Access & Excellence

Bridging campus and community
THE DIVISION OF DIVERSITY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ADVANCES SOCIALLY JUST LEARNING AND WORKING ENVIRONMENTS THAT FOSTER A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE THROUGH DIVERSE PEOPLE, IDEAS, AND PERSPECTIVES. WE ENGAGE IN DYNAMIC COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS DESIGNED TO TRANSFORM OUR LIVES.
10 Community-Wide Initiative Works to Revitalize Rundberg

4 Mother-Daughter Program Preps Latinas for Success

27 A Look Inside the Regional Foundation Library's Grant-Writing Services

Contents

3 Message from Dr. Vincent

7 UT Elementary Students Walk for Young Girls in Kenya

8 Community Leader Spotlight

9 SXSWedu Community Dialogue Addresses My Brother's Keeper Initiative

16 Community Leadership Awards in Photos

17 A Q&A with an Austin City Hall Fellow

18 Students Dedicate Spring Break to Helping Others

20 New Clinic Provides Quality Health Care to Underserved Residents

21 Book Spotlight

22 Students Partner with Google to Bridge Technology Gap

24 DDCE Events

26 High Schools Compete at UIL's Inaugural State Mariachi Festival

28 DDCE Faculty Fellow Addresses Austin's Affordable Housing Challenges

29 Meet Two Members of the DDCE Family
Pitching In

Last spring, more than 1,400 UT Austin students volunteered at The Project, one of the largest one-day student- and community-run service events in the nation. Established in 1999 by the Longhorn Center for Community Engagement, The Project is the annual culmination of a 12-month partnership effort involving student volunteers, city government departments, community organizations and local businesses.
Increasing Equity, Access, Social Justice Beyond the Forty Acres

To transform lives for the benefit of society. Our core purpose, while simple, is rich with meaning and drives everything we do at The University of Texas at Austin. Not only does it shape how we conduct research and scholarly inquiry, but also ensures that our resources serve Texans throughout the state.

Community engagement is no longer viewed as separate from, but rather as essential to, a robust learning and research environment. It is part of how professors teach and carry out research and how our students learn. By encouraging students to engage in public service and academic service learning, they’re able to pursue projects in their areas of interest and help the community.

Nowhere is this ideal more evident than our partnership with the Rundberg neighborhood in North Austin. In February, more than 1,400 students volunteered there at The Project, UT’s largest day of service. In total, students worked on more than 60 beautification projects across 19 work sites, producing over 8,900 volunteer hours with an economic impact of nearly $90,000.

This partnership illustrates the possibilities when we act intentionally. And I say with immense pride that the DDCE has grown to encompass more than 300 community partners, including those with Huston-Tillotson University, Con Mi Madre, Google Fiber and the City of Austin, all of which are highlighted in this issue of Access & Excellence.

Our hard work has also been recognized nationally, including being named to the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll and receiving the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Classification.

Whether it’s through our Community Engagement Center or in partnership with the Longhorn Center for Community Engagement, the DDCE is ensuring that we serve as a catalyst for positive change in Texas and beyond.

Dr. Gregory J. Vincent
Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement
W.K. Kellogg Professor in Community College Leadership
Professor of Law
GOING PLACES

Mother-daughter program empowers young Latinas to pursue college

by Jessica Sinn
Upon first impression, one could easily assume that Irais Romero has always aspired to attend graduate school and do something great with her life. Poised and articulate, she exudes a quiet confidence when she talks about her plans for medical school.

However, it wasn’t too long ago when she set her mind on becoming a hairstylist—not necessarily the right fit for a girl who loves science.

“College just seemed too out of reach,” says Romero, now a UT Austin neuroscience senior. “It wasn’t mentioned at home, so I decided to get my license in cosmetology and start working right away.”

That changed a few years ago when she and her mother joined Con Mi Madre, a nonprofit located at UT Austin’s School of Social Work that helps girls and their mothers prepare for college. A longtime community partner of the DDCE, the program is helping thousands of young girls (600-700 per year) become the first in their families to attend college. The partnership is a natural fit for the DDCE, which is home to several programs that are helping underserved students of color prepare for success in college and beyond.

Keeping with its name (Spanish for “with my mother”), the program requires participants—including dads and other family members—to work as a team. Together, they go to leadership summits, visit college campuses, get counseling and mentoring and learn the ropes of college admissions in workshops and meetings.

The goal is to plant a seed early on—starting in the sixth grade—to get both mothers and daughters into the college-going mindset. This can prove to be a challenging task due to the barriers young Latinas face, such as family expectations, financial obligations and legal restrictions. The key to their success, says Con Mi Madre Executive Director Dr. Teresa Granillo, is to get the mothers on board.

“If we want to make an impact, we need to focus on the mom,” says Granillo. “To create a cultural shift, all it takes is one Latina to change the entire family. If Mom has a degree, the question isn’t if but when her child will go to college.”

Granillo speaks from personal experience. Like Romero, she was raised in a low-income household by a single mom who didn’t have a college degree. To this day, she still remembers the moment when a little tough love galvanized her desire to make a better life for herself.

“I see myself in these girls,” Granillo says. “I remember my mom would tell me, ‘If you don’t want this life, go get an education.’ Like most mothers in the program, she didn’t know what that entailed, but I followed her advice and earned my Ph.D.”

Her story is the kind that offers valuable lessons to both mothers and daughters alike. Granillo wants them to see that they can and will get through college with a lot of hard work and determination. She brings this message home by surrounding them with college-educated staff—all Latinas—and graduate student mentors in the School of Social Work.

“We believe that these girls need multiple examples of success so they don’t think that..."
“This program helps me spend more time with my mom because we go to conferences and volunteer in the community together.”

-Stephanie, 2013 participant

Con Mi Madre Executive Director Dr. Teresa Granillo smiles for the camera with a group of college-bound young Latinas. (Photos provided by Con Mi Madre.)

a Latina with a Ph.D. is just an anomaly,” Granillo says. “We also make sure that our mentors have the background and experience to successfully guide them through the process and help them achieve their goals.”

Inspired by her supportive mentors, Romero is already returning the favor as a student mentor in the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence and Scholar Program, she attributes much of her success to her extended Con Mi Madre family members.

“Con Mi Madre has been helping my family for so many years,” says Trimble-Quiz, who recruited her little sister, a UT Austin linguistics freshman, to the program. “Now I want to give back in any way that I can.”

Both Cristabella and her sister Graciela aspire to learn new languages and travel abroad—dreams they will soon realize with some help from the program’s annual $1,000 scholarship.

Like a proud mother, Granillo beams when she talks about her students’ accomplishments. She has clearly found her niche in helping young women work toward a better, brighter future. Her hope is that students in the program will feel just as happy and fulfilled in their future careers.

“I can’t think of a better way to use my degree and experiences than to give back to the population that I came from and care so much about,” says Granillo, smiling. “All they need is an opportunity. Once you give it to them, they will take it with both hands and run.”

Cristabella Trimble-Quiz, a senior studying linguistics and Chinese at UT Austin, also feels the call to pay it forward. A finalist for the Fulbright Scholar Program, she attributes much of her success to her extended Con Mi Madre family members.

“I can’t think of a better way to use my degree and experiences than to give back to the population that I came from and care so much about,” says Granillo, smiling. “All they need is an opportunity. Once you give it to them, they will take it with both hands and run.”

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with College Forward, a non-profit college-coaching program.
Carrying bottles filled with water from Lady Bird Lake, UT Elementary’s fifth-grade class walked 6 kilometers (nearly 4 miles) around the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail at the seventh-annual Walk4Water event on Saturday, April 2. The event was hosted by H2O for Life, a nonprofit that promotes social awareness through service-learning projects.

As part of UT Elementary’s social and emotional curriculum, the fifth-graders learned about the scarcity of clean drinking water in Africa and the sacrifices young girls their age must make in order to survive. In class, the students learned about the water crisis in Kenya, where adolescent girls are burdened more so than boys with the responsibility of providing water for their families and schools. Although the majority of students at UT Elementary qualify for free and reduced lunches, they often remark on how much they take for granted, says fourth- and fifth-grade teacher Scarlett Calvin. “We focus on accountability, responsibility, cooperation—and Walk4Water is a great way for them to connect to all of those character traits,” says Calvin, who coordinated this year’s fundraiser. “In the fifth grade, our social studies curriculum isn’t just about history, it’s about stepping into other people’s lives.”

Leading up to the event, the students worked on a range of projects, including promotional videos, T-shirt sales and a coin drive. All proceeds will go toward building water catchment tanks and latrines for this year’s sponsored school, the Nasaruni Academy for Maasai Girls in Kenya. This year, the students raised more than $1,100, exceeding their goal of $1,040. Last year they exceeded their goal and reached $2,600, and in 2014, they raised more than $1,700. “We want to raise as much money as we can to build a well so the Nasaruni girls in Kenya don’t have to walk so many miles with five jugs of water on their backs,” says Reagan Sims, a student in Calvin’s fifth-grade class. “Everybody should be equal, and they should have what we have.”

Calvin is proud of the work her students have accomplished and enjoyed watching them take their first steps—literally—toward becoming global citizens at the culminating Walk4Water event. This is one of many service-learning projects embedded in the school’s curriculum. Last fall, Calvin’s class participated in the Buddy Walk and raised $1,700 for the Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas. “Our philanthropy projects help prepare students for success in school and in their daily lives,” she adds. “They often tell me that they really appreciate what they have, and that they’re able to understand and respect others outside their community.”
Teddy McDaniel remembers the moment when he discovered his love of learning. He was in middle school in Ohio, and a lesson on Black history opened his eyes.

“That was when the light turned on for me,” he says. “I believe if you can get students through that transition period and prepare them for high school, you can have some real success.”

Now, as leader of the Austin Area Urban League (AAUL), McDaniel is working to equip African Americans and all underserved populations with the tools to achieve economic and social equality.

One critical tool for success, McDaniel notes, is education. That’s why the AAUL has taken President Barack Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative into the fold.

As the AAUL works toward meeting Obama’s challenge to eliminate the educational barriers faced by young men of color, the organization is supporting a number of education pipeline programs within the DDCE, including Project MALES, the African American Male Research Initiative and the Heman Sweatt Symposium on Civil Rights.

With the second-annual SXSWedu My Brother’s Keeper Community Dialogue event now in the rearview, it’s McDaniel’s goal to keep pushing the initiative forward.

“There is a lot of work to be done,” says McDaniel, who is leading the middle school education sub-committee within the Greater Austin Area MBK Initiative. “SXSW cannot be the end; it has to be the start of what’s to come.”

Although he initially got his start in a lucrative finance career, he has no regrets about his bold career move to community service.

“It’s certainly a calling for me,” McDaniel says. “You have to ask yourself, what are your interests and passions in your community? Find yours, volunteer and get involved.” —E
“The stars are aligned now,” said Austin Mayor Steve Adler as he addressed those gathered for the second-annual SXSWedu Greater Austin Area My Brother’s Keeper Community Dialogue.

“[Now is the time] to redirect energy and resources to advance the full potential of everyone who lives here in Austin,” Adler said in his opening remarks.

It has been a busy year for the My Brother’s Keeper initiative in Austin, which is co-chaired by Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, vice president for diversity and community engagement at UT Austin, and Mark Madrid, president and CEO for the Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

What began last year as a gathering at SXSWedu to address the educational barriers that area boys and young men of color face is now a formal organization with support from the City of Austin, Travis County, local universities, school districts and businesses. The organization is focusing its efforts on six local priority areas, which include improvements in reading levels in early education, high school, college and career readiness, health and wellness, violence intervention programs and more. The team will use data to measure progress in each priority area.

Michael Smith, special assistant to President Obama and senior director of cabinet affairs for My Brother’s Keeper, also spoke at the SXSWedu event. Paraphrasing Obama, Smith said that there is not a single thing more important to the future of America than young men of color achieving their dreams.

In his closing remarks, Mayor Adler gave the group a challenge: to bring results to the same meeting in 2017.

“One year ago we were a group that was joined together with the prospect of doing something real,” he said. “I like the idea of one year ago because it’s important to look back, but I want this to really be one year before. One year before we gather and we no longer are talking about ideas, but about what we have accomplished.”

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Revitalizing Rundberg for a New Era

By Jessica Sinn

Restore Rundberg Revitalization Team member Abel Lopez-Soto paints over graffiti in a Rundberg neighborhood during The Project.
Walk by a magazine rack and take a look at the headlines. Chances are, you’ll find Austin gracing a “fastest growing” list. The traffic, the tech industry, the live music scene – everything is expanding in Austin. Unfortunately, so is economic inequality.

The widening economic gap is especially apparent in the Rundberg Lane neighborhoods, where 95 percent of those enrolled in school are considered economically disadvantaged, according to a 2014 report by Dr. David Springer, professor in the School of Social Work and LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT Austin.

As with most things in Austin, new developments are in the works. Only this lofty project does not involve sky-scraping cranes and construction zones. The tools are in the hands of community members, city officials, researchers, nonprofits and police officers, to name a few key stakeholders. They are all taking part in Restore Rundberg, a three-year initiative that aims to improve a six-mile area in a manner that will be sustainable in the future.

Identified as “distressed” by the U.S. Justice Department, Rundberg is the first among 15 regions to receive the $1 million grant through the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program, part of President Barack Obama’s Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative. The cluster of neighborhoods, just northeast of UT Austin, contains only 5 percent of Austin’s population, but accounts for a disproportionate share of the city’s violent crimes, property theft, prostitution and other violations.

To make a significant impact in a relatively short amount of time, the Austin Police Department partnered with a research team, currently led by Springer, to focus on the area’s three highest crime zones: Sam Rayburn Drive, Northgate Street and the intersection of Interstate 35 and Rundberg Lane.

All of these hotspots provide ample cover for illicit activities. They back up to open lots or fields, payphones (handy tools for drug transactions) are accessible, and there’s easy freeway access for a fast getaway. While the project is still ongoing, Springer and his team are already seeing some big changes.
“When the streets get cleaned up and criminals are arrested or connected to social services, residents start to feel safer being out on the streets and approaching the police more readily,” Springer says. “All of those collective efforts have made a difference.”

Elevated police presence didn’t stop at the hotspots. To make sustainable improvements to the entire area, the researchers advised a more proactive approach to policing. In order for residents to take back their neighborhood, they must work with—not against—law enforcement, Springer notes. But in an area that comprises a high number of people classified as refugees, that trust needs to be earned.

“One solution was to start a mobile walking beat to build relationships and trust among the residents,” says Springer, who is also the director for the university’s RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service. “We had APD officers policing on foot and bike patrol in the hotspots. They made over 14,000 contacts with residents and crime patterns started to go down significantly.”

When the initiative began in 2012, residents of the Rundberg zip codes reported the lowest level of trust in the police as well as the lowest feelings of safety in the city, according to a 2012 City of Austin survey. Now more than 70 percent of respondents in Springer’s 2015 survey claim they feel safe in their neighborhoods, as compared to about 40 percent in 2014. And despite the national trend of rising crime rates in most major metropolitan cities, the overall violent crime rate in all three hotspots was reduced by 15 percent. In the entire Rundberg area, violent crime dropped by more than 4 percent, along with a 14 percent drop in property crime.

Springer attributes much of the progress to the community-based policing strategies combined with community leaders who helped mobilize their fellow residents to take back their neighborhood.

“One thing that surprised me is that the confidence stays up even as the crime rate goes down. Once they felt like they were part of the solution, residents began working together and with the police to improve the quality of life in their neighborhood,” Springer
Dr. David Springer, professor in the School of Social Work and the LBJ School of Public Affairs, spearheads the research effort of the Restore Rundberg initiative. "When you invest time and energy in the place where you live, you're more likely to feel a sense of belonging and become more invested in your community."

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Austin natives like Monica Guzmán have seen Rundberg and surrounding areas deteriorate throughout the years, morphing from tidy rows of houses to graffiti-covered buildings and trash-strewn vacant lots. She and her colleagues on the Restore Rundberg Revitalization Team know the potential of the area and are adamant about making it a safe place where children can play outside and neighbors can chat comfortably on their front porches over morning coffee.

“If we want to have a good, safe, healthy community, we all have to be invested,” says Guzmán, who represents the North Lamar/Georgian Acres Neighborhood revitalization planning. “We can't expect the city to do it for us. This is our responsibility.”

But in order for Restore Rundberg to live up to its name, all concerned parties must come to the table, she adds.

“The majority of Rundberg residents are renters, people of color and refugees resettling in the area,” Guzmán says. “When I first started coming to these meetings, I didn’t see these people, so I demanded that we focus our efforts on community outreach.”

David Fairchild, a case worker for Refugee Services of Texas, stopped by a monthly community and team meeting last March to see how his organization could better serve Rundberg's large refugee population. In addition to helping people begin new lives in Austin, the organization provides intervention programs for prostitutes, as well as offering rehabilitation services and assistance to those who are ensnared in human trafficking.

“We want to make sure that the area is safe, people have jobs and children have access to schools and libraries,” Fairchild said after the meeting adjourned. “We want this to be a thriving community, so that’s why I’m here today—to meet with everyone and see what we can offer to the people of Rundberg.”

The Restore Rundberg Revitalization Team’s efforts are clearly paying off, according to Springer’s lengthy list of assets. In addition to tracking crime patterns, he also took inventory of all of the area’s positive attributes. One of the biggest assets, he says, are the AISD schools, which offer quality after-school mentoring, at-risk prevention programs, free summer camps and more. The diverse student population also adds to the value, he notes.

“I see the schools as one of the core assets for the neighborhood,” Springer adds. “In fact, a couple of officers came up with the idea to tap into the schools to rebrand Rundberg as the ‘Rundberg Educational Advancement District’, or R.E.A.D. The idea being that if we hold up the schools in Rundberg as one of its great resources, we can alter perceptions about the area and make this a more desirable place to live.”

Another school on Springer’s assets list is UT Austin. Every year, students select a neighborhood for a two-year academic service-learning initiative that culminates in The Project, UT’s largest day of service organized by the Longhorn Center for Community Engagement (LCCE). This year, The Project returned to Rundberg for a third time to cultivate gardens, paint bridges, spruce up the schools and clean the streets. In one day alone, their efforts...
resulted in an economic impact of nearly $90,000. Students will engage in academic service-learning activities for a second year in the Rundberg neighborhood culminating in The Project 2017.

UT Austin students in the Austin City Hall Fellows Program are also participating in community meetings and outreach events to help prioritize and execute revitalization plans. A partnership between the LCCE and the City of Austin Mayor’s Office, the program aims to prepare future civic leaders through service-learning. Shadhi Mansoori, a current fellow, is focusing on improving community outreach, advising stakeholders on how to connect residents to the area’s myriad free or low-cost resources.

“This has been a really big stepping stone for me,” says Mansoori, a neuroscience sophomore who plans on pursuing a career in public health. “I really enjoy getting out in the community and learning about the problems facing the people of Rundberg, and how people are working together to address those issues.”

Connecting underserved communities with university resources is an integral part of the mission of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE), says Erica Saenz, associate vice president for community and external relations in the DDCE. A longtime Austin resident, Saenz has a vested interest in this cause. In 2013, she joined the Restore Rundberg Revitalization Team and served as chair from 2014-16. In addition to leading the team in working with researchers and APD, she also oversees revitalization activities in eight other priority areas.

“Restore Rundberg is a community initiative that is of great significance to the City of Austin,” Saenz says. “It’s important that we align resources and bring additional focus to this area in order to have maximum impact.”

Erica Saenz, chair of the Rundberg Revitalization Team and associate vice president for community and external relations in the DDCE, shows her UT pride at The Project.
SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

Looking back at results from the past three years, Springer considers Restore Rundberg to be a success story. Yet when the no-cost extension period of the grant runs out this September, it will be up to the residents to keep up the momentum.

“One lingering challenge is to sustain the changes we made,” Springer says. “Community engagement is critical to the ongoing success for Restore Rundberg.”

Guzmán said she is committed to keeping up the momentum, connecting as many community members, city officials and organizations to the cause as she possibly can. Moving forward, another looming challenge is the threat of gentrification. She’s worried that the double-edged sword of success can potentially turn her neighborhood into another trendy locale for well-to-do newcomers.

“Rundberg looks like what East Austin used to be: low-income housing and people living paycheck to paycheck,” Guzmán says. “It’s important that we work with community-friendly developers who aren’t focused on building condos and high-end properties we can’t afford. If I move out of the area I want it to be because it was my decision, not because I was forced out.”

Although gentrification may not be a big concern for those living on the west side of Austin’s dividing line, known as Interstate 35, everyone—rich and poor—is affected by the overall health of their city, Springer says.

“Austin has a lot of great assets and strengths,” Springer adds, “But the story of two Austins is growing and becoming amplified as I look at how things unfold. The disparities continue to grow—and if we want to be the city that we think we are, we must find ways to improve the quality of life for residents living in crime-ridden neighborhoods so we can become one unified city.” —Æ
Leading the Way
Honoring those who make Austin a better place for all

Every spring and fall, the DDCE and the university’s Office of the President honor organizations and individuals who are role models in the areas of civil rights, social justice, health, education and the arts at the Community Leadership Awards. Here are a few highlights from the fall 2015 celebrations.

Community Leadership Award Honorees at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, Nov. 3, 2015

1. From left: Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, vice president for diversity and community engagement; Dora Trinidad-Campos, Hispanic Women’s Network of Texas (HWN) state chair; Lupe Morin, HWN executive director; Elizabeth Medina, HWN Austin Chapter chair; Rudy Colmenero, CPA and founding partner of Mitchell & Colmenero, LLP; Gina Hinojosa, former AISD Board President; Paul Cruz, AISD superintendent; Dr. Judith G. Loredo, retired assistant commissioner for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; and UT Austin President Gregory L. Fenves.

2. Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Legacy Award recipient Dr. Judith G. Loredo delivered comments on behalf of all Community Leadership Award honorees.

Community Leadership Award Honorees at the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center, Dec. 18, 2015

3. From left: Bernadette Phifer, Carver Museum curator; Richard Overton, the nation’s oldest living WWII military veteran; LaVonne Mason, co-founder of the Austin Area Urban League; Ora Houston, Austin City Council member; Geraldine Tucker, president of the Town Lake Chapter of the Links, Inc.; and Dr. Gregory J. Vincent.

4. Sergeant Richard Overton (center) poses with Dr. Vincent and President Fenves.
City Hall Fellow Melissa Flores aims to make a positive impact on the East Austin community.

Each fall, a new group of undergraduates begins a year of service in the Austin City Hall Fellows Program. A partnership between the Longhorn Center for Community Engagement (LCCE) and the Office of the Mayor of the City of Austin, the program empowers students to become effective agents of change.

Throughout the school year, the fellows engage in discussions with residents and neighborhood associations to explore and define priorities for revitalization. The program also includes a service-learning course led by Dr. Suchitra Gururaj, assistant vice president for community engagement in the DDCE, which provides students with a theoretical framework for community engagement, access to city staff and time to meet with their cohort and share best practices.

This year, the fellows are working with community members in North Austin’s Rundberg neighborhood to identify projects that might qualify for grants through the city’s Neighborhood Partnering Program. We caught up with Melissa Flores, an urban studies junior, to learn more about her work in Rundberg, and how her experiences as an Austin City Hall Fellow are preparing her for the future.

**What are your responsibilities as an Austin City Hall Fellow?**

We work with the Rundberg neighborhood’s local community leaders to address issues ranging from education to infrastructure. Austin City Hall Fellows do not define the projects that address the issue, but rather take direction from the local community.

**Why did you join the Austin City Hall Fellows?**

Through my coursework at UT, I read about the affordability and community engagement issues that Austin is facing. I wanted to take action, but wasn’t sure where to start. The Austin City Hall Fellowship offered me a unique opportunity to continue learning about these topics while making a positive social impact.

**Why is it important for students to get involved in the community?**

Volunteering has given me the opportunity to give back and the confidence to take on leadership roles. When I served as a volunteer at the public library in my hometown of Laredo, Texas, I witnessed how that organization brought people together to learn and improve their lives. I helped my community build stronger relationships and hopefully made it a better place to live.

**What are your post-graduation plans?**

After some more traveling and work experience, I want to attend graduate school and continue working with my local community on urban and environmental issues.

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Meet an Austin City Hall Fellow

by Kevin Almasy
The words “spring break” conjure up images of sunny beaches and parties galore. But for a group of UT Austin students, this much anticipated week away from school means something else entirely: Making the world a better, more equitable place.

Last March, three groups of students journeyed to Louisiana and South Texas to help underserved communities through a national service-learning program called Alternative Breaks. Another group will head out to San Francisco this summer to better understand the social justice issues around homeless LGBTQ youth. Housed within the Longhorn Center for Community Engagement, the program aims to educate undergraduates about social issues and help them become catalysts for positive change.

Throughout the week, they devoted their time entirely—give or take a few scenic tours and dinner outings—to a specific project, from constructing homes for recent Mexican immigrants in McAllen to building a community garden in New Orleans. Though the work was mentally and physically draining at times, the students’ efforts were well-rewarded when they started to see the fruits of their labor—in the lives of the people they served and within themselves.

“Alternative Breaks pushes students outside their comfort zone and allows them to understand the perspectives of others,” says Hali Hoyt, a program coordinator in the DDCE who oversees the program. “They gain real-world experience while discovering their own role in creating social change.”

Now in its second year at UT Austin, Alternative Breaks is proving to be an asset to the undergraduate experience. Seeing the value in the program, Dr. Marc Musick,
dean of student affairs in the College of Liberal Arts, recently contributed a $30,000 gift to support its efforts in providing life-changing experiences for students.

The return on investment can be seen in Zach Garcia, a finance senior who discovered some personal strengths that will serve him well in the business world. After completing his first Alternative Breaks trip in New Orleans in 2015, he returned to the city this year as a team lead so he could put his people skills to good work.

“One of the many lessons this trip has taught me is that I’m approachable and people feel comfortable coming to me with questions or if they just want to talk,” Garcia says. “Now I have more confidence around groups of people—whether it’s a classroom setting or a work environment.”

Though Garcia could have spent the week kicking back with his friends on the sandy shores of South Padre Island, he doesn’t for a moment regret his decision to ditch his creature comforts—even his cell phone—for a week of work in the community garden, where he toiled for hours digging in garden beds and planting vegetables for the summer harvest.

“It’s more rewarding to do something that’s worth my time instead of something I could be doing on the weekend,” he says. “It’s more meaningful and a better experience that I can look back on and remember.”

One memory that will last a lifetime, Garcia recalls, occurred while taking a tour of the Lower Ninth Ward—the area most devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

“It’s hard to describe the heavy feeling that came over me when I looked at all the homes that were completely destroyed,” he recalls. “I could actually see the divide between the people who had the resources to rebuild and those who had no other choice but to leave their homes to ruin. Seeing this helped me realize that each one of us has an individual responsibility to bring about equality. We have to listen to the needs of others and utilize all our talents to achieve social justice.” —Æ
As the sprawling capital city grows in size, so too does the gap between rich and poor. According to a 2015 report from the Martin Propensity Institute, Austin is the most economically segregated large metro area in the country.

The economic divide has become increasingly acute in East Austin, where many historically underserved residents lack access to a luxury that is often taken for granted: quality health care.

With the creation of the Dell Medical School, and the many service-learning programs across campus, UT Austin is working hard to eliminate the city’s persistent health disparities.

“Addressing inequities in healthcare access in Austin is integral to the DDCE’s community engagement vision,” says Dr. Suchitra Gururaj, assistant vice president for community engagement in the DDCE. “Through service-learning courses, community engagement health dialogues and activist research, we forge connections with nonprofits, residents and the government to shed light on these inequities and collaborate on possible solutions.”

Key and perhaps most important to these efforts is the Sandra Joy Anderson Community Health and Wellness Center on the Huston-Tillotson University (HT) campus. A partnership between HT, CommUnityCare, Austin Travis County Integral Care, and the Dell Medical School at UT Austin, the center will address physical and mental health needs of East Austin residents as well as the HT community.

Ultimately envisioned as a $35 million complex, the center is named after the late daughter of HT alumna Ada Cecilia Collins Anderson, who gave the historically Black university $3 million, the largest gift in the institution’s history. Last January it opened to the public, offering health care services in a primary care setting.

The center provides a unique opportunity for HT and UT Austin students to work together to increase health and wellness across the community. This includes a behavioral health service-learning program that will launch this fall. The pilot program is a joint effort between the Community Engagement Center, a unit within the DDCE, and the Dell Medical School’s Health Disparities Division.

“The overall goal of the behavioral health service-learning project is to engage students in community activities that will promote a greater understanding of the disparities seen in behavioral health services, access to care and prevention,” says Tracee Hall, Dell Medical School director of public health and community engagement.

UT Austin students participating in the program will work with community
In honor of the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health’s 75th anniversary, we’re shining the spotlight on a forthcoming book by William S. Bush. In *Circuit Riders for Mental Health* (Texas A&M University Press, 2016), Bush tells the story of the foundation’s central role in transforming the way we think, talk and make policy about mental health in Texas and the nation. It also provides portrayals of the visionary men and women who pushed relentlessly to improve mental health for the people of Texas.

A community partner of the DDCE, the Hogg Foundation has been advancing recovery and wellness in Texas and across the nation since it was established in 1940 by “The First Lady of Texas” Ima Hogg. Visit the Hogg Foundation’s 75th anniversary blog [www.hogghistory.org](http://www.hogghistory.org) to read a few chapters.
Google Community Leaders Bridge Technology Gap in Austin

With tech giants like Dell, Apple, Samsung, Google, Oracle and Facebook setting up shop in the Austin area, it may be difficult to believe more than 50,000 residents don’t have access to the Internet, according to a 2015 Digital Inclusion in Austin study.

To bridge this digital divide, Google Fiber has enlisted the help of some tech savvy UT Austin and Huston-Tillotson University students. Together they are working to solve the challenges of technology training and access through the Google Community Leaders program.

“Google Fiber has clear, positive social impact goals for any city we work in,” says Parisa Fatehi-Weeks, head of Community Impact Investments and Programs for Google Fiber in Austin. “We want to be a part of the local community and make it a better place for all.”

She explained the company has three priorities for Austin: bridging the digital divide, increasing STEM education, and expanding entrepreneurship in underserved communities.

“Our Community Leaders Program is mainly focused on that first goal,” Fatehi-Weeks says. “We want to help students get hands-on.”

Students applied last summer to get into the competitive program that allows them to work with local nonprofits while being mentored by Google employees. Javier de la Garza, a UT Austin computer science senior, is leading a group that’s working with Austin Free-Net, a nonprofit that aims to increase digital inclusion.

He and co-leader Liz Oppenheim are focused on two projects with their team: an awareness campaign and creating an online dashboard that illustrates statistics and other information regarding the community outreach work of Austin Free-Net.

Another team led by Casey Brennan, a human relations sophomore, is working with the Housing Authority of the City of Austin.
and how to work through mistakes and push the team to work harder,” says De la Garza, who will be working at Microsoft after graduation. “It has helped me realize a more realistic approach to real-life problems.”

Brennan also gained some insight into the working world by teaming up with a diverse group of people he otherwise would never have met.

“One of my favorite parts about this work is exposure to people from different disciplines and backgrounds,” Brennan adds.

From Google’s perspective, the program aligns with their mission to ensure that all people have access to the Internet and have the resources they need to use it to their full advantage.

“We have students who are ambitious go-getters. They are all working to make their specific projects successful,” says Lynette Barksdale, Google Fiber staffing lead. “Googlers who are mentors are able to step away from their everyday jobs and partner with the college students—that keeps them engaged as well.”

Austin to help distribute free computers to residents. As part of the effort, Google Fiber is connecting public housing residents to internet service at no cost.

After teaching residents how to set up their computers, Brennan and his team help them get started by practicing a few basic tasks, such as getting online and creating passwords. The team created a script for these sessions so that all necessary material is covered when the computers are handed off to the residents. They also developed an insert promoting digital inclusion for the HACA newsletter and are now working on a communications plan for the housing authority.

The third team is working with the Girl Scouts to create trainings via webcam about how to safely use social media, and how to do basic coding.

Not only has the program helped local residents and nonprofits, but the students benefit from interactions with their Google mentors and clients while learning project-management and interpersonal skills often not acquired until after graduation.

“Liz and I have learned about group management, how to keep morale high time, our students gain real-world experience that benefits their overall learning,” she says.

After Austin was named a “Fiber City,” Mark Strama, head of the local Google Fiber, invited the DDCE to become a community partner. Gururaj believes this is a testament to the DDCE’s reputation as a leader in facilitating sustainable, reciprocal partnerships.

“Like us, he knew that mobilizing college students to mitigate the systemic issue of the digital divide would benefit underserved communities and the ethical leadership development of our students,” she adds. “We are thrilled to be planning for our third year of this productive relationship.”

Partnerships Mutually Benefit UT Austin and Community

Google Fiber is one of the DDCE’s more than 300 community partnerships, which are all mutually beneficial to the university and the community, says Dr. Suchitra Gururaj, assistant vice president for community engagement in the DDCE.

“We provide potential capacity to community initiaties that are under-resourced, and at the same time, our students gain real-world experience that benefits their overall learning,” she says.
On the DDCE Scene

1. Chembridge Instructor Dr. Kate Biberdorf wows Neighborhood Longhorns with her Chemistry Circus at the NLP Soccer-STEM Challenge event.

2. Winners of the 16th annual fiction writing contest at the Texas Book Festival. Hosted by the DDCE and the Texas Book Festival, the contest encourages and rewards creative writing in Texas schools.

3. Dr. Gregory J. Vincent and Austin Mayor Steve Adler show off their Longhorn spirit with the Texas Cheerleaders at the annual UT Night at the Trail of Lights.

4. Alpha Phi Alpha’s rededication ceremony for the Martin Luther King Jr. statue on the East Mall lights the way for reflection on Dr. King’s life.

5. Wheelchair rugby is always a highlight of Adapted Sports Night, a campus event hosted by Services for Students with Disabilities, Recreational Sports and Student Government at Gregory Gymnasium.

6. Jean Boyd (right), athletic director for student athlete development at Arizona State University, led a panel discussion with his colleagues about academic support programming at the 2016 Black Student-Athlete Summit.

7. UT Elementary students help celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the annual MLK Day March and Rally.

8. Former Texas Longhorns football players Fozzy Whittaker (far left) and Aaron Humphrey (back) played a different kind of ball game with representatives from 24 Hour Fitness, the DDCE’s new fitness sponsor, during the Neighborhood Longhorns’ Celebrity Bowling Challenge.

9. Four-time U.S. Olympic gold medalist and UT Austin alumna Sanya Richards Ross gave the keynote address at the 89th annual Nike Clyde Littlefield Texas Relays Celebration and Reception at Google Fiber Space, co-hosted by the DDCE.

10. In honor of the 60th anniversary of the admission of African American undergraduates at UT Austin, three Precursors participate in a discussion about campus integration during the Heman Sweatt Symposium on Civil Rights. From left: The Honorable Harriet Murphy, Judith Jenkins and Sherryl Griffin Bozeman.
By Jessica Sinn

Budding musicians from high schools across Texas competed at the inaugural University Interscholastic League (UIL) State Mariachi Festival. Dressed in elaborate traditional outfits—complete with embroidered ties, silver-studded pants and sombreros—the 57 groups sang and strummed their hearts out at the two-day festival, which took place March 11-12 at Southwest High School in San Antonio.

“The goal of the festival is to provide sound educational student-centered competition against a ratings standard, all while providing instruction from a panel of experts,” says UIL Music Director Dr. Bradley Kent. “Ultimately, the desired end result is to facilitate the growth and development of mariachi programs in our schools.”

The UIL, which operates under the auspices of the Vice President for Diversity & Community Engagement, has held mariachi regional competitions since 2007. The move to a statewide competition is a response to the growing popularity of mariachi programs in schools across Texas.

Joe Muñoz, former director of special events for the Mexican American School Boards Members Association, says the number of competitive high school mariachi musicians has ballooned in recent years. By his estimate, the number of groups competing at the regional level increased from 11 in 2009 to 50 in 2015. Those with a Division 1 rating advanced to the finals at this year’s pilot contest.

For a maximum of 10 minutes on stage, the groups were judged on their talent and artistry. But for many of these students, success isn’t all about medals and top rankings, says Muñoz. It’s about respect in the genre and taking pride in one’s culture.

Lessons learned in these competitions also empower young musicians to reach for their goals—on and off the stage.

“The Texas High School Mariachi Competition provides students with a lifetime opportunity that promotes positive values, healthy competition and education,” he says. —Ê
On a Mission

Austin philanthropist turns passion for helping the homeless into nonprofit

by Lisa Jones

Last summer, Austin’s population surpassed the 2 million mark, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. With the surge in growth comes a higher demand for nonprofits and charities that work to improve the quality of life for those struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Mission Accomplished is one of several fledgling nonprofits that are striving to meet the city’s demand for assisting its burgeoning homeless population. Since the newly minted nonprofit was established in 2014, it has been operating as a resource center, providing a range of services for the homeless.

“Our primary purpose is to connect people with resources, and support partnerships among resources,” says Ebonie Trice, chief executive officer and founder of Mission Accomplished.

To make a significant impact on the city’s homeless community, Trice knows she cannot work alone. In a number of projects, she has collaborated with the public, other organizations and private agencies. Last fall, her nonprofit worked with several philanthropic organizations and AISD schools to provide more than 100 Thanksgiving dinners to the homeless and victims of the 2015 Onion Creek flood.

Mission Accomplished has also partnered with Coinless Laundry in North Austin to launder clothes for the homeless twice a month. Revolving teams of 20 volunteers participate in Operation Clean Clothes, in which they transport clothes from homeless camps to the laundromat. In the future, Trice aims to broaden this service to veterans, substance abuse recoverees and senior citizens.

As the nonprofit expands, new challenges lie ahead. However, Trice has already jumped over a sizable hurdle: starting a nonprofit. This is not an easy task for those who are new to the grant-writing profession. She’s thankful for the wealth of resources that the Regional Foundation Library (RFL) provides to philanthropists like herself who aspire to turn their passions into a nonprofit.

A unit within the DDCE, the RFL offers a wealth of print and online resources including books, periodicals and databases. While visiting the library, located in the Community Engagement Center, Trice researched fund development, grants and more.

Though the process can be overwhelming, she wasn’t in it alone. The library’s staff members were there to help every step of the way—from seeking crowd-funding resources, to finding mentors in Austin’s nonprofit sector. RFL Director Ellen Moutos-Lee helped her pinpoint funding opportunities with the Greater Round Rock Community Foundation and the Austin-based Glimmer of Hope Foundation.

“Ellen has always been there to give me the help I needed,” Trice adds. “That’s just exactly what Mission Accomplished wants to do and be.” –AE
Dr. Eric Tang, DDCE faculty fellow and director of the Social Justice Institute, has been named as one of The Alcalde’s 2016 “Texas 10” top professors at UT Austin.

So rapidly, but he quickly discovered there was no qualitative data available to answer his questions. Over the past two years, he has conducted more than 150 surveys with current and former East Austin residents to find answers.

Findings from the first phase of his research shows that as gentrification continues in East Austin, residents who have stayed have faced higher property taxes without any tangible benefits such as improved infrastructure or lower crime rates.

So why did they stay? According to Tang, it is because their sense of belonging to the community can’t be calculated.

“Rootedness doesn’t conform to what economists call rationality,” Tang said at a Longhorn Center for Community Engagement event last fall.

Since September, Tang has been working on the second phase of his study, conducting surveys with those East Austin residents, mostly African American, who have left and relocated to outlying Austin suburbs such as Pflugerville, Round Rock, Manor and Elgin. He seeks answers to whether their quality of life has improved, worsened or remained the same since leaving Austin.

Tang hopes his work will lead to greater community involvement and support for those who have stayed.

“We can’t stop the market from doing what it’s doing,” says Tang, who directs the Social Justice Institute in the Community Engagement Center, which brings together faculty, staff, students and community members on social justice-oriented projects and dialogues. “But those who stay are alone to figure out how to survive their situation and no one else is thinking about it with them, and I find this to be the tragic element revealed by the research.” —E

Austin, one of our nation’s fastest-growing cities, is losing its African American population—decreasing from approximately 15 percent to less than 10 percent from 2000 to 2010. This data sets Austin apart from its peers as it is the only city with general population growth and African American population decline.

This was not the conclusion that Dr. Eric Tang, DDCE faculty fellow and professor of African and African Diaspora Studies, expected when he began his groundbreaking research, which was published in a 2014 Institute for Urban Policy Research & Analysis policy report.

Intrigued by the data, Tang wanted to know the reasons why the predominantly Black communities in Austin had changed so rapidly, but he quickly discovered there was no qualitative data available to answer his questions. Over the past two years, he has conducted more than 150 surveys with current and former East Austin residents to find answers.

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In Keiko and DeVry Anderson’s home, community service is not an option. It is a pleasure and a privilege.

“We see it as a way of life,” says Keiko, a UT Austin alumna (B.S.W. ’99, J.D. ’03). “As members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc., we have been instilled with the value of serving our communities. As Christians and as ministers we believe that serving is central to our purpose in life.”

Given their passion for education and community service, it’s only natural for the Andersons to become a part of the DDCE family. With their support, programs and units such as the Fearless Leadership Institute and the UT-University Charter School can continue to help students reach their full potential. Both successful professionals (Keiko is a litigator who specializes in family law and DeVry is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army and a physician), they exemplify the value of higher education and strong community roots.

Those roots run deep in Austin, where the couple and their three children are actively involved in the church community. When they learned about The Project, UT’s largest day of service, they knew it was the perfect opportunity to give back to the city they love.

“Seeing so many young people gathered together utilizing their own free time to give back to their community as a collective group was nothing short of awe-inspiring,” says DeVry, who graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (B.S. ’96) and the Thomas Jefferson Medical College (M.D. ’00). “Such a gathering teaches young men and women of the next generation wonderful lessons about things like teamwork, service, sacrifice, dedication, fellowship and pride in one’s individual and shared habitat.” —Æ
Save the Date!

Sixty years ago the first class of Black undergraduates entered UT Austin. Throughout the year, the DDCE, the Black Ex-Students of Texas, and the Texas Exes Black Alumni Network are commemorating this anniversary with a series of events. Be sure to mark your calendar for the culminating fall celebration, which will take place during the Texas v. UTEP football game Sept. 8-10. More details will be available on the DDCE’s news site: http://diversity.utexas.edu