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOW

By Sheryl E. Taylor

**A**nyone who meets Kayla quickly learns that she has goals ... and there's no stopping her from achieving them.

Mazariego was named a 2022-2023 Newman Civic Fellow by the Boston-based non-profit Campus Compact, which works to advance the public purposes of higher education. For this year's cohort, the organization selected 173 student civic leaders from 38 states, Washington, D.C., and Mexico.

**In her essay to Campus Compact, Mazariego said, "As a child, I was always told to mind my tongue and behave like a lady in certain instances; my voice has always been my most powerful tool, and I use it to address issues of injustice and inequality."**

Her story rings true for a number of UHD students who strive to make a difference in the lives of their families and communities. Mazariego experienced firsthand gangs, domestic violence, and drug use within her community. In response, she created a social media platform to address these issues as well as political polarization and inequality.

The third-year, first-generation student continues to use her voice in her community and alongside her peers at UHD to address issues such as social inequalities and voting rights. As a member of the University's Honors Program, she worked on an honors research project with UHD's Dr. Judith Harris on how to lower the recidivism rate at halfway houses, which she presented at this year's UHD Student Research Conference.

Her mentor Harris only had a few words when describing her mentee, "She's absolutely brilliant," said the Associate Professor of Criminal Justice Harris.

Mazariego's community activism began volunteering at homeless shelters. **"I know what it's like to be homeless, and I want to give back to the community that has so graciously helped me in my time of need," said the 20-year-old. "As a college student, I enjoy educating my peers on civic matters, why it's so important to exercise our constitutional right to vote and attend protests that promote human rights and equality, such as Black Lives Matter and women's rights."**

After graduation, she plans to set her childhood dreams into motion. "As soon as I get my bachelor's, I'm coming right back for my master's degree," she said smiling. Post college, her first stop is the FBI. "I was never able to help myself as a child and now I want the opportunity to help others who can't help themselves, especially those affected by sex trafficking. I want to make a difference."

**"Kayla is a passionate and exceptional leader with a strong voice who enthusiastically speaks about her future short-and long-term goals," said President Blanchard, in his recommendation letter for Mazariego. "She inspires those around her with her energy and constant drive for success. Regardless of her upbringing, Kayla is not afraid to take on challenges and make a difference in the world." UHD**



UHD Student Kayla Mazariego



Dr. Peter J. Hotez & Dr. Marie Elena Bottazzi

## College of Public Service Names Social Work Persons of The Year

By Sheryl E. Taylor

It's an annual tradition, but this year was slightly different. Each year, UHD's Center for Public Service & Community Research (within the College of Public Service Social Work Program) selects one individual to be honored as its Social Work Person of the Year.

But the past few years have been far from normal ... in fact, unprecedented, due to COVID-19. So, it's befitting that the College recognized two persons to share the honor—top vaccine experts Dr. Peter J. Hotez and Dr. Maria Elena Bottazzi, who are also nominees for the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize.

**“Now in our 11<sup>th</sup> year, the UHD Social Work Person of the Year celebration is about creating opportunities for our students to learn, grow, and most importantly, be inspired by examples of transformative public service,” said Dr. Dawn McCarty, Professor and Director of the Social Work Program. “In these COVID-19 times, Drs. Bottazzi and Hotez have done something extraordinary for the common good in their development of a vaccine that is patent-free and thus accessible and affordable worldwide.”**

Houston Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher nominated Hotez and Bottazzi for the Nobel Prize.

In a press release, Fletcher noted that she nominated the pair because “as people around the world confront the many challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the efforts to develop and distribute a low-cost vaccine to all people in all nations

without patent limitation represent the work for fraternity between nations and people that the Nobel Peace Prize embodies and celebrates. Dr. Hotez and Dr. Bottazzi's effort to develop the CORBEVAX vaccine is truly one of international cooperation and partnership to bring health, security, and peace around the world. It is a contribution that is of the greatest benefit to humankind.” Hotez and Bottazzi's CORBEVAX vaccine has been authorized in India.

**“Dr. Bottazzi and I have worked together for years, and our purpose has never changed—to bring attention to the neglected diseases of poverty and build a new generation of vaccines in the pursuit of global vaccine diplomacy,” said Hotez, Dean of the Baylor College of Medicine National School of Tropical Medicine. Bottazzi serves as Associate Dean, and the pair co-direct the Texas Children's Center for Vaccine Development.**

Last year, Hotez participated in a virtual discussion with President Blanchard—“COVID-19 Health, Safety and Vaccine”—as part of the University's COVID-19 Vaccine Information Forums.

Hotez and Bottazzi join an elite group of Houstonians who have earned the honor of Social Work Person of the Year. Previous honorees include former Harris County Clerk Chris Hollins; restaurateur Russell Ybarra; Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg; Jim “Mattress Mack” McIngvale; Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner; Pulitzer Prize-winning Houston Chronicle columnist Lisa Falkenberg; and BakerRipley President Emerita Angela Blanchard. **UHD**



## Taking Her Studies Abroad

By Mark Kramer

**V**eronica Gorostieta is ready to take on the world. The junior International Business major is doing just that as a new Gilman Scholar.

Gorostieta is one of more than 300 students nationwide to receive the Benjamin A. Gilman International Study Abroad Scholarship sponsored by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Her once-in-a-lifetime learning experience will begin at the start of the Fall semester as she heads to Seoul, South Korea, to participate in projects at Kookmin University. **“It is an absolute honor to be a part of this prestigious program and named a Gilman Scholar,” she said. “Without a doubt, I am thrilled to receive the support of Gilman to not only complete a one-of-a-kind project during my stay, but also give back to UHD upon my return.”**

As an administrative intern working in UHD's Office of Study Abroad, Gorostieta became fascinated with the opportunities the Gilman Scholarship program provides. The scholarship program enables students of limited financial means to study or intern abroad to provide skills critical to U.S. national security and economic prosperity. The Institute of International Education has administered the program since its inception in 2001.

**“What drew me to this program was that it encourages students to gain knowledge of other cultures and languages, which is often hard to do for students who are first-generation college students and minorities, like myself,” Gorostieta said.**

Gorostieta's stay in South Korea will afford her the opportunity to “acquire as many skills as possible to excel in my career and become well-versed in another country's customs and languages,” she said. “Studying abroad in

South Korea will help me build a strong foundation that will differentiate me from other international business majors when I graduate and join the workforce.”

While in South Korea, Gorostieta plans to participate in various volunteer activities. **“Throughout my life, I was always taught that we should help others and give back in whatever way we can,” she said. “By helping others not just at UHD, but in my community, I have come to understand the true meaning and value of service. The positive impact of simple actions like lending my skills and time for other people is truly the best reward.”**

One of the most notable volunteer efforts Gorostieta helped organize at UHD was a fundraiser to benefit those affected by the war in the Ukraine. **“It personally helped me see that as long as there is a will to help others, it doesn't matter where in the world you stand because anything is possible,” she said.**

She also encourages her fellow Gator students to apply for study abroad opportunities.

**“Although studying abroad might seem like an unobtainable opportunity to many, it doesn't have to be,” she said. “There are many options, paths, and resources to choose from to assist students regardless of background and financial status. Similarly, I hope others can learn from my experience and plan their own journey.” **UHD****



## Upward Bound Widens Its Reach: UHD Program Receives \$4.3 Million Grant

By Sheryl E. Taylor

Helping Houston high school students recognize their academic potential and prepare for college has always been the goal of the Upward Bound program at UHD. Now, thanks to a \$4.3 million grant (over the next five years), the program will be able to expand its offerings and services.

learning and field experiences. We also provide our students with academic instruction, tutoring, and advising; information on financial aid programs; assistance in completing financial aid applications; financial literacy; and support for applying to college.”

Lewis also noted that students in their senior year can enter a summer work-study program to earn college credits at UHD through its BRIDGE program—project-sponsored credit courses prepare students for the first Fall semester of college enrollment at their school of choice. “This opportunity for students has increased enrollment at UHD, within the University of Houston



**“We were astonished and excited because we could now widen our reach,” said Dawana Lewis, Director of Upward Bound at UHD. “We started from serving only 60 students to tripling our reach with a massive 175 students annually throughout Houston. We are creating a pipeline to higher education and UHD specifically by providing our students with a peek at University life on campus during the Summer, Fall, and Spring semesters as early as ninth grade.”**

UHD’s Upward Bound, a federally funded program, serves students from the Houston Independent School District through mentoring sessions, tutorials, test preparation, college tours, cultural excursions, social events, virtual tours (think the Bill and Melinda Gates Museum in Seattle), and career tours across the nation—all specifically catering to each student.

Lewis and her hardworking team coined the nickname “College Prep Central” for UHD’s Upward Bound program, which has been at the University since 1980. “Our goal is to provide programming and resources to underrepresented populations and make higher education more accessible to low-income, first-generation college students,” Lewis noted. “This goal is achieved by developing soft skills as well as social and emotional IQ through real-world

System, as well as at other colleges across the nation—at both undergraduate and graduate levels.”

Kennedy Bosie, an alumna of Upward Bound’s 2019 class, attended Houston’s South Early College High School where she earned a high school diploma while earning a degree at Houston Community College simultaneously. At a family friend’s suggestion, she decided to try Upward Bound.

**“I started my journey at Upward Bound as a rising junior; at the time, I had no idea what my future held,” Bosie said. “I was welcomed with open arms and treated like family from the beginning, with both the staff and students creating an accommodating environment that helped me thrive during my high school career.”**

Through Upward Bound’s aid, “I was accepted to the college of my dreams (University of North Texas), and graduated early with honors in 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts in English,” said Bosie. “I was elated when Upward Bound invited me back to work for them since I had such an amazing experience as a student. My goal now as a mentor is to give that same space, opportunities, and experiences to the new students who become part of our Upward Bound family.” **UHD**

## Acting Up For Social Justice

By Laura Wagner

Lane Lewis ('03) started acting up in high school. Driven by his passion for '80s punk and New Romantic music—think Depeche Mode and Duran Duran—he began wearing eyeliner and outfits considered “disruptive” at his conservative Deer Park High School. His parents were unaware until the principal called. “Once my folks were alerted, they started checking my wardrobe every day before I left the house,” Lewis said, laughing. “It was high drama for a 16-year-old.”

Lewis turned his musical passion into a paying gig as a DJ in the Houston nightclub scene before quitting to focus on college, where he studied mental health. When he met legendary gay rights activist Bill Scott in 1987, Lewis knew he’d found his calling.

Scott, a pivotal gay-rights activist in Greater Houston during the '80s and '90s, had successfully launched much-needed services for the gay and lesbian community in New York, then replicated that success in Houston. But one service was still lacking.

Lewis asked Scott why no one had created a safe space for gay and lesbian homeless and at-risk teens to receive counseling and access to other resources. **“It was a highly sensitive topic at the time,” Lewis said. “Society was not prepared to acknowledge a large group of young queer people existed—especially homeless and/or HIV-positive ones.”**

But Lewis had met a number of these teens while DJ-ing in nightclubs and volunteering at a local homeless shelter for youth, Covenant House, so he knew firsthand the need was very real. “I told Bill, let’s do it,” Lewis said. Together, they launched the Lewis-Scott Youth Center. “We wanted our names on the door, so people would know we were not afraid of the gay teen HIV issue no one was talking about.”

He didn’t stop there, though. Lewis continued his career of activism, including joining groups like ACT UP! and Queer Nation, until Bill Scott weighed in.

“Bill Scott once again changed the course of my life,” Lewis said. Scott told him to go back to school. “I had my associate degree from Houston Community College and a social work license. I was in my early 30s, so I was not a traditional student. I wanted a college with small class sizes and a convenient location.”

**There was only one place in Houston that met his criteria: the University of Houston-Downtown. “On the first day of class as an Interdisciplinary Studies major, I thought, ‘Oh yes, I’m where I need to be now,’” Lewis remembered.**

The return to college didn’t stop Lewis from pursuing social reform. He worked to secure funding to hire attorneys to fight Texas legal code 21.06, which made same-sex sexual activity a crime. The landmark case, Lawrence v. Texas, went before the Supreme Court, which ultimately ruled the Texas law and similar laws across the country unconstitutional.

**“With the stroke of a pen, being gay was no longer illegal in the U.S.,” Lewis said. “That meant gay people could no longer be fired or kicked out of their apartment for being gay, so the gay community for the first time had occupational and habitational safety.”**

He added, “That ruling helped lay the groundwork for same-sex marriage to be recognized as a fundamental right under the U.S. Constitution.”

The Supreme Court decision and his graduation two weeks later were key events in Lewis’ life. He went on to serve successfully in local politics for several years before launching his own insurance business in Houston.

His advice for UHD students who want to make a difference?

“First, education. That’s most important,” he said. “It’s not about getting a piece of paper. It’s about creating opportunities for yourself by exploring what you’re interested in and what you’re good at. That’s why UHD was such a good fit for me—it gave me the freedom to find my way.”

And second? “It’s probably obvious after talking to me,” he said, smiling. “Find your passion, then find a way to act on it.” **UHD**



UHD Alum Lane Lewis

# And The Award Goes To ...

This year's Faculty Award recipients were asked the question when thinking about student success:

"What did you learn as a college student that you now incorporate into your teaching?"

UHD Faculty Senate recognized these academic community members who provide exceptional teaching, service, and scholarship.

By Sheryl E. Taylor



## Excellence In Service

Dr. Godwin Y. Agboka

PROFESSOR, TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

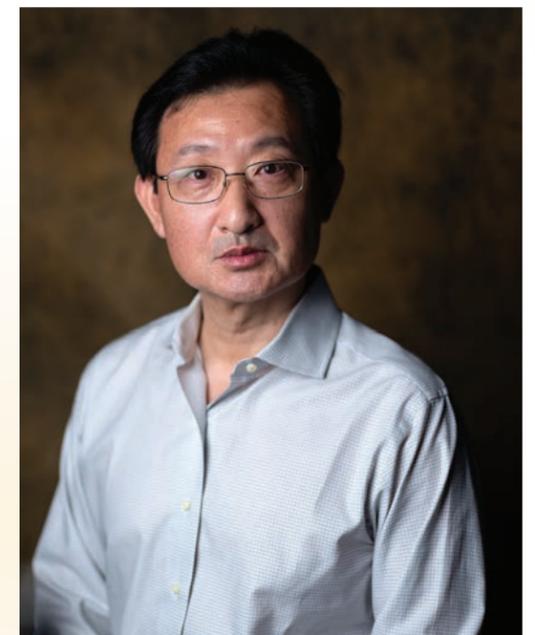
"Growing up in Ghana, educational opportunities were different than in the U.S. Education in Ghana is basically the primary means for attaining social and economic capital, so for me and many others, education was the only option. These realities challenged my worldview of education in terms of what enhances or inhibits students' experiences; they also shaped my perspectives about teaching social justice and student success. I am thoughtful about the classroom experience and the structure of my courses, the pedagogical choices I make, the resources I provide, and the type of care I extend to students and to connect students to the external community to prepare them for the world of work."

## Distinguished Faculty

Dr. Qing (Ray) Cao

PROFESSOR, SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

"Experiential learning is one of my main pedagogies. I learn my students' needs and wants by developing teamwork skills; understanding real-world experiences; and improving critical thinking skills. To enhance their critical thinking skills, I promote conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or decision-making in the class with a reality-based approach to engage my students for high-impact learning experiences. Moreover, I learn from my students through their personal and/or work experiences that diversity is prevalent and critical in today's society by encouraging the formation of diverse student teams (e.g., race, gender, nationality, backgrounds, experiences, perspectives)."





## Distinguished Faculty

**Dr. Edmund Cueva**

PROFESSOR, CLASSICS & HUMANITIES

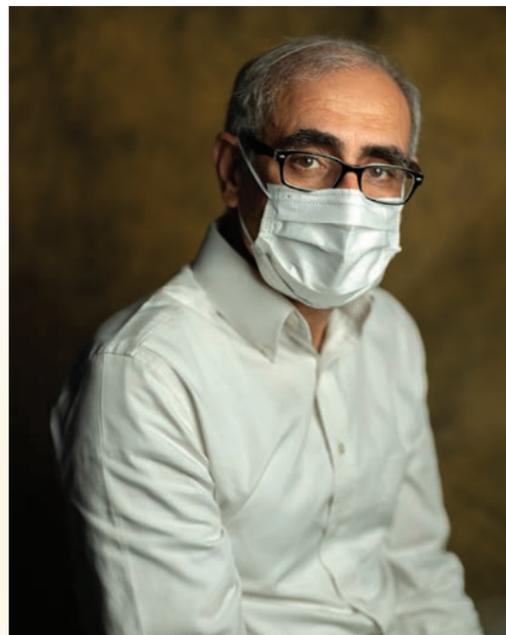
"The one thing that always stands out about my undergraduate experience is my reluctance to take full advantage of what my university offered me. As a first-generation student, I really didn't make much use of student support systems. Now, after 34 years of teaching, I am motivated to ensure that in all my classes, students know that professors and staff care and that UHD has much to offer. In fact, I treat all my students as if they were first-generation students and intrusively supply answers to questions that I am sure all undergraduates ask at some point during their studies to help enculturate them into academic life."

## Outstanding Adjunct

**Dr. Mehdi Esmaeilian**

DIRECTOR  
LABORATORY NATURAL SCIENCES

"I engaged in undergraduate research early in my college years, which gave me a sense of belonging and autonomy to explore my curiosity and be mesmerized by the concepts I learned. As a faculty member, I am proactive and participate in the design and implementation of research-based projects to inspire our new generation of scientists and help them to explore their own curiosities. As an educator, I have always tried to establish a connection with my students by sharing my own struggles and failures as a student and how I overcame such difficulties."



## Excellence in Scholarly/ Creative Activity

**Dr. Katrina Rufino**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, SOCIAL SCIENCES

"I learned the importance of clarity and humor in the classroom. As a student, I found the most success with professors and mentors who were clear in their expectations about their courses, assignments, and me. I have similarly learned that students excel when expectations are clear from the outset. As a college student, I was drawn to professors who used humor in their classes, as they were always the most engaging. As such, I try to incorporate humor into my classroom as much as possible, particularly given the weight of the topics we often discuss."



## Outstanding Lecturer

**Dr. Meghan Minard**

LECTURER, BIOLOGY

"Students are more likely to succeed when they can see the relevance to the course content in their everyday lives, and when they can see themselves in the content. Two things I learned as a college student that I incorporate into my teaching: learning is fun, and science is all around us and is for all of us. The beautiful thing about science is that it explains so much of the 'wonder' and the 'why' that we ask every day. I hope to inspire students to share something they've learned. If students can see the relevance in their lives, I consider the class a success!" 



## Excellence In Teaching

**Dr. Austin (Rob) McKee**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

"My time as a college student profoundly influenced my teaching style. I learned several lessons that extended far beyond the subjects my professors taught. The great professors aren't the easy ones. Great professors learn how to challenge their students to make meaningful (i.e., nonrandom, predictable) mistakes and how to avoid making those mistakes. They also often challenge themselves and sometimes make mistakes, too. An effective professor calls upon the students' general knowledge to draw parallels with the course content to enhance the learning experience and imbue them with some degree of expertise by the end of the course."

# A Laid-Back Lager

By Sheryl E. Taylor

If you know anything about UHD Alumnus Jeff Handojo, one of the first questions you may ask him is: What's your favorite beer? Wait, what?

## Before we get to that, let's get a bit of background.

Handojo (pronounced just like it's spelled) is a native Texan who grew up in the Cypress suburbs. His dad immigrated from Indonesia to Jacksonville, Texas, in 1972, moved to Houston in 1975-76, and worked for Texas Instruments back when 290 was a two-lane highway.

Jeff was born in 1977, graduated from Cy-Fair High School in 1995, and attended The University of Texas (UT) at Austin.

**"Coming from a traditional Asian household, it was 'hey you're going to med school to be a doctor or have a career in medicine,'" Handojo said. "I said sure whatever**



**because I just wanted to get out of the house." While at UT, he studied as a pre-pharmacy major for almost three years.**

Unfortunately, Handojo's UT college career wasn't stellar. "I had the best time of my life at the expense of my grades," he said. "They say C's and D's make degrees, but that definitely wasn't the case for me."

## Love Brought Me In and Got Me Through to Graduation

He was faced with a dilemma. His future wife, who was attending Texas A&M University, told him that she wasn't going to marry a bum.

So, why UHD?

**"I actually didn't choose it," said Handojo. "It was crystal clear that I needed to do something." So, he returned home and applied to UHD. "It was the first place I applied. It wasn't too far from where I was working, and I never looked back."**

"At the time the Computer Science program was still growing, but it's so great how much it has grown since I've graduated," he added. "I really appreciated the small classes because I was able to get to know my professors really well, which was pretty awesome. I could talk to my instructors one-on-one and develop familial relationships. I didn't realize how much I needed that. It was critical to my success at UHD." In fact, Handojo still talks to his UHD professors today.

Now 21 years later, his feelings for his first alma mater haven't changed.

**"It's a gem," Handojo said. "I would tell anyone to give UHD a closer look and you will achieve bigger and better things."**

After graduating in 2000 from UHD with a degree in computer science, he went into the industry as a programmer. Fast forward to 2008, Handojo decided to start his own software and consulting company—HNN Innovation.

"Thirteen years later and we're still rocking and rolling. Running your own business is a blessing. Every bit you put in, you get out," he said. "It's always fun."

With three kids under four years of age, Handojo remembers 2009 like it was yesterday.

**"I was folding clothes and I said to my wife (whom he describes as a saint among saints), I think I want to go back to school and get my MBA," he said. "And she asked me what's my motivation?"**

His answer was simple. It was a dream he wanted to achieve. Admittedly, his first semester at the University of Houston's Bauer School of Business was challenging. He took evening classes so he could work during the day and see his family. Within two years, Handojo earned an MBA. "It was the best thing I ever did. It was absolutely wonderful," he said.

## Hobby Between Friends

Quick recap. In 2000 he graduated from UHD, 2008 he started his own business, 2010 he attended grad school, 2012 he earned an MBA, and along the way he picked up a hobby ... home brewing.

Here's the backstory ... a lesson in two degrees of separation involving a high school classmate, a good friend, and a dream of going pro.

**"It's every home brewer's dream to go pro because you think that what you're creating is better than anything you could buy; especially after eight beers ... everything tastes better," he said, laughing.**

Brandon Moss (high school classmate), Bryce Baker (the good friend), and Handojo were brewing one weekend and the question was posed, "What would it take for the three of us to do this full-time?" So, the two engineers (Moss and Baker) and the computer science wiz used their respective fields to create a few specs and "it just snowballed from there," Handojo said.

In 2013, Handojo, Moss, and Baker started their official campaign. In 2015, they opened the doors of 11 Below Brewery Company in the Spring/Klein/Champions area and sold their first keg. The brewery celebrated its six-year anniversary this past spring.

**"We wanted to lay roots where we live," Handojo emphasized. "We wanted to make sure we are growing where we grew up."**

What's in the name? It's simple mathematics. Baker, Moss, and Handojo all worked in the oil industry and the 11 represented the difference in their lives from one industry to another.

"A barrel of crude oil is 42 US gallons, and a barrel of beer is only 31 gallons," said Handojo. "We went from 42 to 31 gallons ... 11 below our former lives."

11 Below Brewery products are found in all H-E-Bs, Specs, Total Wines, Whole Foods, as far north as College Station, and as far south as Galveston. The company offers 18 beer varieties across three categories (All Time, Seasonal, Sometimes).

So, what are Handojo's favorites? All Time: Oso Bueno (for Shiner lovers); Seasonal: A Lil' Snack (German Style Pilsner), and Sometimes: Robocall (sneaky strong beer).

**"We wanted to create a product that bridges memories—enriching life experiences, having a good time, smiling and laughing with your family. Sometimes you cry over a beer, sometimes you laugh over a beer ... that's what we're trying to do."**

Describe your life as beer?

"Laid-Back Lager ... not too weak, not too strong, not necessarily average, but one that evokes memories of good times," he said. **UFD**



UHD Alum Jeff Handojo

VIEW FROM THE BAYOU

The University of Houston-Downtown's 72<sup>nd</sup> Commencement Ceremonies hosted proud parents, relatives, and friends as more than 1,600 graduates crossed the stage to receive their degrees at two ceremonies.

President Loren J. Blanchard emphasized to the graduates that even though they have finished this part of their academic journey, their impact will be felt for years to come.

**“Because of your hard work, your reputation, and your drive, people are already taking notice,” he said. “How do we know this? We see it in the incoming freshman applications, which are at record numbers for this upcoming academic year. These potential new students are doing it because they see your success. We know it because UHD is being considered more as a school of first choice.”**

Two distinguished civic leaders, Texas State Senator John Whitmire and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, shared words of advice with the graduates. UHD student speakers Gabriela Medina Torres and Sebastian Troitino encouraged their fellow graduates to keep moving forward in their lives and careers.

**“The most powerful part of my UHD education is that I leave this institution full of hope and gratitude. UHD is part of who we are now, and we will be forever connected and supported as we move forward to build a better world.”**

Gabriela Medina Torres

**“UHD helped me find my purpose. I learned more than just academic terms and business concepts. I found my purpose through learning about the value of friendships, the power of networking, and how beautiful life can be. This inspired me to live a good life and motivated me to help others do the same.”**

Sebastian Troitino



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