

# UHD

MAGAZINE  
FALL 2021

**DETERMINED.**  
**DEDICATED.**  
**DOWNTOWN.**

# CON FLU ENCE



“Keep in mind always the present you are constructing. It should be the future you want.”

“Resist the temptation to think what afflicts you is peculiar to you. Have faith that what is in your consciousness can be communicated to the consciousness of all. And is, in many cases, already there.”

“Helped are those who are content to be themselves; they will never lack mystery in their lives and the joys of self-discovery will be constant.”

Alice Walker, Author  
“Temple of My Familiar”



Learn more about the exciting Houston Parks Board’s mural, “Confluence,” neighboring the UHD campus on page 34.

PHOTOS: Anthony Rathbun  
Houston Parks Board



## PRESIDENT'S LETTER



PHOTO:  
Colt Melrose Photography

### Welcome to the University of Houston- Downtown Magazine!

This issue is special on many levels. For one, it marks the return of a print edition of our flagship publication. As you may recall, the spring magazine was completely digital during the pandemic. Although it offered a very impressive new online format, I know many loyal readers missed having a printed magazine to share with friends and family members.

Now, we can offer readers the best of both worlds, a traditional copy and an enhanced electronic version. However you wish to enjoy this publication you can be assured of the same quality content that continues to shine a spotlight on our Gators, as well as the many initiatives aimed at expanding the University of Houston-Downtown's presence in our city and surrounding region.

The theme of this issue is quite emblematic of our institution ... "Determined. Dedicated. Downtown." Admittedly, these are words I often use to describe the University, and you will be seeing them on billboards, advertisements, social media and many other communications platforms.

They serve as our mantra so to speak and remind Houstonians of the very essence of our storied institution.

After all, it is rare to find students, faculty, staff and alumni with more determination and dedication than those from UHD. And our proximity in Downtown Houston positions us for productive partnerships that support our academic mission.

In this issue, we meet students and alumni engaged in consequential efforts in our communities and learn about faculty members whose real-world experiences are providing new perspectives in the classroom. Additionally, this magazine will introduce you to our esteemed Faculty Excellence Awards recipients and showcase the public art offerings that make our campus a destination for Houstonians seeking a creative getaway.

And this edition of UHD Magazine also shares details on the Listening Tour I embarked on soon after arriving at the University. This tour allowed me to connect directly with students, faculty, staff, alumni and other stakeholders to learn more about our Gators, our University, and how to effectively move our campus forward as we begin the strategic planning process.

You will also discover the background behind the central focus of this issue, "Determined. Dedicated. Downtown.," and how it will continue to shape the University's image in our region and beyond.

I mentioned earlier that this issue is special for a few reasons, and another memorable aspect of the Fall 2021 UHD Magazine is that it is my first issue as University President. That said, I am delighted to offer these opening words and invite you to turn the page and experience our institution's stories and learn more about the University that I now can proudly call home.

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

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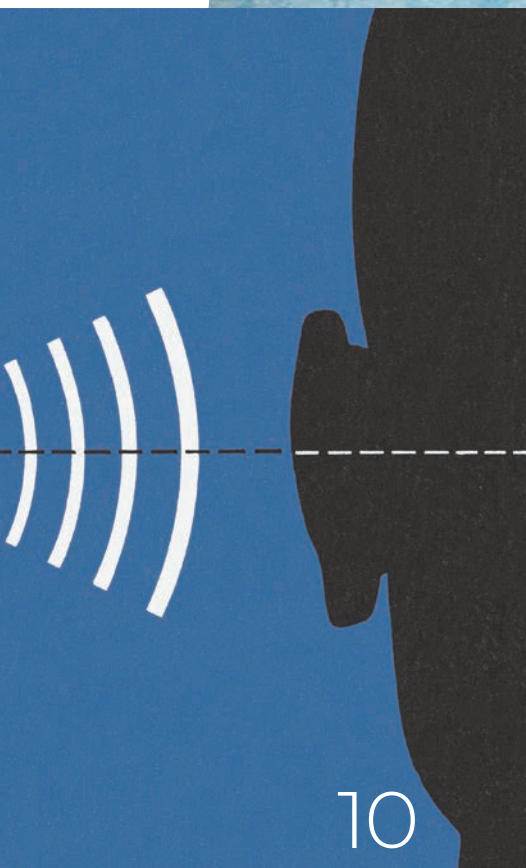
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# IT'S IN THE BRAND

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

GREAT QUESTION.

## UHD DEBUTS NEW BRAND CAMPAIGN

By Sheryl E. Taylor

Through a quick web search, 'name' is defined as: "a word or set of words by which a person, animal, place, or thing is known, addressed, or referred to."

Think Apple, Disney, Amazon, McDonald's or Google. But, behind every name is powerful and creative branding that resonates with the consumer or audience.

For the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD), its target audience is the prospective student—first-time-in-college, transfer, adult, distance learning, and graduate students—who consider specific factors when choosing a university. To delve deeper, multiple research studies were conducted, for and by UHD, to assess those contributing factors including reputation, flexibility, cost, proximity and a great job after graduation—all were considered in developing effective campaign strategies.



# 2013

## Major Opportunity

The year was 2013—the movie Iron Man 3 hit the big screen, Apple released new iPhones Apple 5s and 5c—and UHD unveiled its first branding initiative, 'Major Opportunity'.

Since the beginning, the University of Houston-Downtown continued to be a place of opportunity and the transformative education experiences it offers its students. The 'face' of 'Major Opportunity' featured exceptional students and alumni with snippets of

their personal stories. For more than five years, 'Major Opportunity' was the call to action for prospective UHD students. While it had successfully served the University well; the next generation of college students were evolving.

During its 'Major Opportunity' days, UHD leadership released its 2015-2020 UHD Strategic Plan that included an aggressive, yet achievable, goal to recruit and increase enrollment among specific student populations.



# 2017

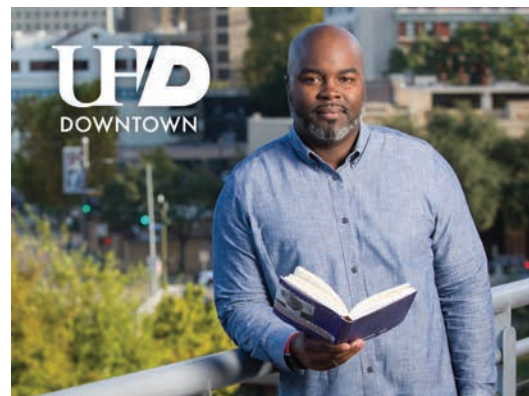
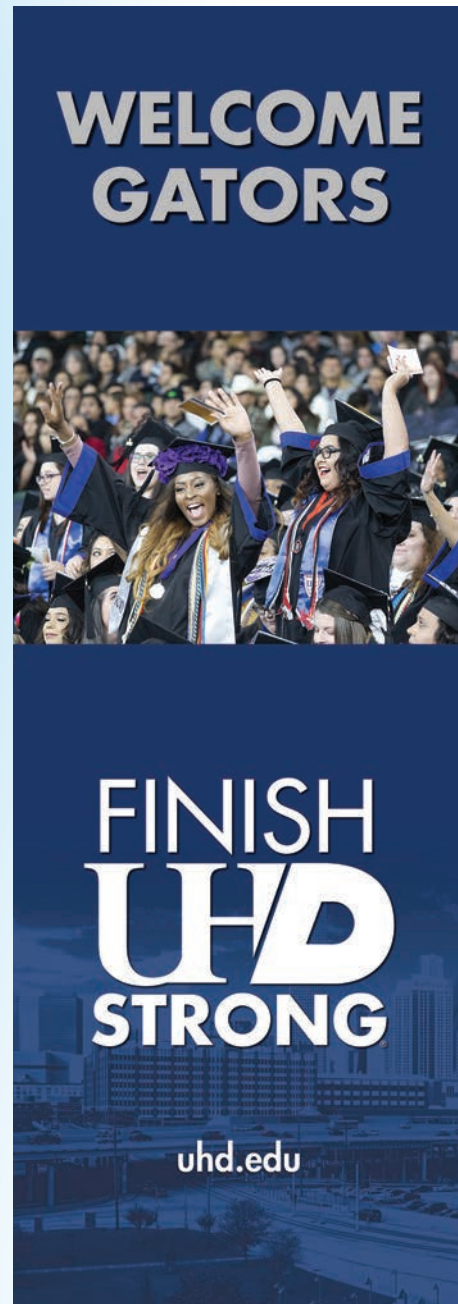
## Finish UHD Strong

To answer this strategic call, the University launched its next campaign 'Finish UHD Strong' in early 2017. Through this campaign, the University hoped to aid with student recruitment and retention and also sought to change some outside perceptions of the institution—to establish UHD as the school of first choice among prospective students. It also served as a natural segue from 'Major Opportunity' to further solidify and communicate the University's brand—UHD students seek a 'Major Opportunity' to 'Finish UHD Strong'.

The campaign expanded its visible footprint to include digital advertising, television commercials, billboards and other media throughout Greater Houston featuring more than 30 outstanding students from across all five UHD colleges.

**"Finish UHD Strong was both a promise and a call to action," said Elisa Olsen, Executive Director of UHD University Relations. "We wanted our students to know that UHD is dedicated to every facet of their college experience to help ensure they finish strong at the University of Houston-Downtown. The campaign invited prospective students to choose UHD and encourages current students to succeed at UHD."**

After four successful years gracing the Houston freeways on billboards, YouTube videos, commercials and more; it was time for a new look and tagline that embodied the pride, strength and the resolve of Gator students, faculty, staff and alumni.



Balance School, Work,  
and Family with Evening Classes.

# FINISH UHD STRONG

**DOWNTOWN • NORTHWEST • ONLINE**

# 2021

## Determined. Dedicated. Downtown.

In Spring 2019, UHD worked with an agency partner to conduct a brand assessment that included 14 on-campus focus groups, 10 in-depth interviews with business and community members and four web-based surveys (more than 1,300 participants provided feedback).

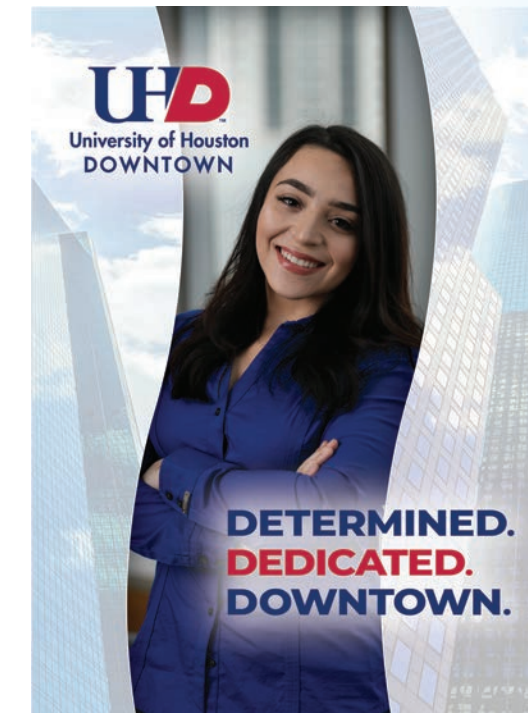
**"The objective of this brand assessment was to better understand the image and perceptions of UHD among prospective undergraduate and graduate students, current students, faculty, staff and alumni," said Olsen. "We also wanted to identify perceived strengths, challenges, differentiating characteristics of all audiences; and determine what prospective students value with regards to college choice factors."**

As a result, three distinct taglines and creative campaigns were developed and shared broadly across campus to stakeholder groups (key leadership groups, students, faculty, staff and alumni) in February of 2020.



As a result of COVID-19, the project was placed on hold for eight months and in November the brand creative was selected with a decision to launch the campaign in September 2021.

This fall, the University unveils its 'Determined. Dedicated. Downtown.' brand campaign, which celebrates the tenacious spirit of its students, faculty, staff and alumni. The brand-new initiative invites its audiences to meet the UHD student—confident, ambitious, fearless and ready to change the world.



**UHD's Brand Promise is clear: "UHD is a supportive, flexible institution for determined students who want a relevant, high-quality, life-changing education to further their career opportunities and empower them to contribute to their communities."**

"This (brand promise) is the implicit promise that we make to our various stakeholders through our advertising and communications

as to what they can expect from UHD," emphasized Olsen. "It's an unspoken promise that we intend to make through all communication mediums." She also added that every brand promise is supported by pillars or how to accomplish this goal of the brand promise.

**"We do so by having encouraging faculty and staff who foster student potential, showing that UHD is a smart investment and offers pathways to educational and professional opportunities, being reflective of Houston with diverse perspectives, and**

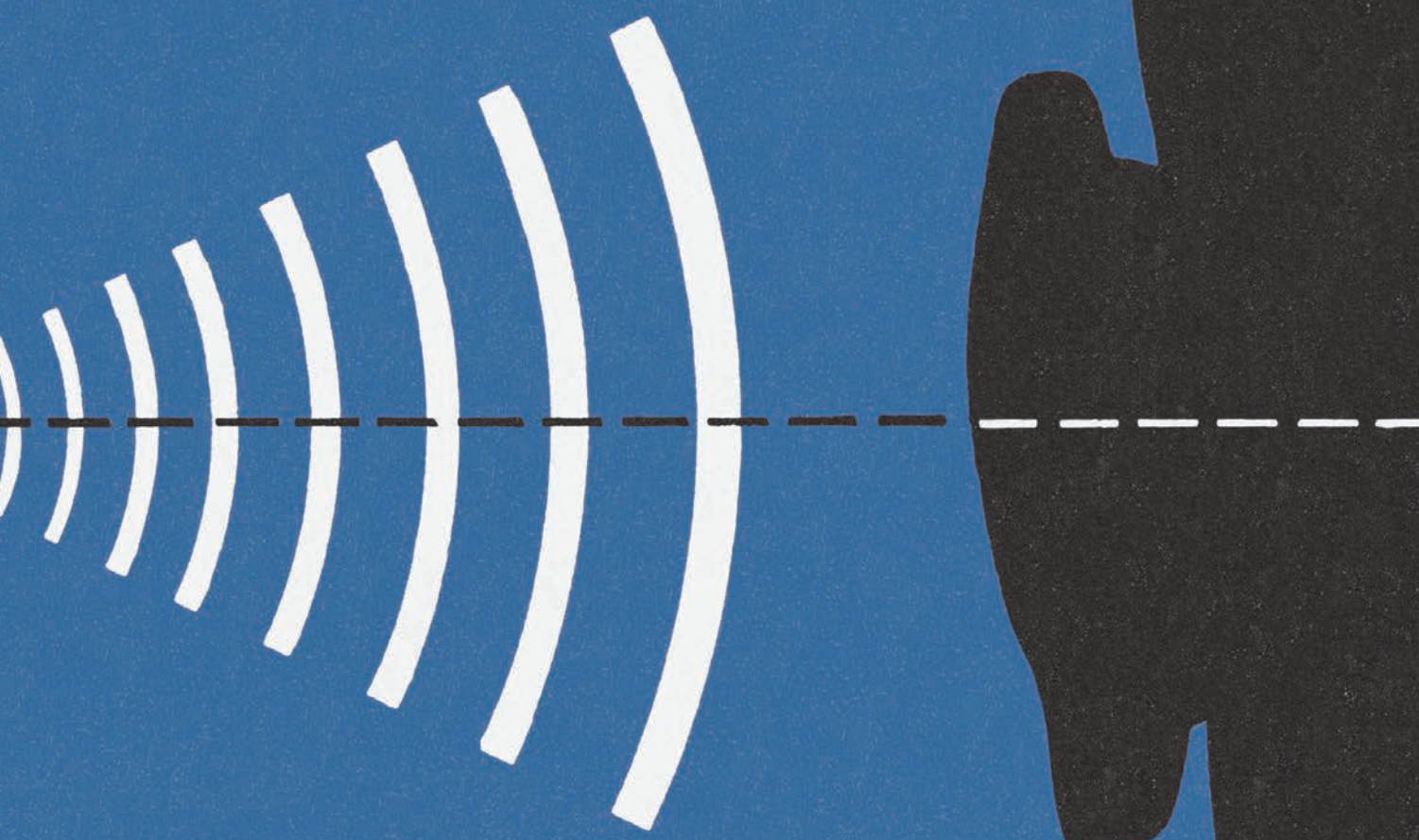
**by being a community in which real-life shapes the educational experience," said Olsen. "Our new tagline, 'Determined. Dedicated. Downtown.', reflects our position in the University of Houston System, the City of Houston and across the region."**

Visit the UHD Network for a detailed visual presentation about the 'Determined. Dedicated. Downtown.' campaign. **UHD**

# PRESIDENT'S LISTENING TOUR

# THE FIRST 100 DAYS

By Sam Byrd



As President Loren J. Blanchard prepared to undertake the responsibilities of his office, he committed to listening and learning from the UHD Community.

He made good on that guarantee with the launch of a "Listening Tour" between April and June, which provided multiple opportunities for key stakeholders to share thoughts, ideas and visions about UHD during a series of virtual and in-person forums.

**"If we take seriously the business of operating a high-quality urban higher education enterprise that is connected to our city's needs and development, we need to learn more about who we are and what we are positioned to become to ensure that our University remains a living, thriving beacon of promise for the students and community we serve,"** Blanchard said.

The Listening Tour kicked-off with the University's most significant resource—the student body.

**"Students are one of the most important groups. They're in the seats and can let us know if our academic fortitude is where it needs to be,"** he emphasized. **"I'm also interested in areas for improvement. I want to celebrate all the great work underway and build upon it. I also want to know if there are areas that aren't working well, which we need to play close attention to from the varied perspectives of our campus community, beginning with our students."**

Facilitated by Dr. Creshema Murray, Associate Professor of Corporate Communication and Special Assistant to the Office of the President and Dr. Liza Alonzo, Director Alumni Relations & Special Events, the discussions focused on four questions:

- ▶ **As a member of the UHD community, what do you like best about the University?**
- ▶ **If you could make one sweeping change today at UHD, what would it be?**
- ▶ **If we could rally all people on campus toward one goal, what should that be?**
- ▶ **As we look to the future, what is the biggest threat to UHD's growth, success and reputation?**

The students offered high praise for the University, referencing feeling welcomed on campus, the flexibility of classes and professors, the wealth of diversity, its affordability, and its accessibility. One student remarked in the comment box, "UHD just cares ... I've never been at a University like this one."

Students also shared areas where they would like to see growth and improvement, including wanting more opportunities for civic engagement, increasing the awareness of student resources to benefit degree completion, a desire to capitalize on UHD's proximity to Downtown Houston, and a need for more merit-based scholarships.

**"I want to learn as much as I can about UHD, and who better to learn from than students? As our students graduate, they become our shining stars for the city and state workforce and leadership corps. Students' feedback allows us room for growth, which is why I'm listening carefully. What they share with me can impact the future of UHD and the city of Houston,"** Blanchard expressed.

From there, he reached out to faculty, staff, the UHD Alumni Association, the President's Leadership Council and the Houston Hispanic Chamber. The format and four

questions remained the same for these disparate groups.

**"These groups are key ambassadors for what UHD stands for in this city, state and nation. The time faculty, staff and Leadership Council have spent here equips them to know best the practices and policies that benefit as well as undermine the University's overall well-being,"** he said. **"The UHD Alumni Association and Houston Hispanic Chamber offer viewpoints that bring to light the symbiotic relationship between our University and the region and how what happens on our campus has a rippling effect."**

These groups mentioned the strength of the student body's diversity and uniqueness, the close-knit connections between faculty and students, a shared commitment to the institution's mission, and the relationships between UHD and the community as positives.

During each meeting, President Blanchard ensured attendees that their input during the Listening Tour—whether it was in-person, via Zoom or through the online survey—were helpful.

"I thank the participants for all they shared with me," he said. "I want to benefit from hearing both the problems and the opportunities. The comments are not falling on deaf ears. I don't believe in talking the talk. I believe in walking the walk, and that will be demonstrated throughout my interactions with the campus community thanks to what I've learned during the Listening Tour." **UHD**

**21**  
**SESSIONS**  
**&**  
**1,200+**  
**ENGAGED**  
**=**  
**1,100**  
**STUDENTS**  
**FACULTY**  
**STAFF**  
**& ALUMNI**  
**140**  
**COMMUNITY**  
**PARTNERS**  
**& FRIENDS**

# IN THE AGE OF COVID

By Sheryl E. Taylor

On March 13, 2020 Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued “a disaster certifying that COVID-19 poses an imminent threat of disaster for all counties in the state of Texas.”

The imposing threat silenced the busy halls of UHD and students, faculty and staff made the dramatic shift to learning and working virtually from their homes.

After a deluge of information on vaccination and COVID-19 statistics, mask mandates, business closures and rising unemployment rates for more than a year, it seemed that the country was finally getting a reprieve to return to a pre-pandemic life in late spring.

And UHD was no exception.

“While I look forward to seeing everyone back on campus, I want to ensure that we continue to not only work hard ... but work smart,” said UHD President Loren J. Blanchard. “Let’s continue to make the best decisions regarding health and safety on campus ... to not only benefit ourselves ... but others in our community.”

## Healthy Community Partnerships

To ensure the University community had access to vaccination opportunities, UHD hosted campus vaccination events with H-E-B and Houston Methodist. The events offered no-cost vaccinations to students, faculty and staff and their family members. Thanks to its thriving relationship in the community, UHD community members are also able to receive the vaccine through University partner, UTHealth.

“The well-being of Gators has always been, and will remain, the top priority,” said Blanchard. “Over the past year, this community has responded to the changes necessitated by COVID-19 with diligence and flexibility, and I am confident we will retain that same level of commitment. We all share in the responsibility to maintain safety.”

Free COVID testing is being offered through a partnership with the healthcare company Curative. The on-campus testing site kiosk offers the self-swab COVID-19 test to the University community as well as the public. Appointments are made through the Curative portal and results are guaranteed within 48 hours, through email and a text message. Also, there is no limit on testing frequency.

UHD’s ongoing relationship with The Houston Food Bank also continued throughout the year with several Food Fair and Backpack Buddy events that provided groceries to students, faculty and staff, along with other community members in need.

## Expert Insights Hosted @ UHD

As access to the vaccines continued expanding throughout the region, many questions still lingered regarding the doses, their efficacy, side effects and how they will ultimately impact the spread of the virus.

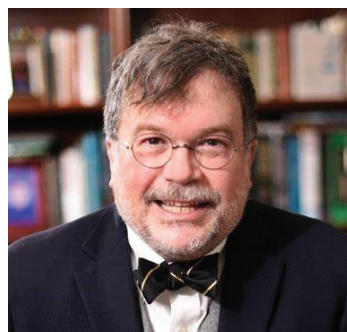


PHOTO: Dr. Peter Hotez  
Baylor College of Medicine

To answer these questions and more, President Blanchard hosted the virtual speaker series, “COVID-19 Health, Safety and Vaccine Information Forums” featuring medical experts: Dr. Peter J. Hotez, Dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine and Professor of Pediatrics & Molecular Virology & Microbiology at Baylor College of Medicine; David Persse, Chief Medical Officer for the City of Houston and Professor of Emergency Medicine & Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine; and Dr. Stephen J. Spann, Founding Dean of the University of Houston College of Medicine and UH Vice President for Medical Affairs.

All three experts agreed and stressed that educating the public is key in helping to steadily decrease the numbers of COVID-19 cases. “We must give people the facts about the vaccines and the disease,” Persse said. “It’s important to provide the community with factual information regarding COVID-19 and the vaccines so that they can make informed and educated decisions.”

## Onward & Upward

UHD’s Information Technology Services ensured that more than 790 students were provided with technology for their remote learning needs.

The generosity of private donors, corporate partners and the UHD community contributed to the Gator Emergency Fund, which was distributed to students, who were ineligible for federal COVID-19 relief funds and experienced difficulty paying rent, childcare, groceries or tuition and fees. The goal of this need-based support was to ensure that every UHD student would remain enrolled to continue their academic pursuit toward degree completion.

Since the onset of the pandemic, UHD remains steadfast to ensure that the campus was safe upon the full return of its community of students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors. A multitude of campus safety measures, protocols and enhancements have been made in all public facing areas, offices and classrooms.

“All of these plans guarantee that our most important stakeholders—our students—will have a rich, immersive academic and student life experience this fall,” Blanchard said. “These opportunities to return to the traditional operations so often associated with our institution reinforce the academic success, persistence and degree attainment of our students.” UHD







## 2021 STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

It is an honor and privilege to lead the University of Houston-Downtown into its next phase of growth as the second largest University in the nation's fourth largest city.



To create a strategic vision, my first task was to embark on a Listening Tour within the first 100 days of joining the University (see page 10 of this issue). The goal was to open a conversation to familiarize myself with the University from the inside out. I especially became well acquainted with the most important asset of our campus—our students. I am heartened to see the efforts they are putting forth in our classrooms and throughout the local community. Student success remains the cornerstone of this institution, and I have used this time to understand what UHD has done

thus far and what more we will do to ensure every student is met with the utmost service and instruction to support their goals.

I also looked outward to the community to fully understand the University's relationship with the region. I was not surprised to learn that UHD continues to be a thriving force in our city and state, thanks in large part to the hard work and support of our faculty, staff and alumni. I know, however, that the institution can—and will—play a larger role in supporting the academic aspirations of the community's underserved student populations and addressing other issues related to equity and inclusion. We have the socio-intellectual capital ... and more importantly, the passion ... to effect change in the lives of so many Houstonians.

But we cannot do so as a singular institution. Through strategic partnerships we can address issues affecting our region and enhance our role as a premier urban institution of higher learning. I have met with more than 50 community leaders who will all play an integral role in furthering the mission of UHD and will no doubt support our efforts in the community. Each and every leader I have met impressed upon me the important work taking place here and why they view UHD as a treasured asset to our region.

In doing so, we must set a trajectory for new levels of success ... a journey that is guided by what I have termed as UHD's Institutional Compass. On September 8, I shared with the University Community and friends how this compass will serve as our directional tool as we steer the institution toward four points of excellence—Embracing Educational Justice, Strengthening Student Success, Support Institutional Excellence & Infrastructure, and Growing as an Anchor Institution.

The fact remains that the University of Houston-Downtown is an institution that is already on the rise, growing even stronger, moving forward and is overcoming barriers to strengthen our mission of educating our most precious stakeholders ... our students.

Visit:  
[uhd.edu/president](http://uhd.edu/president)  
[uhd.edu/listening-tour](http://uhd.edu/listening-tour)



## GATOR BITES

### UHD Alumna Makes Chief

Following a five-month search with more than 40 applicants from 17 states a finalist was named for the role of Waco's Chief of Police ... and it was a UHD alumna. Dr. Sheryl Victorian's selection for this role marks the latest move for a woman who broke barriers while at the Houston Police Department (HPD). Victorian, who holds a master's degree in Criminal Justice from UHD, joined HPD in 1993 starting in the Southeast Patrol Division. Over the course of her HPD career, Victorian served within the Training Division, Special Victims, Juvenile, Internal Affairs, Major Offenders, and Homicide. Before joining, the City of Waco Police Department, she served 27 years with HPD and was promoted to captain of the South Central Houston neighborhood. At the time, just two other Black women had earned that rank. In 2017, she was named HPD's Assistant Chief. Her new appointment in Waco also celebrates a couple of firsts. Victorian is the first female and first Black police chief for the city. Nationally, women make up about 15 percent of local police officers and only about three percent of local police chiefs.\* HPD Former Chief Art Acevedo described her as a "phenomenal leader," saying "Waco's gain is Houston's loss." In an interview, Victorian said **"the selection says a lot about Waco's values,"** and she hopes she inspires other women and people of color **"to pursue higher heights in public safety."**

*\*Bureau of Labor Statistics.*



PHOTO: Sheryl Victorian  
City of Waco



### University Earns Top Rankings for Diversity

UHD continues to earn accolades for its programs as the University received major recognition for its commitment to diversity. The rankings from The Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education reflect what many at the institution and in Texas have known all along ... that UHD is the most diverse university in region. UHD ranks No. 1 for diversity among colleges and universities in the South and is No. 18 in the nation. **"Diversity is critical to any university's mission ...**

**but particularly so at the University of Houston-Downtown," said President Blanchard. "As a Hispanic-Serving Institution and Minority-Serving Institution, the University provides a learning environment that fosters collaboration and cooperation among students, faculty and staff members of varying racial and cultural backgrounds."**



## UHD Earns High Marks: Online Programs Ranked Among the Nation's Best



U.S. News & World Report recognized UHD's online programs in its 2021 rankings. The University ranked in the Top 100 among online Bachelor's Programs (No. 86 out of 362 institutions of higher education) and is No. 30 for its Best Online Programs in Graduate Criminal Justice. Both are the highest ranked programs in Houston within their respective categories, marking the third consecutive year UHD has been recognized by U.S. News & World Report—the gold standard of higher education rankings—for excellence in its academic offerings. Additionally, the University ranked well among programs for Veterans. Making its debut on the list, UHD ranked No. 54 among Best Online Bachelor's Programs for former service members and No. 16 for Best Online Master's Criminal Justice Programs among this group. UHD's online Bachelor of Applied Arts & Sciences in Applied Administration (BAAS-AA) program is based in University College and supports students as they develop competencies and skills necessary to ascend in their careers. The BAAS-AA is listed among the top six online bachelor's programs in the state. Based in UHD's College of Public Service, the Master of Science in Criminal Justice (MSCJ) helps develop students' knowledge of criminological theory, program evaluation and criminal justice administration. The 36-hour program includes courses focused on the most pertinent issues in the field and offers the skills needed for students in their careers or to continue into a doctoral program. The recent ranking places it among the top five online criminal justice programs in Texas. These rankings are compiled based on engagement, services and technologies, faculty credentials and training, expert opinions from academic officials and student excellence (for master's programs only).



## Gator Grit Keeps The Conversations Going



Compelling conversations have always been at the heart of UHD's Gator Grit Speaker Series, and this year has been no different. Women in leadership, alumni in the media and the importance of COVID-19 vaccines were some of the highlighted topics during this year's virtual events. During Women's History Month in March, "Taking Their Seat At The Table: A Conversation with Local City Leaders," featured Gator Alumni Melody Barr ('02), Deputy Assistant Director, City of Houston Public Services; Shannan Dionne Nobles ('13) Chief Deputy Director, City Controller; Maria Montes (MBA '17), Director, City of Houston Board & Commissions and Carolyn Wright ('02), Interim Director, City of Houston Solid Waste Management. UHD also hosted a virtual talk with "Gators in the Media" with notable alumni who included Brian Mendoza ('14), news reporter with

NBC10/Telemundo62 in Philadelphia; Mary Flood ('89), legal media consultant and former Houston Chronicle reporter; Margaret Barrientos ('15), data reporter with the Houston Business Journal and Victoria De Leon ('18), reporter for KUSA-TV/9News in Denver. In what has been a hot topic, COVID-19 Vaccine Development and Distribution was the theme of a virtual discussion with UHD's Dr. Gabriela Bowden, Associate Professor of Biology, featuring Dr. Helen Valier, Program Director, Medicine & Society at the University of Houston and Dr. Leslie Dietz, Research Assistant & Laboratory Manager, Biology, University of Oregon. Now in its fifth year, UHD continues its Gator Grit series to highlight leaders who showcase examples of grit that inspire courage, resolve and tenacity within both UHD, the Houston community and beyond.

## THECB Reskilling Grant Seeks to Support Returning Students

UHD received a \$750,000 grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to support students wanting to complete their degrees after pausing their college education. Funding from this grant will assist returning students pursuing bachelor's degrees and provide resources to guide them toward success in the career marketplace. According to Associate Vice President of Planning & Curriculum Dr. Michelle Moosally, it's a game-changer for students who may have left school because of personal or financial reasons — with some needing to complete only a few classes to graduate. "We have identified (through a joint effort from all of the UHD colleges, Financial Aid, and Admissions) more than 2,000 UHD students who have left UHD in the past six years without completing a degree, yet were in good standing," she said. **"With this grant, we can support their return and completion by providing financial support to cover tuition and fees for up to one or two courses in a semester for 500 students."**

University College Dean Dr. Scott Marzilli and his leadership team are involved in regular collaborative efforts with several other Texas universities through THECB to help students return and complete their degrees with the valued professional skills and education that tomorrow's career market will demand. Their work is the foundation of the Governor's Emergency Educational Relief (GEER) Fund and they are leading the academic side components.

# 500



## New Endowment Honors Longtime Educator Dr. Hank Roubicek

It all began with three courses in 1983 and he has never looked back.

From just those three, Dr. Hank Roubicek designed several new courses, taught most of them and carefully advised students seeking a degree and a profession in the communication field. While building a strong division of Communication within the College of Humanities & Social Science's Department of Arts & Humanities, he also taught communication-based graduate courses in Criminal Justice and Urban Education.

Now 38 years later, the award-winning educator's legacy of a successful Communication Studies program in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences has graduated more than 1,400 alumni since the first degrees were awarded in 2002.

The Professor Emeritus—the highest recognition for a retired faculty member—is being honored by fellow colleagues and former students through the Dr. Hank Roubicek Scholarship Endowment in

Communication Studies with the hope to recruit future students to the program.

The internationally sought-after workshop leader is a well-known consultant for more than 25 organizations and the local radio personality for Houston's long running program on KPFT 90.1FM, "So, What's Your Story?"

**"Dr. Roubicek has been a force within UHD and the Greater Houston community over the past four decades. He's been instrumental in developing the critical, historical, and global perspective we offer, as well as the mix of coursework in the theories, skills, and aesthetics of communication," said Dr. Ashley Archiopoli, Associate Professor and Communication Studies Program Director. "This scholarship honors the legacy he helped to establish and the growth he helped to achieve. This merit-based scholarship will help alleviate financial obstacles for students who wish to join our program."**

Visit [uhd.edu/give](http://uhd.edu/give) to learn more.

**"I am immensely honored that my colleagues have chosen to honor me by establishing an endowed scholarship in my name," said Roubicek. "It's an even greater tribute to my service to UHD and the Communication Studies degree program that this scholarship provides funds to recruit future students into our program."**



PHOTO: Dr. Hank Roubicek

## Wellness & Success Center Coming to Campus

The ground is broken and the manned bulldozers are clearing the site for the future UHD Wellness & Success Center. Just west of the newest campus addition, the College of Sciences & Technology Building, the Center will redefine the student experience by enhancing its fitness and recreation offerings on campus as well as provide Gators with new spaces for studying and socialization.

The Center's amenities also include a demonstration kitchen where students can learn about nutrition, the UHD Food Market, Wellness Suite, counseling services and much more.



Two years ago, Texas Representative Mary Ann Perez (a UHD alumna) authored House Bill (HB) 1277 during Texas' 86th Legislative Session authorizing a dedicated student fee to support the project. The University of Houston System Board of Regents and UHD students had previously voted to approve the fee for the new facility. The building's design is overseen by SmithGroup and its general contractor is Vaughn Construction.

The Center is slated for completion in Fall 2022.

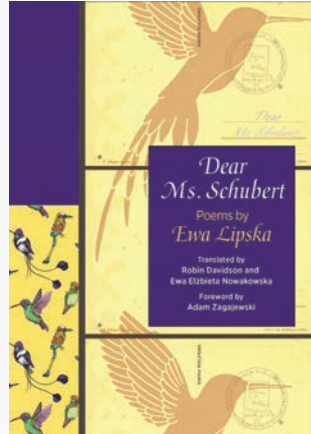


PHOTOS: RENDERINGS/SMITHGROUP



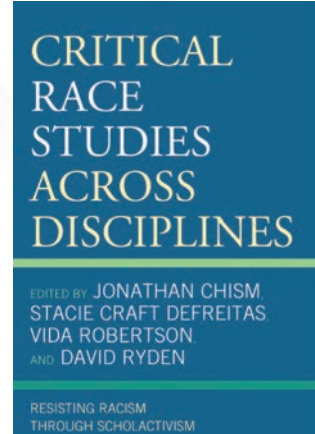
## Animal Rights in China

China has been scrutinized for its policies related to the treatment of animals. **Dr. Peter Li**, Associate Professor of Political Science, explores his native country's complicated and complex history of animal welfare practices in the book, "Animal Welfare in China: Politics and Crisis" (Sydney University Press). Li, an internationally-respected animal rights activist, hopes to offset misconceptions about China's treatment of animals with this text. **"I wanted to show that compassion is part of the Chinese culture regardless of what we read or see on TV and that many people value the humane treatment of all animals,"** Li said.



## Poet ... Professor ... Translator

**Dr. Robin Davidson**, Professor Emeritus of English and former Houston Poet Laureate, has long inspired readers and students alike with her passion for poetry. In addition to her prowess as a poet, Davidson has become an accomplished translator of literary works as evidenced in the text "Dear Ms. Schubert" (Princeton University Press). Davidson and collaborator Ewa Elżbieta Nowakowska translated a series of poems written by one of Poland's most revered poets Ewa Lipska. The book spotlights a series of poetic postcards sent to the title character Ms. Schubert from an enigmatic Mr. Schmetterling (or "Mr. Butterfly"). **"These poems are mostly short, dense, complex, and engage ideas and language from a range of social systems,"** Davidson said.



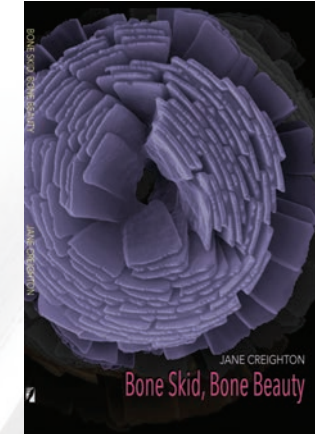
## Addressing Critical Race Studies

Four Fellows from UHD's Center for Critical Race Studies (CCRS) served as editors for the book "Critical Race Studies Across Disciplines: Resisting Racism Through Scholactivism" (Lexington Books). **Dr. Jonathan Chism**, Assistant Professor of History; **Dr. Vida Robertson**, Director of CCRS; **Dr. Stacie DeFreitas**, Associate Professor of Psychology, and **Dr. David Ryden**, Professor of History helped gather essays from scholars from around the nation to address critical race theory's evolution and increased relevance in our nation. **"One of the reasons this book is so important is because there is a staggering amount of misinformation and mischaracterizations of critical race theory,"** Robertson said.



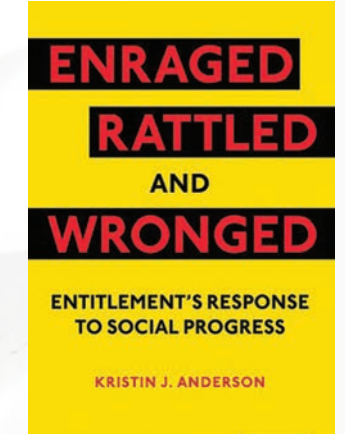
## Protecting the Internet of Things

**Dr. Shengli Yuan**, Professor of Computer Science, was awarded nearly \$50,000 by the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate for a research project investigating security solutions for the Internet of Things (IoT: the robust network connecting smart devices such as video doorbells, virtual assistants, speakers, appliances and more). Yuan and student Beatrice Cedar will work with a team from the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign to help prevent IoT security breaches. **"Most individuals will come across between 10 and 20 smart devices in their personal lives. Security is very important as we continue to depend on this technology,"** Yuan said.



## Bone Skid, Bone Beauty

Professor of English **Dr. Jane Creighton's** latest book of poetry, "Bone Skid, Bone Beauty" (Saint Julian Press) is a collection of poems deeply absorbed in a language that thinks through the body and the body's memory of place, of love, and of losses sustained over time. **Creighton said, "Poetry, I know, for many readers takes a bit of patience—and in 2021, patience can be in short supply. But I'm hopeful that if readers take their time, drink in the language, allow themselves to see into the imagery, they may find that the poems become a vehicle for the passion and power of their own thinking."**



## Understanding Entitlement

Professor of Psychology **Dr. Kristin Anderson** explores the deep roots of modern-day entitlement among Americans and how it fuels rage and feelings of victimization. Her latest book "Enraged, Rattled, and Wronged: Entitlement's Response to Social Progress" (Oxford University Press) delves into the factors that fuel entitlement including popular culture, peers and privilege. **Anderson noted, "This book should provide a road map to what's happening in our world right now and understand the divides in our society ... political and otherwise."** **UHD**

# GATORS BEING THE CHANGE

By Sam Byrd

The University of Houston-Downtown has long educated some of the brightest minds and some of the most dedicated public servants. Recently, two of these students witnessed the payoff of their dedication to education and community. The stories of Miguel Garcia and Tooba Narejo are a mere glimpse into the power of Gators shaping the world around them.



in his community through programs, such as the Brighter Bites Program and the LULAC National Education Service Centers, even while holding down a full-time job to support his family.

With more than 12 years working in oil and gas, he chose to return to college and picked his major based on his experiences in the working world as well as a volunteer during his formative years.

**“I worked in oil and gas where people spend a lot of time isolated due to work, and people’s mental health and well-being were not a priority. That’s what drove me to pursue a psychology degree,” he said.**

Garcia joined UHD’s Center for Diversity & Inclusion to enhance his experience at UHD. Among its many goals, this Center strives to create inclusivity and help students from marginalized communities who may feel stressed at the University. Through this relationship, he began volunteering in

the counseling offices at the Montrose Center and the Legacy Community Health Clinic. The Montrose Center focuses on ensuring the mental health of the LGBTQ population. The Legacy Community Health is affiliated with United Way, and its mission is to connect communities with all health services.

His immediate plans are to graduate from UHD on the Dean’s List and continue his path of service.

**“After graduation, I want to continue reaching out to organizations and helping others, whether that’s starting new programs for an initiative’s community rollout or joining an organization. I plan to continue bringing positive changes to the community,” Garcia said.**

In Miguel Garcia’s world, kindness and community are king. Thanks to his efforts to raise up his fellow Houstonians in need, the psychology major received a significant accolade from the Boston-based non-profit organization Campus Compact when he was selected as UHD’s newest member of the 2021 cohort of Newman Civic Fellows.

Public service is nothing new for Garcia—he’s been volunteering since childhood. As a young person, Miguel accompanied his grandmother as she delivered food, clothing and other necessities to the underserved in the community. He soon began volunteering to mow lawns for the elderly persons in their neighborhood. This initial engagement sparked a desire to help others throughout his life. He continued to serve

PHOTO: Miguel Garcia/R. Wittig Images



In academia, the Three Rs stand for “reading, writing and ‘rithmetic.” For the environmentally conscious, they stand for “recycle, reuse and reduce.” Senior Tooba Narejo has blended both of these paradigms to use her studies as a launchpad for improving the Earth.

**“Recycling is the first aid to protect our environment. It protects Earth’s natural resources,” she said. “When I see things being wasted, food being thrown away or people throwing away reusable items, it makes me sad because it doesn’t have to be that way. Recycling is a doable action.”**

As a Management Information Systems (MIS) major in the Marilyn Davies College of Business, Narejo is also a student in the University Honors Program as well as involved with the Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning (CCESL). From here, she leveraged her resources to dive headfirst into environmental issues.

Through a partnership arranged via CCESL, Narejo accepted a communications internship at Citizens Environmental Coalition (CEC) in 2020. When she began the internship, she was one of 25 UHD students selected from a pool of 118 applicants for the competitive summer program. She also is an active member of CCESL’s Community Scholar’s Program.

During her time with CEC, Narejo was able to align her position more closely with the skills she is developing in her major.

“As an MIS major, my goal with this internship was to apply management, problem-solving and communication skills while working with CEC,” she said. “Also, I am passionate to learn what resources we have to make Earth greener and its atmosphere better, how to reduce the rising sea levels, and to promote awareness among social media and friends.”

The work paid off with her classmates when Narejo, along with a cohort of other CCESL participants,

presented a poster during the program’s annual showcase to spotlight how UHD’s community members and interns work together to build healthier communities in Houston. Also, she presented her work with CEC through a poster presentation at the Gulf Coast Summit. In addition, her proposal, “A Nomological



Network of Supplier Integration and Customer Integration on Firm Performance,” was accepted to the 2021 International Academy of Business Disciplines conference with Dr. Shuaifu Lin, Professor of MIS in the Department of Finance & Management Information Systems (Marilyn Davies College of Business).

Narejo credits her empathy as a main driver for her focus on making the world a little bit more eco-conscious.

**“I want all communities to grow together. Nobody should be left behind,” she said. “We should all be able to have education, food, and access to equity and justice. This is my main reason I wanted to be involved in the community, and I want my children to do the same.” UH**

# DR. RYAN PEPPER

## A NATURAL PROBLEM-SOLVER

By Sheryl E. Taylor

He sees the world of mathematics as “a perfect balance of logic, utility, efficiency and creativity. It’s threaded in everything I do. I’m a natural problem-solver.”



Recently, the Professor of Mathematics & Statistics was recognized with the 2021 Distinguished Faculty Award. He follows previous recipients including Dr. Hsiao-Ming Wang, Professor of Criminal Justice, in 2020 and Dr. Lisa Morano, Professor of Biology & Microbiology, who received the inaugural honor in 2019. Awardees are chosen by a panel of their peers to recognize professors who have established a record of outstanding contributions in teaching, research/creativity, and service. It also includes a \$10,000 stipend spread over two academic years to support their work at the institution.

At the age of seven, Pepper’s family moved to Texas from Denver, Colorado for his father to join the oil

industry at Schlumberger. Dr. Ryan Pepper grew up in the suburbs of Sugar Land and attended the University of Houston where he earned a bachelor’s, master’s and Ph.D. in 2000, 2002, and 2004, respectively—all in mathematics. During his undergraduate studies, he almost double majored in philosophy (which he considers a close cousin to mathematics).

“Many mathematicians spend significant portions of their lives without solving any equations. Mathematics is a very deep subject that connects logic to creative thinking,” Pepper said. “Pure mathematicians are constantly trying to create new ideas and new ways of thinking while also trying to tie existing ideas together in new ways.

**Much of mathematics is about idea creation and manipulation; what things are, what they mean, what they are related to, and what they can become. Some of this is similar to how philosophers think, but the questions are posed about mathematical topics involving shapes and numbers and relations—as well as abstractions of these concepts.”**

Pepper joined the UHD Faculty in Fall 2005, attained the rank of Associate Professor in 2011 and Full Professor in 2016. Ironically, it wasn’t his intention to be an educator. It wasn’t until three or four years at UHD that he began to appreciate teaching.

**“I didn’t choose education,” said Pepper, Chair of the Department of Mathematics & Statistics in the College of Sciences & Technology. “I chose being a mathematician and molded myself into an educator.”**

“I aim to convey understanding rather than facts and knowledge. If you can get students to understand the deeper reasons for things, it motivates them to learn. If you can get them to appreciate mathematics, then they are much more willing to study it. Most students have never been exposed to the beauty of mathematics ... they usually don’t think of it as a beautiful piece of art (mental). When you get them to see its beauty ... the motivation is easily achieved.” **UHD**

# THE FUTURE’S SO BRIGHT

## Historic Tu Futuro Scholarship Supporting Students’ Academic Dreams

By Mike Emery

To many people, it was just a typical Thursday. For Mateo Muñoz and his family, it was a day that would forever change their lives.

The Muñoz family gathered at Univision 45 KXLN studios (Univision Houston studios, home of Univision 45, UniMás 67 and 4 Radio Stations (102.9 FM Que Buena, 106.5 FM Amor, 104.9/93.3 FM Latino Mix and 1010 AM TUDN) as they were informed that their oldest son, Mateo, was a finalist for the Tu Futuro scholarship—a collaboration between Univision 45 and UHD—that would provide one young Houstonian with access to higher education.

What they didn’t know was that an elaborate ruse was under way. Mateo was not just a finalist for this scholarship that would provide tuition for four years at the University of Houston-Downtown ... he was the sole finalist.

Mateo, then a senior at Cypress Park High School, was among hundreds of Houston students who submitted scholarship applications and essays detailing how higher education would help them give back to their communities.

Following a tour of the station, Mateo, his parents, sister and grandmother were directed to Univision’s plush Uforia Lounge for refreshments and the “big reveal.”

**“Students here in Houston are the people we need to invest in ... now,”** Univision Houston General Manager and President John Hannon said. **“They’re the future of Houston. They’re OUR future.”**

Dr. Daniel Villanueva, UHD Vice President for Enrollment Management, echoed Hannon’s sentiment and voiced UHD’s support for the scholarship, which was co-sponsored by Community Health Choice, Exclusive Furniture and Luby’s.

**“Great things can happen through the power of education and partnerships such as this one,”**

**Villanueva said. “This is a pivotal moment for the University of Houston-Downtown as this initiative is the culmination of all that we do and the commitment of all of the participating sponsors to our community.”**

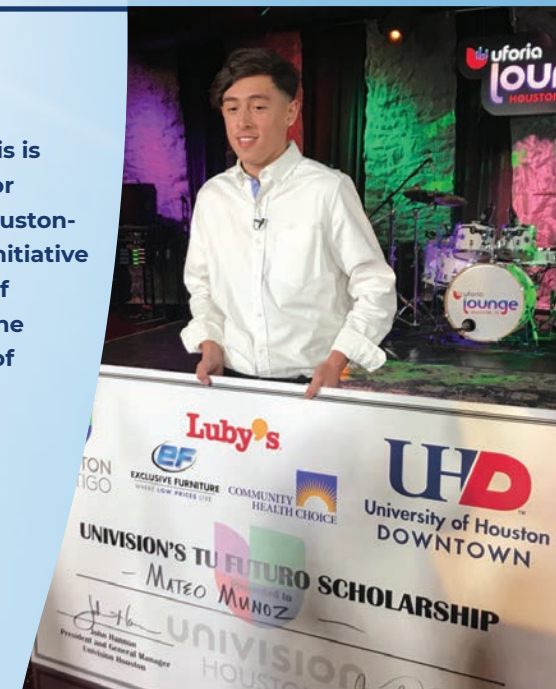
The Muñoz family (including mother, Clara Barona, who previously attended UHD) was called to the stage and Hannon introduced Mateo, who shared his essay, which offered insights into his dream of owning a car detailing shop that would give back to the community. Additionally, he expressed an interest in creating his own scholarship to support other students.

Following Mateo’s essay, Hannon revealed the truth to him and his family ... he was the sole finalist for this historic scholarship. Mateo now has the opportunity to make good on his ambitions of both earning a degree and helping his community.

“It’s an honor,” he said. “I am very thankful for this opportunity and look forward to coming to UHD.”

Mateo, who plans to study Business, is impressed by his new university and by the enthusiasm of those who turned out to officially welcome him to campus.

**“If you want something, you have to go get it,” he said. “No one will give it to you. You have to work to accomplish your goals, and that’s what I plan to do at UHD.” **UHD****



# THE EDUCATION OF JACKIE AGUILERA

By Sheryl E. Taylor

She considers herself one of the remaining originals as a third-generation Houstonian. She grew up on the Northside (now Near Northside) and East End's Second Ward.

University of Houston-Downtown alumna Jackie Aguilera believes that her upbringing with a family that was pro-education prepared her for her destiny. She praises her grandparents who were champions of education. "They (grandparents) were self-made, self-educated and determined self-learners who always knew that education was the key," she said.

Raised by a single mom, Aguilera also credits her mother and uncle for inspiring her to fight for one's beliefs.

"My mother and my uncle grew up in the 50s and 60s. My uncle was about standing up for the red, white and blue through military service, and my mother was about standing up for the red, white and blue with flowers in her hair protesting a controversial war," she said laughing at their differences to accomplish a common goal. **"But I knew that fighting, standing up and following your beliefs to do what is right as well as being a part of the fabric of this country was so important because of them."**

There were times when Aguilera felt the pressure of a multicultural "juggling act" that blended the ethnic background of her grandparents (from Mexico and Basque) and her father's (from Puerto Rico) as well as being a second-generation American in Texas. Added to her cultural identify challenges, she was also a lesbian born into a very strict and religious family, which posed another juggling act in itself.

"My family was born during a time when assimilation was the push...what many called the white-washing of cultures in America ... melting into a common identity called American. This was the perceived way for many to succeed," emphasized the oldest of three. "This also meant your sexual identity. Conformity was the norm for everything. I conformed almost in every way except when it came to being a lesbian. **I found my rainbow pride and my brown pride at UHD, a place where I didn't have to be ashamed of either. I was born here and identify as a Chicana or Mexican-American. And I'm out and proud. How great is that?"**

Choosing UHD gave Aguilera a new perspective.

**"UHD was huge for me," she said. "When you're first-gen, you are in survival mode and your family is doing the best they can to help you to navigate the system. UHD gave me a second chance to kick start my education."**

Aguilera's time as a Gator exposed her to "so much diversity, multiculturalism and most of all a sense of pride. You didn't have to be two different people," she said. "You were all of you at UHD!"

At UHD she worked as an English tutor and eventually a College Success Instructor with first-generation students from other countries, who were labelled at-risk, in reading/writing and exam preparation to excel in their studies. "Being able to help students with the skills they needed and seeing them succeed and excel in their studies ... really fueled and fired me up," she said. In 1989, she earned a bachelor's degree in General Studies degree with a major in English and a minor in Sociology from UHD.

After UHD, she served a brief stint in retail, followed by a position at Houston Community College in Adult Education, which led to the Houston Read Commission in response to what was known as the "urban literacy crisis." At the Commission she led many literacy initiatives, wore many hats and she founded the Financial Literacy Carnival—an initiative picked up by McGraw-Hill that became a state-wide funded financial education project.

**"All the things I experienced during and after UHD kept telling me that I was meant for education and**

**that I could run, but couldn't hide," she said. "I knew that I wanted to be a part of a process. It was a community effort in raising me and when that happens, you must always give back."**

Aguilera earned a master's degree in Cultural Studies at Texas Christian University and her involvement in literacy initiatives never waned. In 2008, Aguilera co-founded Houston Money Week, a city-wide financial empowerment initiative. She also later worked on a project to implement the Literacy Coalition of Central Texas' English @ Work Program. In 2018, she helped organize the Houston Area Adult Literacy Collective provider network and the Adult Literacy Partners of Houston, an award-winning team of providers piloting new apps for adult learners. She spent a number of years in Houston's Third Ward working in a grassroots adult literacy school, EastSide University, where she served as president for almost three years.

She recently landed at The Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy as a Project Manager to facilitate projects that will optimize service models for adult literacy in Houston, including the Houston Adult Literacy Blueprint, developed in partnership with the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation that was launched this past June.

"We're working on policy and advocacy, and I work with a multitude of adult literacy providers affecting thousands of adults and their families across the city," she noted. "We're achieving phenomenal things that are benefitting more than I ever imagined. It's humbling. Being a part of positive change is what my life's work is supposed to be about." **UHD**

# Practicing

## What They Teach

### Faculty Applying Insiders' Experiences to Enhance Curriculum

By Mike Emery

Just as University of Houston-Downtown students learn from accomplished veterans of academia, they also gain professional perspectives from longtime leaders from a range of industries. In essence, faculty such as the Marilyn Davies College of Business' Tracy Davis and the College of Public Service's Terry Pelz and Damon West and so many others have certainly practiced what they currently teach.



### Supermarket Superman

At UHD, **Tracy Davis** serves as Director for the Marilyn Davies College of Business' Center for Retail Management. The Center prepares students for the ever-evolving world of retail, and in turn, supports the regional workforce by ensuring UHD graduates are ready to adapt their knowledge and skills to this industry.

During 2020, retail professionals were among those essential workers who served on the frontlines of the pandemic. Many learned from faculty such as Davis.

Davis himself had not encountered anything like COVID-19 during his decades in the grocery industry, but his experiences no doubt provided foundations for his Center's alums who have been serving their respective communities.

To say he spent his life in the grocery business is a pretty close assessment. He stumbled into a job at a

Houston Safeway at the age of 15 and worked his way into the role of Chief Operating Officer for Apple Tree Markets. Following the dissolution of that company, Davis continued to serve as a consultant for the grocery industry and found his way to UHD to lead the Center for Retail Management.

In his classes, he balances textbook lessons with anecdotes from his storied career to enhance students' understanding of retail principles.

Although online shopping has altered the way people buy their goods, Davis said that the Center will continue to focus on the one aspect of retail that can never be automated ... people.

**"Customer service is key," he noted. "While retail is changing, the one thing that remains the same is keeping people satisfied. It all comes down to the personal experiences we have when shopping for goods and services."**

Just as Davis shares his stories from years of managing grocery stores, Criminal Justice lecturers **Terry Pelz** and **Damon West** can expand on the correctional system from two decidedly different angles.

Pelz is a former prison warden who served at the Darrington Unit in Rosharon, Texas and West learned corrections while serving time as an inmate at the Mark W. Stiles Unit in Beaumont, Texas. Now, they separately share their experiences with students through courses in UHD's nationally recognized Criminal Justice Program.

### The Warden

"Criminal justice students appreciate instructors who have been practitioners in the field," Pelz said.

**"My experience as a state prison warden, and one who was director of operations for a private prison company, gives me the ability to prepare students for success by passing on my professional knowledge."**

According to Pelz, the stories accumulated from working within prison walls help bring to life the lessons provided within texts. Beyond sharing these personal experiences, his long relationship with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice has provided students with an up-close look at the state's correctional facilities. Prior to COVID-19, he regularly took students to Huntsville's Walls Unit.

Pelz teaches classes such as Criminology, Introduction to Criminal Justice, Correctional System and Prisons in America among others.

### Reformed & Ready to Teach

West served seven years in prison and is currently on parole. A former college football player, he fell into a life of drug addiction—and crime—following an injury. After being released, he emerged from behind bars with a sense of purpose.

He earned a master's degree in Criminal Justice from Lamar University and in 2019, he was extended an invitation to speak to UHD Criminal Justice students by lecturer Lynn Ruzicka, who was a member of the parole

board that voted to release West from incarceration. Following an impassioned and informative speech, he was asked to teach at UHD.

**"I have an opportunity to provide an offender's view of our prisons," he said. "Students can learn about the rehabilitation of a human being within these units from someone who had a front row seat. It's a unique perspective that students can't get anywhere else."**

West expands on topics such as the inmates' code (never snitch on a fellow prisoner and other important things to know behind bars), prison education programs and gang culture in prison.

Prior to COVID-19, both Pelz and West were planning to team teach the Prisons in America class. This partnership has yet to materialize but both are confident that together, they can produce a unique, enlightening experience for UHD students.

### Practical Lessons to Produce Professionals

The real-world lessons provided by these faculty members perfectly complement their teaching colleagues' research activities and scholarly output. More than that, they help shape students into professionals and prepare them to enter decidedly different (yet very essential) industries in our region.

**"Students need a way to learn job skills, and one of the best ways we do that at UHD is providing them with someone who has that real-world experience," Pelz said. "I believe that myself and others make course materials as accurate for them as possible. Relating these experiences to the curriculum helps bring it to life." UHD**

PHOTOS: Terry Pelz, Tracy Davis, Damon West / Justin DeYoung & Michael Orta





# THE Hope-Filled ACTIVIST

By Sheryl E. Taylor

In the “About” section on her LinkedIn page it says: a general practice attorney who is passionate about equity and access—something that UHD alumna Fran Watson knows firsthand.

From an early age it was about survival. In Watson’s early teens, she took on the role as caretaker for her family and was expelled from high school in tenth grade.

“I was born to a 15-year-old mother,” recalled the 43-year-old Watson. “My mother was 29 when she died of a drug overdose ... I was 13.”

She failed ninth grade, but somehow was promoted to tenth grade. Eventually, she was expelled from high school due to absences. At the age of 16, she was called into the assistant principal’s office and was told that the “State of Texas is no longer responsible for you due to your absences. We are expelling you.”

Watson never returned to high school.

**“That’s why access is so important to me. I know what it’s like to slip through the cracks,” she said. “Young Black girls are expelled and/or suspended at higher rates than white female students. Now, I understand so much clearly because of my experiences.”**

Post-high school, Watson worked two jobs (Wendy’s and Luther’s Bar-B-Q) where she was constantly encouraged to aspire to bigger and better things, such as management. “Every place I worked, people saw potential in me. I’d change the subject, and say, ‘That’s not really something I want to do.’ I was embarrassed because I’d been expelled from high school and I didn’t have a high school diploma,” she said. But her manager at Luther’s kept encouraging her, and she finally admitted that she didn’t have a high school diploma. He told her that he didn’t have one either, but he had a GED. “I didn’t know what that was,” she added.

She began working the night shift to study for the GED and looked online for places to take the exam.

“I was simply taking the GED so I could apply for a manager position. I had no intention of going to college,” she said smiling. She soon discovered that UHD offered the GED Exam.

A few months after Watson received her results, “the testing proctor said that my scores were high enough to get a scholarship. She literally walked me to the



PHOTO: Ashkan Roayae  
OutSmart Magazine

registration desk, and I enrolled in May and was taking my first class (Introduction to Psychology) by August.

**“I will always be forever grateful to UHD. I know God put me at UHD on this journey,” she added. “I don’t take the stance of ‘pulling yourself up by your bootstraps’ mentality. I know it was the support at UHD that brought me through.”**

Four years later in 2005, she graduated *magna cum laude* with a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. While at UHD, Watson worked on a Fund for The Improvement for Post-Secondary Education grant that focused on first-year, first-generation students and college retention. She traveled as a peer mentor to Houston area high schools sharing her story about her challenging path to college.

She also met her wife, Kim, of 17 years at UHD.

Fast forward another four years, Watson earned a Juris Doctorate (*magna cum laude*) in 2009 from Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University.

Her gratitude extends to UHD whenever she is asked—from participating in a mock trial as a coach to speaking at various University events. Watson is also the recipient of the UHD’s Pre-Law Society’s Mock Trial Coach Award of Appreciation.

Watson graduated from law school during the economic downturn and was unable to find a job, so she opened her own practice (F. Watson Law, PLLC). She campaigned for the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance in 2015. In 2016, she was served as Female

Grand Marshal of the Houston Pride Parade. The Houston Business Journal named her as one of its “40 Under 40” honorees and the League of Women Voters of Houston bestowed Watson with the “Rising Star Award.”

In 2017, she ran for the Texas Senate seat for District 17 with the campaign moniker: “People First.” She didn’t win, but she’s keeping the door open. Right now, she finds her work as an Associate Municipal Court Judge for the City of Houston the most gratifying.

“Being able to talk to the people and make them feel they are being heard in the courtroom is empowering,” Watson emphasized. “I will never close the door to running again because I know that the State controls the funding and where it goes.

“Sometimes it’s hard to believe when I look back on my past. I think about the times when there was no water or lights,” said Watson. “No matter what happens there is a purpose for me ... I’m supposed to be here. I always had this big fear that I would be dead by 29, like my mother. Now, I’m thinking about retirement and what’s in store for my future. **My life is all about hope ... hope is what drives me ... I live it, feel it and believe it. I know there’s always something shared among people who have experienced hardships. I know how my life was, what my journey has been and where I am now.”** **UHD**

# THE POWER OF DETERMINATION

By Sheryl E. Taylor

**“What is your definition of Determination?” was posed to this year’s Faculty Award recipients. University of Houston-Downtown’s Faculty Senate recognized these academic community members who are dedicated to providing exceptional teaching, service, and scholarship to Gators.**

## OUTSTANDING LECTURER

“I feel like what I’m about to say has become something of a UHD platitude, but our students, many of whom are juggling school, work, and family obligations, are the personification of determination. I’ve known many students over the years who have had to leave school for a semester ... a year ... or several years ... to come back and finish their education. That’s determination. I’ve also known many “non-traditional” students who are older and returning to college 10 years or 15 years after high school. That’s determination, too.”

**Dr. Nancy Lopez, JD**  
Lecturer, History  
Social Sciences



## EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE

“Determination is persistence while facing barriers to success. Pushing forward to succeed when facing obstacles is difficult to do. Is success guaranteed? No, but that doesn’t matter. The push forward is part of success. Often, the result is not as important as the road we took to get there. Our paths can be better representations of ourselves than our accomplishments. Did we give up or did we struggle through and get to the other end? The answer to this question will signal a lot about our character to other people. Determination is an admirable trait and one that I see every day in UHD students, faculty, and staff.”

**Dr. Michael R. Cavanaugh**  
Associate Professor & Assistant Chair  
Criminal Justice & Social Work



## EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARLY/CREATIVE ACTIVITY

“It isn’t easy to define determination, and there are many different ways that one can interpret or approach the concept of ‘determination.’ For the ancient Greeks and Romans, ‘determination’ was defined by the community within which the individual existed and what was required for everyday life so that the individual could benefit society. For the ancient Greeks, in particular, this word was extremely important because it eventually led to the attainment of honor. Among the Romans, this word held significant influence since it was expected from those who intended to reach any level of political, social, or economic power. The same applies, in a lesser manner, to people today. Thus, one needs to be focused firmly on what will ultimately benefit society. In some profound way, the individual’s goals and purpose should align with the benefit of all. Indeed, it is necessary to be acutely aware of one’s goals in life and resolutely fixed in reaching them no matter the number of obstacles and challenges in one’s path.”

**Dr. Edmund Cueva**  
Professor, Classics & Humanities  
History, Humanities & Languages



## OUTSTANDING ADJUNCT

“The past year has clearly shifted the concept of determination from ‘yes, I can do’ to ‘yes, I can survive.’ My goal has been to shift my classroom from a place to ‘complete a degree’ to a forum where students have the opportunity to show mastery in decision-making and learn how to survive challenges. The best way to achieve this transformation is by communicating our diverse thoughts and developing lifetime lessons learned.”

**Dr. Elias Keedy**  
Adjunct Professor, Management

## EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

“During our journey through life, we face obstacles that may discourage us from moving forward, push us to change direction, or cause us to readjust priorities. Determination is our innate force and drive that guide us in overcoming obstacles, learn from these life experiences and prepare us for future challenges. Determination is that voice we have inside all of us that declares, ‘You can do it!’”

**Dr. Adriana Visbal, Biology**  
Lecturer, Natural Sciences



# A Creative Hub FOR HOUSTON

By Sam Byrd

Nestled in the heart of the Houston arts community, UHD is home to a public art collection that highlights diversity, documents Houston's history and underscores a rich academic student experience.

Featuring unique pieces created by talented and notable artists, the UHD collection can be found in the hallways, meeting rooms and public spaces in every building on campus.

**Mark Cervenka, Associate Professor and Director of UHD's O'Kane Gallery, noted that the collection "illustrates social history as well as individual perceptions of human experience. Art has the capacity to reflect upon a broad range of topics and one can find a dialogue between the art and many university disciplines. I imagine the diversity and scope of the art suggests to visitors messages of tolerance, community interaction, social awareness, empathy and curiosity."**

## Public Art of the University of Houston System

The collection is part of a larger University of Houston System (UHS) initiative established in 1969 dedicating one percent of the construction cost of all future building projects for art. UH became the first public university in Texas to formally adopt a percent for an art program.

More than 50 years after its establishment, the collection now spans the four component universities of the UH System—University of Houston, University of Houston-Downtown, University of Houston-Clear Lake, and University of Houston-Victoria—as well as additional instructional sites in Sugar Land, Pearland, and Katy, helping to make art accessible to millions of Texans.

Its collection has matured into one of the most impressive public art collections in the country, with nearly 700 objects on view. The scope of these projects has increased dramatically over time, and Public Art UHS continues to expand its collection through commissions, site-specific installations, temporary public art projects, purchases and gifts.

"UHD prides itself on connecting in different ways to the communities it serves from education to public service to art. The completion of 'Confluence,' just steps away from our campus, as well as the several public art installations owned by the University, demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between the University of Houston-Downtown and the namesake city it serves," Elisa Olsen, Executive Director of UHD's Office of University Relations.



Legends/Trenton Doyle Hancock

## Confluence

Commissioned by Houston Parks Board and Buffalo Bayou Partnership, this newly minted public art installation stands along the Bayou Greenway trail at the confluence of White Oak and Buffalo Bayous, located adjacent to the UHD campus. Created by artist Jane Kim, co-founder of Ink Dwell studio, the mural showcases the birds that call Houston's bayous home.

The 223-foot-long mural "Confluence" tells a 12-month story of Houston's migratory birds. Its name refers to the way in which many birds change color seasonally to attract mates. At the center are six species represented in both their spring breeding plumage and their non-breeding plumage. On the right are three species that winter in Houston; on the left are three species that arrive in the spring to breed. A map of Houston's bayous serves as the backdrop to bring movement and energy to the work.

As with Houston Parks Board's Bayou Greenways 2020 initiative, "Confluence" is a product of the public/private partnership between the City of Houston and Harris County, along with voters and philanthropists with a particular thanks to Tom and Laura Bacon. The mural project also collaborated with Houston Audubon to provide ornithological expertise and programmatic direction.

## The Gator Wall

A wall near UHD's Willow Street Pump Station on historic Allen's Landing, features a mural of the city's most famous reptile. Created by artist and muralist Sebastien "MrD1987" Boileau and his Houston-based mural company Eyeful Art, the piece provides another pride-inspiring display on campus. Viewers will recall Boileau was the creative talent behind the original Gator Wall located on a storage building in the University's Daly Street Lot. While that popular mural was conceived as a temporary addition to campus, the new Gator Wall is now a permanent installation.

## Gator Utility Box

Houstonians are well-versed with the colorful murals adorning the city's utility boxes. UP Art Studio, co-founded by UHD Alumna Elia Quiles, initiated the award-winning Mini Murals Houston project that reimagines traffic signal control cabinets by converting them into works of art by local and visiting artists. At the intersection of North Main and Commerce stands a mini-Gator mural representing the four-legged mascot of UHD. The work, commissioned in collaboration with UHD's Office of University Relations and UP Art Studio, was created by local artist Anat Ronen.

## Close to Home: Latinx Art and Identity

It was originally intended for a two-week run, but "Close to Home: Latinx Art and Identity" now has a permanent home at UHD. The collection is comprised of prints and paintings by several generations of U.S. Latinx artists that combine iconic images and up-to-the-minute works by important newcomers. Gifted by Drs. Harriett and Ricardo Romo, the more than 50-piece exclusive collection of Chicano Art is the largest art gift ever made to UHD—valued at more than \$200,000.

**"On view across five university campuses within the UH System, installed indoors and outside, the Public Art UHS' collection represents more than half a century of creative expression in a variety of different media," said Dr. Maria C. Gaztambide, Public Art**

**UHS Director & Chief Curator. "Works such as Dr. John Biggers' Salt Marsh (1997), Floyd Newsum's Contemplating Success (2004), or Trenton Doyle Hancock's LEGENDS (2015)—among the collection highlights at UHD—demonstrate a long-held commitment of working with major artists to develop significant site-specific projects for broad public enjoyment in and beyond our universities." UH**

Passage  
Carter Ernst & Paul Kittleson



Contemplating Success  
Floyd Newsum

# Here Comes the Sun

## UHD is certainly looking forward to sunny days


now that a new 75-panel, 23.5-kilowatt solar array is powering its College of Sciences & Technology's (CST) environmental science laboratories. The solar panels and additional photosynthesis equipment (used for faculty-mentored research) were made possible by a \$250,000 sustainability grant from Green Mountain Sun Club.

"The Green Mountain partnership is a great way to showcase the creativity of combining renewable energy in an urban environment," said Dr. Lisa Morano, UHD Distinguished Professor and Director of the University's Center for Urban Agriculture & Sustainability. "Such a system will serve as an educational tool for UHD students and it represents the future direction that universities should aspire to—we are in the business of building bright and sustainable futures."

UHD and Green Mountain Sun Club officially "flipped the switch" on the off-grid solar system in 2020 during a virtual Solar Celebration (conducted during the pandemic). Now that students are returning to campus, they will be able to truly benefit from the power generated by this impressive array (installed and engineered by Shine Development Partners), which sits along the Bayou Greenways facing White Oak Bayou.

"We are excited to support UHD's newest academic building by providing tools to inspire students and jumpstart their journey to becoming future leaders in sustainability," said Mark Parsons, Vice President and General Manager for Green Mountain Energy.

One of the labs supported by the solar array has been aptly named the Green Mountain Energy Sun Club Environmental Science Lab to recognize the company's commitment to renewable energy, energy efficiency and resource, and environmental conservation.

"This system supports our sustainability and sustainable development goals, such as minimizing UHD's carbon footprint, by generating electric power to meet the energy needs of two research labs," said Dr. Vassilios Tzouanas, Chair of UHD's Computer Science & Engineering Technology Department. "More importantly, it is a 'pilot plant' where generations of students, from different disciplines, will learn about renewable energy technologies and develop skills to solve important societal problems by working in a collaborative environment." 



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