

UHD magazine

Fall 2018



UHD
University of Houston
DOWNTOWN

Empowering Houston

Answering the Call for Big Data





GRIT | Noun

COURAGE, bravery, pluck,
mettle, backbone, spirit, strength
of character, strength of will,
moral fiber, steel, nerve,
fortitude, toughness,
perseverance, endurance, guts



UHD President, Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz visits North Shore High School.

From The President's Desk

Welcome to UHD Magazine.

WIn April, I reached my one-year anniversary as president of the University of Houston-Downtown. It's been quite a first year, with both challenges and triumphs—from a historic storm that tested our resiliency to celebrating the academic accomplishments of more than 3,000 graduates. My first year on campus has been memorable to say the least.

During this time, I've had the pleasure of hosting numerous city and state leaders on campus—all of whom have expressed a deep admiration for this great University. There also have been academic honors awarded to our institution; a collaboration with NASA; the launch of a major capital campaign; the groundbreaking of the new College of Sciences & Technology Building; and many more noteworthy milestones.

I am proud to be surrounded by students, faculty and staff who are committed to empowering through education to make our world, city and state even better and stronger.

Our fall issue's theme, Empowering Houston, spotlights two students—one who has dedicated herself to being an agent of change for social causes on campus and within her community and another who is applying communication theories learned in our classrooms to a professional broadcasting career. The magazine also features our Corporate Fellows in the Marilyn Davies College of Business who are sharing their industry insights with the next generation of Houston business leaders. Our cover story, Data Driven, highlights how the College of Sciences & Technology is answering the demand for data science professionals, which is at an all-time high. The College offers a bachelor's in data science—the first-of-its kind in Texas—and a master's in data analytics. The pairing of these degrees will provide our students with a distinct advantage in the data science arena.

I knew this was an exceptional institution when I first visited the campus in 2016. After more than a year of working alongside UHD's committed faculty, staff and students, I am even more impressed by the University. I am proud to share its accomplishments with you and look forward to many more years as president.

Our stories are endless on how we're Empowering Houston.



I.S.M.

Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz

President, University of Houston-Downtown



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A digital version of UHD magazine is available at UHD.edu/magazine

New Dean of University College

AFTER A NATIONAL SEARCH, Dr. Scott Marzilli joined UHD as dean of University College and chief student success officer on June 1. Marzilli served as assistant vice president for Academic Innovation & Student Success and dean of the University College at The University of Texas at Tyler (UT Tyler).

Marzilli's first impression of UHD was displayed on its web homepage: Finish UHD Strong.

"I learned quickly that UHD is about providing accessible pathways, affordability and attainability," said Marzilli. "All students are not created exactly the same or don't fall into the exact same mold. UHD understands that you have to create pathways and avenues for each individual student's success. I knew that UHD was the best fit for me."

The native Southern Californian holds a Ph.D. in motor behavior from Florida State University; a Master of Science in human movement & sports and a Bachelor of Science in physical education/kinesiology from California Polytechnic State University. The award-winning educator's career spans more than 20 years in higher education, and he has led several student success initiatives at UT Tyler.

"When it comes time for my son to go to the college, I want to be assured that the university he chooses provides him the opportunity to both grow as an individual, as well as provide support to him, if and when he needs it," said Marzilli. "Some schools are great at this, but not every school gets it. UHD gets it. This University is committed to helping students succeed in the 21st century by giving them academic and real-life skills of teamwork, innovation



Dr. Scott Marzilli

and creativity to be prepared for their future careers and making their dreams come true."

Marzilli fills the position previously held by Dr. Chris Birchak whose career spanned more than 30 years at the University. **UHD**

Hosting Great Conversations



GATORGRIT SPEAKER SERIES IDEAS OF LEADERSHIP AND RESOLVE

THIS YEAR, UHD launched its Gator Grit Speaker Series to highlight regional leaders and showcase examples of grit that inspire courage, resolve and tenacity at UHD and in the community. The series' inaugural event, "Houston Heroes: Leadership During Difficult Times," featured insights from Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez;

Harris County Flood Control District Meteorologist Jeff Lindner; and Houston Fire Chief Samuel Peña.

The University brought "A Conversation with D'Artagnan Bebel: Life Stories on Leadership, Finding Your Way," with vice president and general manager of FOX 26 Houston. The series also hosted Harris County Judge Ed Emmett. UHD also followed up on the discussion regarding Houston's recovery from the massive storm with the town hall event, "Harvey: 6 Months Later." This event partnered UHD with ABC13 and featured a panel of speakers that included UHD President, Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz and representatives from non-profits and first responders.

"Great universities host conversations on the issues affecting our community," said Muñoz. "UHD is doing just that." **UHD**

Turning the Page



Daniel Peña

THREE UHD PROFESSORS are sharing their academic and creative insights in recently published books.

Daniel Peña, assistant professor of creative writing, published his first novel, "Bang," which tells the story of two undocumented brothers who find themselves stranded in Mexico. The book was published by Arte Público Press, the nation's leading publisher of literature by Latino authors.

Dr. Creshemra Murray's "Leadership Through the Lens: Interrogating Production, Presentation and Power" (Lexington Books) explores essays

that examine how the media often influences all audience's understanding of leaders and its depictions of women of color in leadership roles. The assistant professor of communication studies edited and contributed content to this text. **Dr. Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi**, lecturer of psychology, recently collected essays from more than 30 men and women for "Mirror on the Veil: A Collection of Personal Essays on Hijab and Veiling" (Critical, Cultural and Communications Press). Essayists, from Houston and around the globe, offered their insights on what the hijab means to them, as well as why they do or don't wear it. **UHD**



Dr. Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi



Dr. Creshemra Murray

Greetings From Costa Rica & Mexico

MOST COLLEGE STUDENTS use the summer to take a break from the books, but 10 UHD students experienced a summer trip like no other.

It began with an email to all sophomores and first-semester juniors inviting them to apply for a study abroad trip to Mexico and Costa Rica. These UHD Global Scholars—(two from each of

UHD's five colleges)—were selected to join UHD President, Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz for the eight-day trip, which included learning about new cultures via local tourist sites and visiting four universities and corporations to learn about the local economy and trade, as well as the governmental and educational structures of these countries, including ecotourism.

"The opportunity for our students to experience the sights, sounds and culture of Costa Rica and Mexico helps situate their academic credentials from UHD within an international context," said Samuel Santos, assistant vice president for student affairs and dean of students. "A UHD degree can take our student scholars anywhere around the world."



The first leg of their journey was Costa Rica, where students' cultural experiences included an excursion to La Paz Waterfall Gardens; a tour of the Gold Museum; zip lining at Colinas del Poás; and visits to Dell Alienware and Flordia Ice Farm & Company—the largest beverage company in Central America. The group also visited Universidad de Iberoamerica (UNIBE) and Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) where Muñoz also met with university leaders.

"This trip enabled me to connect travel experiences to future goals and career aspirations," said Adrian D. Calagon, junior in psychology. "I will be forever grateful for the experience."

In Mexico City, the group visited Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México and Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP), which included an opportunity to explore the campus and meet with faculty and students. Muñoz also met with university leaders at both institutions. While in Puebla, Mexico, they visited Rassini—one of the largest manufacturers of auto parts in North America. The trip's cultural excursions included a Teotihuacan archaeological site to climb the pyramids and the Frida Kahlo House and Museum. **UHD**



Photo: NASA

Astronaut Joe Acaba

Downlink to UHD

"UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN, I read you loud and clear," announced NASA astronaut Joe Acaba from the International Space Station.

Acaba, a longtime friend of UHD President, Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz, beamed down to campus (via Skype) to connect for a cosmic conversation—ISS In-Flight Downlink—the culmination of a partnership between UHD's Urban Education Program and NASA Education.

Students had been collaborating with NASA's Office of Education to learn how to become better science teachers. After a semester of working alongside NASA team members, UHD students and faculty members hosted a three-day educational extravaganza, including interactive events for K-12 students; an open house with artwork and astronaut gear; and the finale, the ISS In-Flight Downlink.

"Students love science," Acaba said. "You can ask any child, and they'll ask why the sky is blue or about bugs. Keep it practical and relate science to their everyday lives. If you can do that, you'll be successful." **UHD**

Just #SayHerName

THE COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (CHSS) and UHD's Center for Critical Race Studies hosted its inaugural #SayHerName Conference in March. The event was created to increase students' awareness of issues that impact the lives of women of color and how various forms of activism can take place within and outside academia. And, it served as an opportunity to recruit future students to UHD.

The conference welcomed more than 400 high school and community college students and admissions counselors. Students from Houston Community College, San Jacinto College and Lee College also were in attendance.

"This powerful event demonstrated that UHD is uniquely situated to address critical cultural issues and communities.

Our unique institutional consciousness is of immediate importance and attractive to students," said DoVeanna Fulton, CHSS dean. "They understand that regardless of the degrees they earn, a UHD education equips them with the tools to understand the dynamics of race, gender, and other categories of difference so that they can navigate this world for professional and personal success." **UHD**

UHD Grads Go Viral



Christyana Young & Ta'Mara Foster

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

FOR SPRING 2018 grad Christyana Young and her mother Ta'Mara Foster, their picture garnered hundreds of thousands of likes and shares across social media.

The viral photo, which was posted on Facebook, featured a side-by-side comparison of mother and daughter. One side was Foster, a 20-year-old single mother, sitting with one-year-old Young. The other side of the image captured the two of them together in their respective graduation regalia, 20 years later.

In the fall of 2015, both Young and Foster began their studies—Foster at Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law and Young at UHD.

"When I was researching universities, my mom actually suggested UHD," said Young. "We both liked it because it was affordable and had flexible course schedules, which worked out, because during my time at UHD, I was able to take online, early morning and night classes."

"We did it as a team and with the unwavering support from our family," Foster said. "She's been one of my greatest support systems throughout law school. **"Christyana is just as much a part of my success as I am hers. We hope to encourage others who are pursuing their education and career goals to work hard and persevere."** **UHD**

Champions

YOU MAY BE FAMILIAR with Ieshia Champs' story—a single mother of five whose law school graduation from Texas Southern University photo went viral. Champs attended UHD from 2013-2015, after transferring from Houston Community College (HCC), where she earned an associate's degree.

In 2015, Champs graduated from UHD with a Bachelor of Applied Arts & Sciences in applied administration.

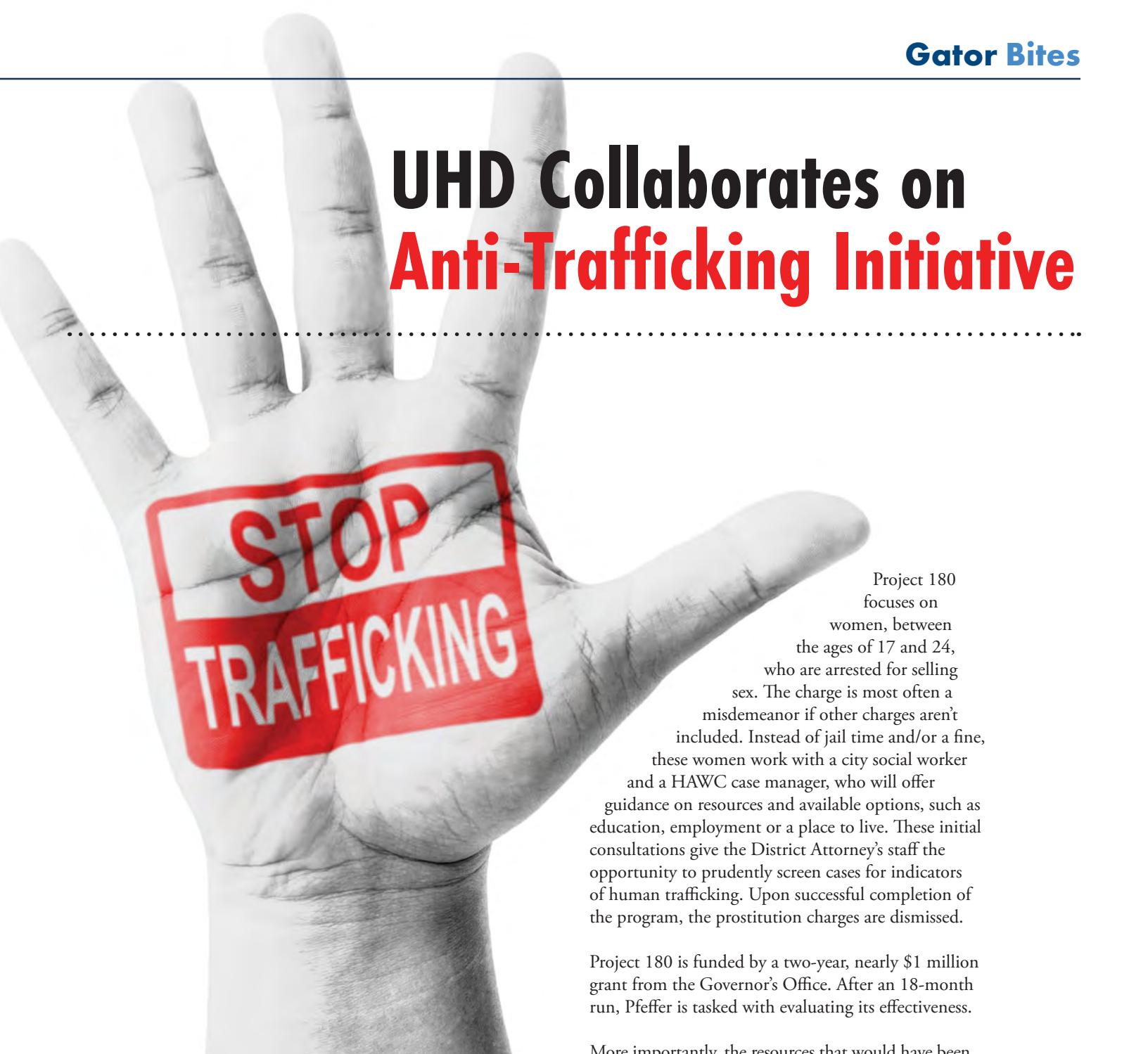
"I felt at home at UHD. I think that's really what I look for in colleges," Champs said. "Of course, the solution was very affordable for me. So, I think that is what made me really decide that UHD was the place for me. It's one heck of an institution." **UHD**



Richard Holman Photography

Ieshia Champs & Family

UHD Collaborates on Anti-Trafficking Initiative



IN A HEADLINE-MAKING story, the Houston Police Department arrested more than 100 people in a massive prostitution sting—a stark reminder that sex trafficking remains a problem in our city.

Thanks to Project 180, some of those arrested for prostitution can participate in a pilot program that could help get their lives back on track. The initiative is driven by a partnership between the Harris County District Attorney's Office, the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC), Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's office, and Dr. Rebecca Pfeffer, UHD assistant professor of criminal justice, who is a collaborator on this project.

Project 180 focuses on women, between the ages of 17 and 24, who are arrested for selling sex. The charge is most often a misdemeanor if other charges aren't included. Instead of jail time and/or a fine, these women work with a city social worker and a HAWC case manager, who will offer guidance on resources and available options, such as education, employment or a place to live. These initial consultations give the District Attorney's staff the opportunity to prudently screen cases for indicators of human trafficking. Upon successful completion of the program, the prostitution charges are dismissed.

Project 180 is funded by a two-year, nearly \$1 million grant from the Governor's Office. After an 18-month run, Pfeffer is tasked with evaluating its effectiveness.

More importantly, the resources that would have been spent prosecuting these individuals are then allocated toward investigating human trafficking cases and identifying traffickers. With the support of this grant, the DA's Office is putting significant effort toward the identification—and prosecution—of those who are involved in the trafficking of others.

"This might be the first program of its kind," Pfeffer said. **"There's a nationwide movement to acknowledge the victimization of sex workers and those involved in prostitution. It's important that programs like this are evaluated. We need to determine whether this can be a statewide model for other cities. This a major step forward in alleviating human trafficking in our city and perhaps helping victims get a second chance."** **UHD**

Marilyn Davies College of Business

Names New Dean



Dr. Charles E. Gengler

UHD's MARILYN DAVIES COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

welcomed its new dean, Dr. Charles E. Gengler. Gengler arrived at UHD on July 23 after serving as dean of the School of Business and Information Systems at City University of New York (CUNY) – York College.

He succeeds Dr. Michael Fields as dean of the Marilyn Davies College of Business, who retired in June.

At CUNY, Gengler developed a master's program in aviation management and coordinated international partnerships with colleges in China. Previously, he served as the chair for the department of marketing and international business for CUNY – Baruch College. He also held teaching positions for esteemed institutions, such as Rutgers University and Clarkson University. Gengler also has served as a consultant to numerous companies.

He earned a Bachelor of Science in mathematics and computer science from the University of Illinois-Urbana; a Master of Science in marketing from The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD); and a Ph.D. in management science (marketing) from The University of Texas at Dallas.

"I am proud to work with the fine colleagues in a college committed to the long-term success of our students," said Gengler. "The greatest honor is to see the positive impact we have on the lives of the many students who attend UHD. With the value we deliver to our students, the Marilyn Davies College of Business is destined for incredible growth. We will continue to be a great resource for the economic growth of Houston and all of Texas." **UHD**



Dr. Gene Preuss & Ray Valdez

House of History

AT FIRST GLANCE, the white house at 3004 Bagby Street doesn't look like a national treasure. In spite of its appearance—rough exterior with boarded-up windows, a damaged roof and graffiti on its walls—the house is rich with history.

It once served as the clubhouse for the League of United Latin Americans Council 60—a prominent civil rights organization where Houston-area activists developed programs and initiatives benefiting Latinos in Houston and across the country.

Thanks to the efforts of UHD faculty members, an alumnus and others, the house—known as the LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse—was named a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historical Preservation Foundation.

Complementing this designation is a \$140,000 American Express disaster recovery grant to support repairs to the house following Harvey.

"It's an important part of our city," said Dr. Gene Preuss, associate professor of history at UHD. "It may not look like a special place, but in reality, it is. This National Treasure designation is just a start for its preservation as a piece of local and national history."

Within the walls of this house, civil rights legislation and court cases were addressed. Landmark initiatives were developed here as well, including Project Head Start (teaching English to Spanish-speaking children); SER—Jobs for Progress (job training and placement

center); and the National LULAC Housing Commission (improving affordable housing options for Latinos).

Preuss and his wife Dr. Mari-Nicholson Preuss, director of UHD's Honors Program, are among those who worked to obtain the National Treasure status for the home. Also assisting was UHD alum Ray Valdez, current president of LULAC Council 60, who founded the organization C 60 Inc.

"It's an exciting time for this project that's being driven by people passionate about preserving this place and what it stands for. There aren't many pieces of Hispanic history standing," said Gene Preuss. "Preserving this house helps show that Latinos were active in civil rights." **UHD**

Data Dri

By Mike Emery

The next time you're watching a blockbuster film, like "Black Panther" or "Avengers: Infinity War," take a moment to consider that data analysis and data science were involved in the movie's release.

While data scientists aren't super heroes, they play a crucial role in getting costumed characters to the big screen. Data is collected from past film releases within certain genres. It's compared against data from competing films, and algorithms are designed around budgets, audience demographics and box office revenue. This information is then assembled to determine a movie's release date and, ultimately, help predict its success.

Of course, the film industry is just one example of how data science and data analytics impact business decisions and lives. Data analysis and data science factor into energy, healthcare, insurance, education, banking, finance and countless other industries. In fact, a recent IBM study suggests that there will be three million job openings for data professionals by 2020.

At the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD), two innovative programs within the College of Sciences & Technology are preparing students to fill those positions. The College launched its Master of Data Analytics (MSDA) program in 2015. And earlier this year, the Bachelor of Science in Data Science (BSDS) program kicked off. Both programs are the first of their kind in the region.

"We live in a data-driven world," said Dr. Akif Uzman, dean of the College of Sciences & Technology. "Our programs in data science and data analytics brings advanced quantitative training to an array of students."

Uzman helped lead the charge to create the MSDA program. He connected industry leaders with professors for on-campus workshops to gain insights on how students could prepare for careers in the evolving field of data analysis.

"In these workshops, we received industry feedback indicating a need for professionals from within their respective industries who could effectively analyze big data," said Dr. Ermelinda DeLaVina, director of the MSDA Program and associate dean for the College of Sciences & Technology. "As a result, current MSDA student backgrounds span a variety of academic areas, such as business, natural and social sciences, engineering, computer science, statistics and mathematics."



iven



*Cover Stars:
Data Science Students
Shawn Olichwier & Vi Ly*

Recognizing the emergence of data science in society, Dr. Ryan Pepper, chair of the Department of Mathematics & Statistics, with departmental colleagues Drs. Vasilis G. Zafiris and J. Patrick King, created the Bachelor of Science in data science. Pepper consulted with the city's industry leaders from companies such as Noble Energy and Schlumberger. He shared curriculum samples with them that met their approval. UHD's data science curriculum was also in line with recommendations made by the Park City Mathematics Institute (PCMI) in its report on data science in higher education.

"All of it really came together," Pepper said. **"We spent many months developing this curriculum, and that hard work was validated by industry support and a close match with PCMI's guidelines."**

The BSDS program is designed to immerse students in the data science pipeline—identifying and mathematically modeling problems; gathering, sorting and analyzing data relevant to those problems; visualizing and presenting the results of this analysis; and making mathematically valid and ethically sound decisions based upon the findings.

Shawn Olichwier is among UHD's first group of BSDS students. With a background in computer science and math, the degree sounded like a perfect fit for him.

"With the amount of data in the world right now ... and even in our pockets, there has to be a way to handle it and learn from it, Olichwier said. **This program puts UHD on the cutting edge. I'm basically a math, stats and computer science major rolled into one. I'm learning a variety of skills to apply in the workforce. The possibilities are endless with this degree."**

Uzman concurs that the MSDA and BSDS will provide students with a vast set of fluid competencies that are needed across a variety of industries while positioning UHD as an institution, which addresses the needs of a demanding industry.

"These programs reflect UHD's commitment to providing a 21st century education and training to all of Houston's citizens," Uzman said. **"They represent a growing nucleus of programs that cross traditional academic disciplines and allow our students to apply analytical reasoning to solve the region's complex problems."** **UHD**



The Business Footprint

By Sheryl E. Taylor

Thanks to a powerful combination of sound business theory and practical application, the Marilyn Davies College of Business offers a ‘team teaching’ approach through its Master of Business Administration’s Corporate Fellows Program. Collaborating with private industry, the program ensures that every MBA class is taught by a professor and industry executive also known as a corporate fellow. It’s a win-win for students and the corporate fellows—from value-added learning to networking to mentorship to professional recruiting. [Meet two of Davies College’s corporate fellows, Omar C. Reid and J. Paul Oxer.](#)

Omarr C. Reid is the senior vice president of the Human Resources Department at Harris Health System, also known as the Harris County Hospital District—the fourth largest community-based hospital system in the United States, with more than 8,000 employees. The UHD alum served six years as the HR Director for the City of Houston, where he helped turn around rising multi-million dollar healthcare costs. He also held

various leadership roles during a 26-year tenure with United Parcel Service.

“Most people finish their undergraduate degree in four years; it took me 11 years,” said the Akron, Ohio native. “I was the first person in my family to attend college. At the time, I wasn’t thinking about the seriousness of school. I was from a small city with the freedom and distractions of a big city.”

Reid considers UHD a blessing for his academic pursuits. He transferred to UHD and earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in 1993, followed by an MBA from Texas Southern University four years later.

“The smaller classes were very nurturing,” he said. “I was able to stay focused, and the professors were able to provide more interaction and engagement. UHD was the right setting and atmosphere to move through my college experience.”

Reid credits his passion for business to the movie “Wall Street.”

“I love business. There’s opportunity to really impact the way things happen,” said Reid. “After watching that movie, I knew that’s what I wanted to do ... and I said to myself, ‘I want to get an MBA someday.’”

The published author is also an adjunct professor of personnel administration at Texas Southern University’s Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs.

Why is this program so important and relevant for students?

“This program brings real-world practical experience into the classroom. These students are gaining knowledge from industry professionals who have navigated the ropes of various fields. They are learning to be more than practitioners ... they are learning to be leaders.”



Omar C. Reid

Through this experience, what have you learned?

"How much talent these students have ... their commitment to their families and to their future, which exemplifies their determination and desire to be successful as they compete in a world that is very different now. You can't just be average ... you have to have something that sets you apart. And, a UHD degree will do just that ... especially this program."

JPaul Oxer has managed complex projects in multiple languages across a dozen time zones; handled billion-dollar contracts; authored a couple of books; testified before Congress; produced several television documentaries; participated in international auctions for utility companies on three continents; negotiated and interacted with local, state, federal and international governments in a dozen countries; and managed to get licensed as a professional engineer in 45 states.

The Florida native graduated on St. Patrick's Day in 1973 with a bachelor's in civil engineering from The Georgia Institute of Technology, where he jokingly said "You don't graduate, you get out!"

Embarking on a career fresh out of college, like most, Oxer held various jobs—from graphic artist to band roadie to writing commercials to working on a racing team as a mechanic.

"It was a tough time for the economy and the engineering sector was in a slump, so I did whatever it took ... scratching and clawing to buy groceries and pay rent. You have to do what you have to do to survive ... and persevere."

Forty-plus years later, the managing director of McDaniell, Hunter & Prince, Inc. manages project development and finance for investment in international infrastructure and handles transaction management, such as post-acquisition integration.

"I've always taken on projects that others wouldn't, couldn't or simply did not want to," Oxer said. "Why? They were the most interesting, the most unusual and the most fun."



J. Paul Oxer

This past spring, Oxer completed his first term in Dr. Robert Robinson's class—MBA 6342: Interpreting & Delivering Business Results—where he team-teaches communication, team management, organizational structure and understanding people in leadership.

What do you hope to impart to students in this program?

"Everything we've done in the past continues to prepare us for the rest of our lives. I want them to know that the concepts of what they learn will hold them in far better stead than the details. And, learn how to learn and adapt."

What's the true meaning of success?

"Being successful means you can spend your time the way you want to. It has less to do with money and things, and more to do with purpose, people and peace."

Through this experience, what have you learned?

"We're all informed and sometimes are held hostage by our experiences. I've learned from these students to be more open and less judgmental about their perspective of what's going on in the world. You have to suspend that judgment and understand where people are coming from." **UHD**

Walls With A View

By Mike Emery

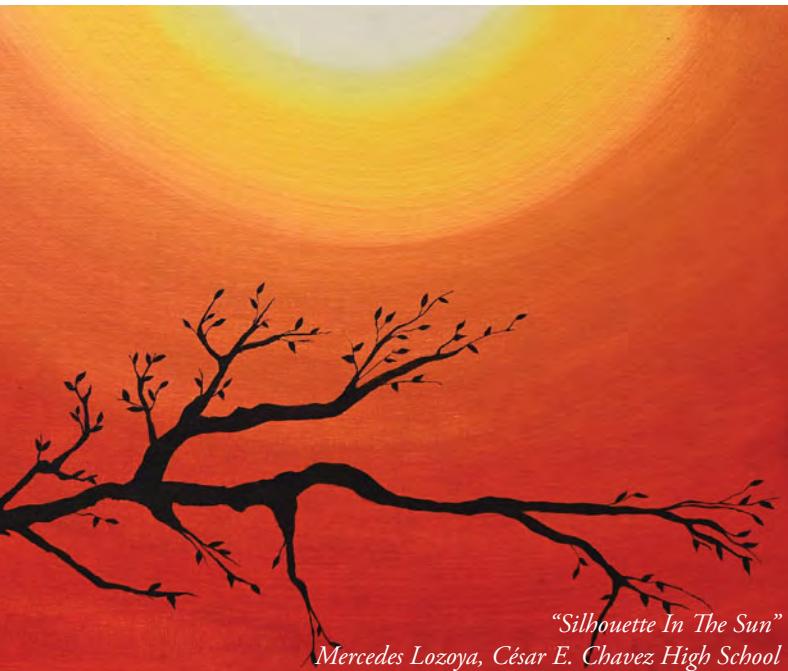
Spring was the season for celebrating art at UHD. From a career-spanning survey of professor Floyd Newsum's works to an exhibition from artists on the rise, UHD's O'Kane Gallery was as active as ever.

"Floyd Newsum: A Survey—1970 to 2018" featured more than 35 of the artist's works. Works were arranged to guide visitors through Newsum's noted career. Featured art included the vibrant watercolor painting "Reverend" (a side profile of an actual preacher that Newsum knew); acrylic painting "Last Count 28;" the iconic "Night Clouds Roll Over South Africa;" the multimedia piece "I View the Cross Billy;" and an installation adorned with his drawings made during travels to Asia and Europe.

The exhibition was curated by O'Kane director and Newsum's friend, Mark Cervenka.

"There's a high level of quality in his work," Cervenka said. "I've always wanted to put together a survey of his career, and there's no better place to host it than UHD where he's been so integral for four decades."

In May, the gallery spotlighted more than 150 works of art by Houston-area high school students during "High Art," which featured paintings, sculpture, mixed-media, ceramics, video and more. Presented works were selected by art teachers at more than 30 participating high schools. This exhibition has been a UHD tradition for more than 20 years.



Floyd Newsum's "Blue Ladders"

"That's why the O'Kane Gallery is here," Cervenka noted. "It's important that our gallery serves as a venue for quality art created by artists from all walks of life ... and all levels of experience."

Houston art aficionados also explored artwork across campus thanks to art tours coordinated by the University of Houston System Public Art Collection and Project Row Houses to connect community members with the paintings and installations located throughout UHD.



UHD Student Paola Palacios



UHD Student Brenda Chapa



*Darius Anderson's "Gabriel"
Springs Wood High School*

"As recent research in art and museum studies suggest, students who experience art and learn about art from their peers engage with the works on a deeper and more meaningful level," said Dr. Rebecka Black.

Additional tours were coordinated by students under the guidance of Black, an adjunct lecturer of arts and communications. Students in her Art 1310 class selected on-campus works and developed tours that were based on specific themes.

"Engaging with their peers about something in their UHD community, such as these works that they see on a daily basis, helps to create a connection between students and the University, as well as with other students through art," Black noted. **UHD**

Champions of Education

By Sheryl E. Taylor

Most people can recall or name a teacher who served as an influence and contributed greatly to their personal and professional successes. Current students and alumni constantly attest to our faculty's passion for teaching. Each year, University faculty are recognized for: Excellence in Service; Teaching; Scholarly/Creative Activity; Outstanding Adjunct; and Outstanding Lecturer. **Meet our 2018 Faculty Award recipients who were posed the question: What have you learned from your students? UHD**

Outstanding Lecturer

Abby Koenig

Arts & Communication

"I've learned that anything is possible from the students at UHD—from first-time-in-college fresh out of high school to 70-year-olds. The strength and perseverance of our students is what makes this University so amazing. I have also learned how to be stronger because of them."



Outstanding Adjunct

Richard Simonds

Criminal Justice & Social Work

"I continue to learn from and with my students. UHD students are resilient, strong and dedicated to their studies and learning."

Excellence In Service

Dr. Trevor Hale, Professor
Management & Insurance
Risk Management

“I've learned from my students that persistence and grit matters. No one changes the world all at once.”



Excellence In Teaching

Dr. Elizabeth Hatfield
Assistant Professor
Arts & Communication

“I've learned the importance of goal setting. Each and every one of them has a personal goal that usually requires perseverance and sacrifice. I admire their dedication to education and am inspired to set my own goals each semester as a result.”

Excellence In Scholarly/ Creative Activity

Dr. Ray Qing Cao
Associate Professor
General Business,
Marketing & Supply Chain

“Diligence, intelligence, professionalism, leadership, integrity and dedication. An interactive learning environment goes a long way in the MBA program at the Marilyn Davies College of Business.”



Benefitting The Majority

By Sheryl E. Taylor

The best laid plans don't always go as expected. Case in point, Dr. Whitney Threadcraft-Walker's educational pathway hit a proverbial road stop while attending Howard University in Washington, D.C. And when the best laid plans go awry, there's usually an opportunity for a second chance.

"I had every opportunity available to me, but I made hasty decisions," said the Houston native. "When I arrived at UHD, it just clicked. The material I learned was timely and relevant. The instructors were engaging. UHD sparked something in me that I didn't know existed."

In three years, she completed a bachelor of science in sociology (2012), and less than 18 months later she earned a master's in criminal justice (2013) at UHD, followed by a Ph.D. in administration justice-criminal justice (2017) from Texas Southern University's Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs. And if that wasn't enough, she and her husband were growing their family. She was pregnant at all three of her graduation ceremonies.

During her undergraduate studies at UHD, she found her calling in criminal justice courses and realized there was more to the story.

"Through all the research theories and different perspectives I was taught, I felt there was a part of the story that was missing variables, such as family composition, socioeconomic status or the amount of resources allotted to the community," the 31-year-old said. "I believe that some criminal behaviors stemmed from socioeconomic deprivation, which wasn't considered in existing research. That's when I realized that I could offer a unique contribution to the current state of criminal justice research."



Threadcraft-Walker works in the Harris County Office of Budget Management's Criminal Justice Division as a principal justice researcher. She's also a policy analyst at the Earl Carl Institute for Legal & Social Policy in the city's Third Ward. The Institute is a think-tank that provides legal services to vulnerable communities as well as legal and advocacy data for legislative sessions. She takes a quantitative approach, using statistics to determine the impact of the policy, noting intended and unintended consequences.

"When proposed policy is based in specific decision-making, you have to understand that not everyone is in the same position or has the same tools or resources," she noted. "Even though certain policies may seem benign or relatively harmless, they can actually have a disparagingly impact by being a disadvantage to some people relative to others. I'm so privileged to be in a room where actual decisions and conscious choices are being made that affect Harris County residents."

Her recent research has been published in *The Journal of Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences* and *The Journal of Criminal Justice*.

"The legacy I hope to leave is to make a better world for my children through equitable distribution of justice outcomes," she said. "I didn't want to entrust the task of making it a fairer world to anyone else for my children. So, I decided to tactically do it by joining the system to see it through."

"UHD gave me the tools to be successful through perseverance. With my UHD degrees, I'm making actionable change." **UHD**

Changing Lives Through Organics

By Sheryl E. Taylor

In always tell my children ... I like myself and I'm proud of my accomplishments. I hope you experience the same feelings in your life. You will achieve great happiness and gratification that is often times contagious and stimulating to others."

These are the words of UHD alumna Victoria Velarde. The mother of four, business woman, activist and self-described "goal seeker" is also president of the ANUME Foundation—an organic farm, educational field and community member of La Grange, Texas.

While earning a degree in her late 40s in interdisciplinary studies (with a minor in political science), she worked at the World Affairs Council of Houston where she learned about nonprofit operations, development and community affairs. Earlier in life, she co-founded a petrochemical marketing company, volunteered at numerous nonprofits and developed a passion and respect for humanitarian efforts.

In 2014, Velarde met Ronnie Vinson who cared about organic food and people who are unable to buy or eat fresh produce. Together, they sought property to originally create a bed and breakfast boutique and grow organic vegetables donating the excess to food banks. Velarde purchased the land, Vinson worked the fields, and it quickly turned into a nonprofit organization that fed local food banks.

Sitting on a vast 55 acres, the ANUME Farm is 12 acres with an impressive pivot irrigation system. While 75 percent of its production is donated to Harris, Fayette and Travis county food banks, 25 percent is sold to restaurants to partially support its operations.

"Through research, connecting with authorities on organics and joining causes to support organic growers, ANUME soon created a niche in the organic farming industry," said Velarde. "We not only grow organic vegetables, but we educate and feed those never exposed to the integrity of fresh produce and the integral balance of the soil connecting to the integral balance of the body."

Another aspect of ANUME is its educational mission. The farm offers volunteer opportunities for adults and children and high school and college internships. Velarde and her team hosts workshops and events, farm tours, field trips and community classes (diabetic cooking series, organic gardening, yoga classes, early toddler programs) to educate about the importance of nutrition and environmental sustainability.

Velarde aspires one day to be a voice for those who can't afford higher-level nutrients and address Congress first-hand about the benefits of feeding people organic food. Having the support of her friends, family, employees and community, she'll continue to grow her dreams.

"I want my children to witness the realization that believing in yourself and taking risks to learn is crucial to happiness." **UHD**



Learning the Ropes of Communications

By Mike Emery

Brad Gilmore's two favorite mentors couldn't be any more different.

Charles French is a lecturer in UHD's Communications Studies Department. In person, he's soft-spoken and mild mannered ... yet very precise and deliberate in his oratorical skills.

On the other hand, Booker T. Huffman is quite loud and somewhat intimidating.

The five-time World Wrestling Entertainment Champion, however, shares French's gift of effective communication.

Gilmore applies what he's learned from both mentors to a career as a color commentator for Houston's Reality of Wrestling (ROW), which produces live professional wrestling shows at Texas City's World Gym Arena and broadcasts a weekly program on Fite TV. Calling the action is Gilmore (alongside broadcast partner Matt Topolski).

"It's all about telling a story," said Gilmore, a senior rhetorical/public communication major.

"From the start

of a match until its finish, I help communicate what's going on in the ring to enhance the action."

He's been working for ROW since 2014. Gilmore's career began as an in-ring announcer, then morphed into a play-by-play commentator. In this role, he calls each wrestling hold and offers viewers insights on the feuds between the "good guys and villains."

"Announcing wrestling goes beyond telling viewers what I am actually seeing in the ring," Gilmore added. "We're trying to help the wrestlers convey their characters. They may only have 30 seconds of on-air interview time before or after their matches. It's up to me and my partner Matt to get their characters across to the television audience."

While Huffman helped groom Gilmore for calling body slams and suplexes, French was instrumental in teaching the fundamentals of effective communications at UHD.

"I've taken two of his classes, and I find him to be incredible," Gilmore said. "He gets students engaged and inspires everyone to learn about their classmates. Because of that, I've made great friends in his classes."

"Being a good talker is one thing, but UHD has taught me to be a good communicator," he said. "When you learn from professors like Charles French and others, you learn how to connect a message to your audience. When you're effectively speaking and connecting, you are making an impact with people. That's what I've learned here, and I am very grateful to UHD for helping me develop those skills." **UHD**



An Agent of Change

By Mike Emery



It's not uncommon for UHD students to be engaged in social causes on campus and in the community. Few students, however, can match the passion and enthusiasm of Diana Platas.

The sophomore political science major serves her peers as a Student Government Association senator. She also works tirelessly as an advocate for Houston-area immigrants. As a volunteer for the organization Familias Immigrantes y Estudiantes en la Lucha (FIEL), Platas helps shed light on the challenges faced by immigrant populations and those affected by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policies.

"There's a strong need for leaders on campus and in our city," Platas said. **"It's important to give back and support causes or events. It's our duty to ensure that we are helping our community become a safer, cleaner, happier and united environment."**

Platas has committed herself to serving as a voice at UHD for women, international students and those who identify as "Dreamers." And in Houston, she is a spokesperson for immigrants' rights and has been featured by local media on the topic of DACA.

Prior to coming to UHD, Platas attended East Early College High School. All students at this institution graduated with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree. In spite of being college-ready, Platas was faced with the reality that a university education might be beyond her reach—until she discovered UHD.

"One year of college cost almost as much as my parents made in a year," she said. **"I was heartbroken and was convinced that college was no longer an option for me, but then I found UHD. It's very affordable, and the professors are amazing and passionate about what they do."**

Thanks to UHD, Platas will graduate debt-free. Still, she will continue paying it forward by supporting her fellow students and Houstonians. And, she hopes to inspire others to do the same.

"To anyone interested in helping others or committing to a cause, there will be times where you may feel like giving up," she said. "But, it's important to persist. It's not always easy, but if you continue to work wholeheartedly and stay true to your passions, then it will all be worth it. Change starts with you." **UHD**

Opening Doors to Future Gators

By Mike Emery

Many roads lead to the University of Houston-Downtown. While the institution isn't hard to find, high school students may need guidance as they navigate the various pathways to UHD.

Thanks to several University initiatives, both high school and middle school students are receiving direction as they plot a course toward higher education.

These are just some of UHD's outreach efforts to help high school students discover their potential and Finish UHD Strong.

Presidential Tour

When Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz became UHD president, he pledged to visit high schools within a 50-mile radius of campus.

He's making good on that promise and has visited more than 30 thus far. Muñoz arrives at each institution with an enthusiastic team that is prepared to share details about UHD and why it's the best choice of colleges for so many students.

"We're among the least expensive universities in the state of Texas," Muñoz tells an enthusiastic audience at North Shore High School. **"And, we're the most affordable institution in Houston. At UHD, you have a very good chance of graduating with no debt."**

Additional schools visited by Muñoz, include Booker T. Washington High School, Eastwood Academy, Austin High School, Worthing High School, East Early High School, Heights High School, Waltrip High School and others.

As Muñoz states, UHD offers the learning environment of a private, liberal arts college with the price tag of a state university.

"Think about this school that's just a few miles away," he told a group of students at Booker T. Washington High School. **"Think about our school ... an institution that offers bachelor's and master's degrees. We have programs that will prepare you for careers in our city. UHD is affordable and accessible, and we'll remember your name and care about you."**



Camino a la Universidad students visit UHD.



North Shore High School Visit

Confidence is Key

While Muñoz visits local high schools, faculty and students from the College of Public Service are reaching out to middle schools. For three years, Dr. Diane Miller, assistant professor of literacy in UHD's Urban Education Department, has overseen, "Camino a la Universidad." This mentoring program, located at Arnold Middle School (in Cypress, Texas near UHD Northwest), helps at-risk students visualize an academic future beyond the eighth grade.

Working with Arnold teacher Marielea Delgado, Miller and her students work with Hispanic female seventh and eighth graders to prepare them for high school and beyond.

Thanks to "Camino a la Universidad," middle schoolers gain confidence in their classroom abilities through exercises focused on self-esteem, teamwork, trust and conflict resolution. Students also take a field trip to UHD to experience a college campus, meet professors and President Muñoz.

"Many of these students have never visited or even seen a college campus," said Miller. "Simply stepping foot on campus can have a transformative effect on these students. They're able to see what they're working toward and, hopefully, set a goal of finishing high school and possibly attending UHD."

Up, Up & Away with Upward Bound

For 30 years, Upward Bound has hosted students from area high schools. They visit UHD and learn about what it means to be a college student, said Dawana Lewis, director of Upward Bound. Students attend classes and workshops providing details on financial aid, transitioning from high school to a university, scholarships, and UHD's colleges and departments.

Although the University hosts Upward Bound, the program also takes students to colleges throughout the state. Still, a number of Upward Bound participants select UHD as their university of choice. Among those is Gaby Martinez.

Martinez was introduced to UHD through Upward Bound while a student at Houston's High School for Law and Justice. After graduating, she remained at UHD, majoring in English and now serves as an assistant director of processing in the University's Financial Aid Department.

"The support I received was invaluable," Martinez said. "They mentored me through the Upward Bound program and into my first years of college. They were always there for me." UPD



HERE, WE GO.

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN



By Sheryl E. Taylor

In October 2017, UHD announced a campaign to **inspire** our community, **serve** our students and **build** a stronger institution for Houston through three priorities—**scholarships, community engagement** and **faculty & facilities**. Our goal to raise **\$25 million by 2020** is well under way. In fact, we anticipate we will exceed our goal. As of 2012, UHD has raised **\$21.2 million**.

Priority ONE: Scholarships

A college degree is a game changer that transforms the future for UHD graduates and their entire family. But, for many promising students, financial need often deters them from their goals. While 70 percent of all full-time UHD students qualify for financial aid, a gap remains between the cost of tuition, fees and student resources. Dr. Nancy Leveille joined the UHD faculty in 1983. With a 35-year career at UHD, she served as a dedicated teacher and researcher in mathematics education. The results of her career are found in math classrooms throughout Greater Houston with teachers who engage and inspire their students and will continue through the Dr. Nancy and Dr. Jacques Leveille Mathematics Education Scholarship Endowment.

“My husband Jacques and I have never forgotten the financial support we received to help us obtain our degrees. We are confident that UHD students who are awarded this scholarship will benefit from our gift, and will go on to make contributions in math classrooms across Houston and beyond.”

Dr. Nancy Leveille

Priority TWO: Community Engagement

Partnerships with organizations and agencies throughout Houston allow our students to develop practical solutions to the city's pressing issues while working alongside faculty, business leaders and non-profit professionals. Community engagement opportunities enrich the curriculum, enliven teaching and promote transformative learning. UHD students are gathering water samples for a collaborative water quality project conducted by the University of Houston-Downtown, Galveston Bay Foundation and Houston Water Keepers for the City of Houston Health Department.

“After the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey, I remember feeling powerless about the situation and couldn't wait to go back to campus to see how I could help. I jumped at the opportunity to participate in a water project to help our city. This project is proof that despite being confronted with the most devastating of challenges, we are resilient enough to turn it into an opportunity to help our community.”

Jacqueline Rocha

Recent UHD Graduate

Priority THREE: Faculty & Facilities

Within our walls, dedicated faculty and staff prepare students for tomorrow's career opportunities and professions that are only imagined today. Such preparation is dependent upon world-class facilities where science happens, meaningful conversations occur and learning takes center stage. A new \$75.5 million College of Sciences & Technology Building is the next step in expanding our campus footprint. But, our facility needs also include ensuring that our current infrastructure serves our students well.

“Great universities host discussions about important ideas. UHD must be an institution where speakers and presenters provoke dialog about topics that matter to our students and our city. With the support of the Cullen Foundation, the renovated Wilhelmina Cullen Robertson Auditorium will provide a venue for those discussions.” **UHD**

Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz
UHD President



The 2018 “Give to Gators” campaign focused on participation from every corner of the University. No gift was too small, and every gift counted. The results were record-setting—more than 52 percent of faculty and staff contributed over \$73,000 to support a variety of programs and projects (that do not receive state or federal funding) across UHD—from scholarships to emergency student relief funds to endowment accounts.

“The engagement of more than half of our faculty and staff is a clear indication of our commitment to our students and our strong belief in the value of the work we do. We are grateful for the efforts and contributions of each member of our Gator community.”

Johanna Wolfe
Vice President
Advancement &
University Relations

Giving a Voice to The Voiceless

By Paige Caldwell

The editors of The Bayou Review saw an opportunity to do something that has never been attempted with the student-run literary magazine.

As a venue to showcase the works of University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) students for the past 30 years, the spring issue marks the first time that the magazine will be comprised of submissions from incarcerated men.

In the issue's foreword, written by prose editor and recent UHD alum Christopher Flakus ('18), their mission of giving a voice to the voiceless is made clear:

"We endeavored to make the best issue possible without allowing moral judgment or personal politics to interfere with our role as editors," Flakus said. "We're proud of these stories and the profound humanity that shines through each word. What you read are the words of the inmates themselves. It's their experience. It's their book."

This issue is empowering to not only the demographic of writers that it showcases, but also the magazine's editorial team.

For general editor Michelle Laird ('18), who is a recent UHD grad, working on this

particular issue brought out latent leadership skills and also sparked a greater interest in criminal justice advocacy.

"The logistics of communicating with inmates can be very complicated," said Laird. "I've learned from this experience how to see an idea through from start to finish. It's also shown me that I'd like to get involved with the prison system and help those who are in the system any way I can."

While the United States represents nearly five percent of the world's population, it houses approximately 22 percent of the world's prisoners. The Bayou Review team worked with community partners in radio and television as well as various activist groups to make this issue possible.

"The purpose of writing is to tell stories, especially from different perspectives," Archie Gayle, sophomore and poetry editor, said. "It's important to get the perspectives of this sector of the population because the prison industrial complex is a major part of America."

"For the inmates, they find it therapeutic to be able to share their stories with the world. And for the public, it humanizes people who live most of their lives in a prison cell." **UHD**





Christopher Flakus, Michelle Laird & Archie Gayle

"Who would have ever imagined that a pinecone would grow into a pine tree? Who could have ever predicted that tree would be cut down and crushed into pulp? Who would have dreamed that a tree's pulp would become the paper upon which my humble but heartfelt communication to the world is written? Who could believe it possible that me, a prisoner, would use my words to reach out, stretching far past the prison fences to find a place for my words to reside and spread their healing balm upon our troubled world?"

Excerpt: "Reaching Out"

Richard E. Smith
Wynne Unit
Huntsville, TX



Pure Prairie League

By Mike Emery

The University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) is surrounded by a freeway, light rail, skyscrapers and other urban elements. But, if you peek over the One Main Building's South Deck, you'll spy a pocket of nature. In Johnny Goyen Park, located along Buffalo Bayou, sits UHD's very own Pocket Prairie with native Texas grasses and wildflowers. And where there's flora, there's fauna (bees, butterflies and other prairie residents).

Credit Dr. Mike Tobin, assistant professor in the College of Sciences & Technology, for establishing and maintaining this natural gem with the assistance of student volunteers. Tobin and the students work diligently in adding new plants and removing weeds. Additional support is provided by the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, which has donated hundreds of plants to be used in the prairie. Visitors to the prairie will observe grasses such as little bluestem, indiangrass and gamagrass, and flowers including phlox, Indian blanket showy evening primrose, clasping coneflower and others. In addition to beautifying the park, the Pocket Prairie supports native pollinators, including bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. The prairie also serves as a living classroom for students in Tobin's ecology and plant biology classes.

"It's important that students have hands-on, high-impact experiences when learning about our environment," Tobin said. "The Pocket Prairie provides these kinds of experiences. Students will remember working and learning in the prairie and may be inspired to return here while riding their bikes or taking a walk." **UHD**

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