Access & EXCELLENCE

Student Engagement
Mission

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.
Contents

12 Undergraduate History Course Teaches Students How to Navigate Difficult Dialogues in the Age of Trump

6 Five American Immigrant Stories Told by Students

18 Mentoring Program Prepares Women of Color for Personal and Professional Success

3 Message from Dr. Moore

4 New SG President Champions Accessibility, Inclusivity on Campus

10 News and Notes

16 Q&A: Mentor, Mentee Reflect on Lessons Learned in Project MALES

20 On the DDCE Scene

22 UT Grad Reflects on Journey from UIL Meets to the Olympic Games

25 UT Charter School Celebrates New Sport Court

26 Peers for Pride Educator Brings LGBTQ+ Advocacy to the Stage

27 Hogg Foundation Supports Research on Forced Migration

28 Connect with Us

29 The People of DDCE
“My research interest is around low-income minority students. I came from that background and want students to realize that college is a brand new journey. When you hear the students’ stories, you realize you have to be there to make sure the statistics don’t come true.”
—Jorge Rodriquez, Project MALES program coordinator

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The Power of Storytelling

People often ask why I’m so passionate about teaching and my answer is always the same. Students are my inspiration. They remind me why my work is so important—and that I need to keep raising the bar and bringing my A-game into the classroom every day.

In class, I often encourage students to open up about their personal experiences and am often taken aback by their responses. Most recently, a student told me about his long commute across the U.S.-Mexico border to his high school in the Rio Grande Valley. It took two to three hours just to make the trip—and those hours extended after football practice. Another student shared her experiences traveling to Arkansas on a monthly basis to visit her mother in a federal prison. She would make the trip in one day to stay on top of her schoolwork.

I want students to share these stories to empower others who have walked in similar shoes to push past barriers and face adversity head-on. It’s also important for these stories to be heard by those who come from different worlds. In sharing these lived experiences, we can find a middle ground and have meaningful conversations about the things that truly matter.

By enabling these students to succeed, they, in turn, change the world. Here in the DDCE, our goal is to get them where they need to be—especially during their first critical two years on campus. In these pages, you can read about our many programs that are preparing current and future Longhorns for success—from peer mentoring to leadership initiatives to advocacy programs for our future thought leaders and policymakers.

I hope you take a moment to throw yourself into someone else’s life. I hope you feel empowered by something they say or stand for. But most importantly, I hope you can see the world from a new perspective.

Dr. Leonard Moore
Interim Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement,
George W. Littlefield Professor of American History
Every day, Alejandrina Guzman captures a moment on her digital camera. She fell in love with photography back in middle school and has been immortalizing memories ever since.

“I’m a very visual person,” Guzman says. “When I look at a picture, I can recall exactly what happened on that particular day. I cherish these memories, even irrelevant moments like looking outside the window.”

She’s especially fond of a photo of more than 50 students gathered together chanting, “I am a powerhouse!” The snapshot was taken at the 2017 “First-Gen Kickoff,” where incoming first-generation students came together to learn how to harness their resources to thrive during their four years on campus. Guzman says she wanted to create this event since she arrived on the Forty Acres five years ago.

The picture of that moment not only captured the emotion of the event, but it reminds Guzman of who she is as a first-generation student and the people who helped her get to where she
is today. Now as the university’s first Latina, differently-abled student body president, she aims to empower more students to advocate for themselves and others.

Guzman, who stands at 2’8”, was born with diastrophic dysplasia, a skeletal disorder that affects bone development and growth. Born with scoliosis, a cleft palette and a club foot (the inward twisting of the foot), doctors told her parents that she would only live for a day. That day stretched into a week and later a month. Growing up in a first-generation immigrant family from Azle, Texas, she was taught from a very young age how to overcome adversity with empathy and perseverance.

“If I said as a child, ‘I can’t do it,’ my father would say, ‘you can’t or you don’t want to?’ Then I’d say, ‘I guess I don’t want to.’ So I would have to figure it out,” she says.

When Guzman first arrived on campus, she was immediately struck by its size. She knew she had to find her place by becoming involved in student activities. After discovering the many opportunities within the Multicultural Engagement Center (MEC) to reconnect with her roots, she got started in her student advocacy work in Latino Community Affairs.

“It was during this time when I started to realize my identity as a Latina,” Guzman says. “We all come from different backgrounds and perspectives and stories and obstacles, but we are not alone and there are a lot of people cheering us on.”

She credits the MEC for much of her personal growth during this time.

“If it wasn’t for the MEC, I would not have really known or found myself,” she says.

As president of UT Student Government, Guzman sums up her term in three words: challenging, rewarding and intense. She is especially proud of her executive team members for their willingness to be open-minded and vulnerable. The majority of members are students of color—a rarity in student government.

“We push each other and are able to work together in a way that is not just talk, but action oriented,” she says.

Her greatest challenge is to be a voice for the many diverse perspectives of the student body.

“Sometimes I go into meetings and am the only person of color or the only woman, and it hits me every single time all that I represent.”

Micky Wolf, student body vice president and Plan II and business honors junior, says he’s most impressed with Guzman’s ability to inspire and empower her fellow students, having already shown that UT Student Government is an effective platform for inciting change on campus.

“There are a lot of student advocates who haven’t always used student government as a tool for advocacy because they don’t see it as a place that holds weight and power,” Wolf says. “But this year, be it students at the MEC, GSC [Gender and Sexuality Center] or Jewish students at Hillel, they have learned that is not true at all.”

As Guzman looks toward the future, she hopes to find a career where she can uplift others as her parents, peers and mentors have done for her.

“I like seeing development in people and building empathy and empowering others,” she says. “Letting them [students] know that I’ll be right there to help or, if not, connect them with someone who can.” —Æ
Since its inception, our nation has been continually strengthened by the energy of newcomers from countries around the globe. In celebration of our shared heritage as a nation of immigrants, we caught up with several Longhorns to learn about their journey toward the American Dream. Though their stories are unique and varied, they all have common threads of hope, pride and perseverance.
THE JOURNEY TO FREEDOM
Sharafi Bahareh is the daughter of two Iranian parents who left their home country to escape a life of oppression. Now a sophomore majoring in public health, Bahareh aims to make her parents proud by following the road to success while staying grounded in her cultural roots.

“My family never takes for granted the freedom that is associated with this country. The intangible liberties, such as freedom of speech and religion, are the characteristics that make my parents fully content with residing in this country. Having the privilege to speak one’s mind and express one’s thoughts without the potential interrogation of a high power is an aspect that they never take for granted. In addition, the law here is well-refined and grounded to a high extent, reducing the corruption that is inherent in legal-systems in other countries.”

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND
When Irek Banaczyk was nine, he and his family emigrated from Poland to New York in pursuit of a better life. Now a recent graduate of UT Austin’s Steve Hicks School of Social Work, Banaczyk is grateful for the sacrifices they made to help him get a quality education.

“My father is now deceased, but my mother admits that America is truly the ‘Land of Opportunity.’ Neither of my parents attended college, yet my mother, grounded in the Protestant work ethic, worked hard, owned two small businesses, and purchased two small properties outside of Austin. In America, one can truly become the person that one chooses—and my family never lost touch with that.”
A WORLD OF PERSPECTIVE
Belinda Busogi, a human development and family sciences junior, is the daughter of two survivors of the Rwandan genocide. Upon arrival in their new home, her parents made it their mission to create a safe, nurturing environment for their family.

“As pictures of refugees fleeing their country flash on television screens all over the world, it is sometimes hard to understand the absolute gravity of the tribulations and hardships these refugees are going through. Growing up, my parents always reminded me to value the freedom and safety we have here in the United States. Sometimes it is easy to focus on what we lack in life, rather than appreciate what we are blessed with such as housing and food.”

AMERICAN DREAMERS
Fifteen years ago, Samuel Cervantes and his family left their home in Monterrey, Mexico to pursue what his parents called, “las oportunidades del otro lado,” (opportunities on the other side). Now a junior majoring in government and communication studies, he is fulfilling his parents’ dreams, taking advantage of all the opportunities the “other side” has to offer.

“A division is created in the undocumented community when the Dreamers are extensively praised. A binary between a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigrant is counterproductive to the movement. I believe that all immigrants are Dreamers. My dreams are my parents’ dreams; my parents’ dreams are my dreams. Immigrant liberation is intertwined in the liberation of a migrant worker and of a college student.”
IN PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

No matter what obstacles come her way, Virginia Gonzales, a neuroscience senior, draws strength from her grandfather who stopped at nothing to provide a better life for his family. Determined to give them the resources he never had, he moved his children and grandchildren from Chihuahua, Mexico, to Texas, where they faced a number of challenges in school, work and at home.

“Being able to enroll in public schools really helped my family thrive in the United States. While not every member of my family has been able to pursue higher education, my family has always prioritized and valued education. As a first-generation college student, I am very thankful for the sacrifices my grandparents and parents made. I know that they are all very excited to see me graduate in the upcoming year.”

COUNTING HER BLESSINGS

The daughter of immigrants from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Jochebed Fekadu knows all too well that access to quality education is scarce in developing countries around the world. Now a junior majoring in public relations at a leading research institution, she plans to take advantage of every opportunity that comes her way.

“I think it’s important to remember how blessed you are at times. Even as a child of immigrants, I find myself being so caught up in things that other people globally don’t even worry about. They pray to live a life half as good as the one I am living currently. My parents give me reality checks when necessary, reminding me how good our family has it and how there is always someone else wishing to live like me, or be as blessed as I have been. Just because an issue or conflict globally does not affect you on a personal level, that doesn’t mean it ceases to exist.”
In the spirit of Disability Awareness Month, faculty, staff, students and alumni came together for a night of hot-rod cycling, wheelchair basketball and various other activities at the annual Adapted Sports Night on Oct. 24 at the Recreational Sports Center. This was one of several educational events hosted by Services for Students with Disabilities throughout the fall semester.

Little Longhorns at UT Elementary School were treated to a special literary event that coincided with the annual Texas Book Festival on Nov. 3. As part of the festival’s Reading Rock Stars program, two popular children’s book authors, Steven Weinberg (left) and Emma Otheguy, visited the school to present their works to the students.

For the sixth consecutive year the university has earned the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award from Insight into Diversity magazine. This award demonstrates that once again UT Austin is a national leader in diversity.
In early October, staff members from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) traveled to Oahu, Hawaii, to attend the Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity. SSD Executive Director Kelli Bradley (left) and SSD Assistant Director Emily Shryock led a breakout session titled “Beyond Accommodations: How Disability Services Can Promote Inclusion in Higher Education.”

HAPPY TRAVELS
This fall the DDCE awarded seven graduate students with $250 travel grants to support their research in understudied areas that promote diversity and social justice. Pictured here are several grantees who will soon be traveling to academic conferences across the country to present their research and network with fellow scholars.

TEXAS STRONG
In response to the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, the DDCE’s Community and External Relations (CER) Office joined the university-wide effort to collect donations for the thousands of people displaced by the historic flooding in the Houston area. Pictured here, members of the CER team assist Central Texas Food Bank drivers as they load up 32 boxes filled with much-needed supplies. From left: Erica Saenz, CER associate vice president, Yvonne Loya, CER executive director.

NEW NAME, NEW RESOURCES FOR AUSTIN NONPROFITS
Recently the Texas Grants Resource Center (formerly Regional Foundation Library) created the Community Partner Networking Program, a new leadership program for non-profit executives and managers. To help leaders make a positive impact on low-income communities, the program offers a suite of classes and professional development opportunities. The goal is to provide valuable tools for emerging nonprofits on shoestring budgets.

ALOHA FROM SSD
In early October, staff members from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) traveled to Oahu, Hawaii, to attend the Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity. SSD Executive Director Kelli Bradley (left) and SSD Assistant Director Emily Shryock led a breakout session titled “Beyond Accommodations: How Disability Services Can Promote Inclusion in Higher Education.”
It’s midway through a lecture in the signature first-year course Race in the Age of Trump, and Dr. Leonard N. Moore is growing frustrated.
Moore paces for a moment before settling behind the lectern to collect his thoughts. With a preacher’s cadence and inflection, he raises his arms and directs them toward his students.

“When I was an undergraduate, I didn’t like sitting in a lecture for an hour,” Moore says. “I never want students to be bored and I believe they learn best from each other.”

Through the years, Moore says he has learned to separate most of his students into two groups: Those who are open to speaking their minds, and others who are apprehensive about sharing their opposing viewpoints. This tactic has proved to be quite effective in both of his fall undergraduate courses, Race in the Age of Trump and History of the Black Power Era.

Moore strides over to the blackboard at the rear of the lecture hall and searches for chalk. He writes “BLACK” and “WHITE” in oversized letters then pauses before dramatically scribbling the space between the words.

“Most things in life are going to be gray,” Moore intones. “Life is not memorizing, it’s the application of knowledge. Now you got all this knowledge—what are you going to do with it?”

His words hit a chord. Hands quickly extend into the air and the discussion takes off.

“Students who disagree with me, politically really enjoy the class because they know I’ll allow them to express themselves,” he adds.

On any given class day, the discussion can start with an open-ended question about the African American experience then branch off into different directions—from nature vs. nurture to historical voting patterns to right-wing evangelical Christians. As the lecture concludes, Moore ties the threads together and reels the discussion back to the original topic.

“Students who disagree with me, politically really enjoy the class because they know I’ll allow them to express themselves.”
In the end, Moore wants his students to see how all of the topics are interconnected.

Designed for incoming freshmen, the course is a component of the Gateway Scholars Program, a student success initiative within the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence that prepares students for their first critical year at a large university. Grey Gamboa is one of the many Gateway Scholars who have learned how to navigate robust classroom discussions in this signature course.

"His style brings people’s stories out because he is always asking us open-ended questions," says Gamboa, a Radio-Television-Film freshman. "People are questioning Dr. Moore, but he will question you right back."

Moore has found that many of his students find comfort in discomfort. This has been the case for William Ntsoane, a mechanical engineering freshman and Gateway Scholar, who has ventured into uncharted territory in Moore’s class.

“He makes things uncomfortable—but in a good way,” Ntsoane says. “He asks the question, waits for you to think about it, then asks why you feel that way.”

Even when he’s not in class, Ntsoane stays on top of current events to prepare for the next lecture.

“When I watch the news, I know we’ll talk about it in class and I find myself wondering what Dr. Moore will have to say about it,” he says.

Javier Wallace, a graduate assistant and doctoral student in curriculum and instruction, says the class gives students a space to challenge each other’s preconceived notions about divisive issues. He recalls one memorable group discussion in particular, in which one of his fellow students made a rather presumptive remark about a man pictured in a photo display of the differing ethnicities of Mexico.

“One picture in particular featured a man with more indigenous features,” Wallace says. “And one of my female students, who is of Mexican
descent, responded that it looked as though, ‘he didn’t speak any English’ and that ‘it looked like he cut grass.’”

Wallace said he was floored by the response, but rather than chastising the student, he challenged her beliefs and moved the discussion into an exploration of privilege and identity.

“A week later, the student raised her hand during one of Dr. Moore’s lectures and started to talk in a personal manner about how she recognized at times that she benefited from being a lighter skinned person,” Wallace says.

Moore says this anecdote exemplifies what he’s trying to accomplish in class. He strives to challenge his students, but in a respectful way that leads to a deeper, more profound discussion. The goal is to get them to see the aforementioned grayness in every argument.

“Maybe there is a middle ground that most people don’t see until they actually break down both arguments,” says Sierra Quarzaza, an art entertainment freshman and Gateway Scholar.

Intrigued by Moore’s charismatic style, students often bring their friends to class, where participation is mandatory and political correctness is jettisoned—with the exception of a few ground rules. To keep the class as interactive as possible, Moore follows his tried-and-true four-step formula.

“First, I’m going to talk about subjects in a way that most professors won’t. That is key as it opens and challenges their minds,” Moore says. “Second, I work hard to develop my lectures to create real impact. Third, I’m never boring. And fourth, they connect with the course content because it covers topics that everyone thinks about, but rarely discuss.”

Moore pauses before adding a final point.

“Plus, you know with me it’s always going to be unfiltered and straightforward.” —Æ
In 2015, Jorge Rodriguez and Angel Ortiz joined Project MALES, a research and mentoring program focused on improving educational outcomes for young boys and men of color. Although they didn’t know each other at the time, they shared one common goal: to make a difference by mentoring middle and high school students. We interviewed Rodriguez, program coordinator for Project MALES, and Ortiz, a Radio-Television-Film junior, to learn more about their work and how their friendship has since flourished into a model mentor-mentee relationship.
Take us back to when you first met in 2015. How did it happen and what was it like?

Rodriguez: Some things just happen naturally. Once or twice, Angel came up to me to have a discussion about certain issues, and I’d say, “Yeah, let’s talk about this.” He felt that he could relate to me because I was going through something similar.

Ortiz: [Laughs] We were just talking about this in the office yesterday.

What does your work involve?

Rodriguez: I assist with the mentorship program. I oversee two sites at local schools, where I deal with curricular, administrative and behavioral matters. This way the [undergraduate] mentors can deal with the day-to-day connections and mentoring. We have 50 undergraduate mentors and close to 150 students at the middle and high school levels.

Ortiz: The program emphasizes Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success. We focus on kids who are having problems with their teachers. We talk to them about brotherhood, leadership development and college readiness. After we get to know them, we also talk to them about life at home and career opportunities.

Why is this work important to you?

Rodriguez: My research interest is around low-income minority students. I came from that background. I want students to realize that college is a brand new journey. When you hear the students’ stories, you realize you have to be there to make sure the statistics don’t come true.

Ortiz: We’re there to guide them. It’s a one-on-one thing with students and mentors. We tell the students, “This is a safe space and we’re here to listen to you.” Once a relationship is established and students feel comfortable, they’ll tell us what’s going on.

What lessons have you learned?

Rodriguez: These students help me reflect on what I want to pursue career-wise. A lot of students are not prepared in high school to understand the concept of loans or debt, grants or scholarships. I wanted to focus on financial literacy. But when I started talking to students, I realized there are a lot more issues stopping them from going to college. I want to create a program to help students of color. The program used to be solely focused on financial literacy, but now it’s focused on much more.

Ortiz: I’ve learned a lot from the students. You have to be open to understanding that everybody comes from a different background. With each student I’ve talked with, I’ve learned where they come from and what they want to pursue. With Project MALES, we go into communities and make a difference in a direct way with students. We get to know them through giving and receiving wisdom.

How do these lessons shape the mentor-mentee relationship between you two?

Rodriguez: We always talk about mentoring. If I need something, Angel will be there. If he needs something, I’ll be there for him. This is the mentoring process. I know the middle and high school students look up to Angel. He wants to go into a different career field than me. I just want to make sure that he succeeds personally, academically and professionally.

Ortiz: Coming out of college, you have to grow up and learn so many things like financial literacy. Jorge gives me the sense that things will be OK after college. He got his undergraduate degree, went to work, came back and got his master’s degree and managed to make it. Seeing somebody get this far reassures me that I will be OK. —Æ
When women of color join the Fearless Leadership Institute, they quickly learn that it is unlike any other professional development program on campus. Surrounded by a close-knit community of African American professionals, alumni and students, they learn how to navigate their personal and professional lives with confidence and poise. Whether they’re networking at workshops, meeting with mentors or building leadership skills at weekend retreats, FLI students are learning how to face challenges head-on to maximize their full potential. We caught up with two students and one alumna to learn about their experiences in the institute and the life lessons they learned along the way.
When Kastina Fishback joined FLI, she was excited to learn from inspiring, successful women of color and forge lifelong friendships with likeminded students of similar backgrounds.

“I decided to join FLI because of the amazing women who founded the organization, Thaïs Moore and Tiffany Tillis,” says Fishback, a corporate finance senior. “I was able to develop a relationship with these women early in my college career and I’m so glad I did. It was so comforting to see women of color on the UT campus who actually took an interest in me and my future.”

Fishback is especially grateful for her network of friends who can understand and appreciate her experiences at a university with a small—yet growing—percentage of African American students.

“I also love hearing testimonies from other young women and learning how they were able to rise above whatever obstacles they faced,” Fishback says. “It definitely makes you realize that you are not alone.”

Now Fishback is ready to wrap up her senior year and get started in her new career as a risk consultant for KPMG in Dallas, Texas. Looking back on her many experiences in FLI—and various other organizations—she is grateful for the many people who helped her prepare for a successful life after college.

With support from both mentors and community leaders—all inspiring women of color—A’nysha Fortenberry has learned how to lead a successful, well-balanced life. Now she feels more prepared than ever to pursue a challenging career in advertising at a New York firm.

“FLI has provided me with a wide network of accomplished well-rounded women of all ages from all backgrounds,” says Fortenberry, a junior in the Moody College of Communication who served as a FLI intern and executive board member. “I’ve been paired with several profession-
al mentors through FLI, and have received continuous guidance from other FLI members as well.”

Another benefit of the program, Fortenberry says, is learning how to be resourceful—a skill that will serve her well in the professional world.

“FLI has given me an extensive amount of resources for academic success through peer mentorship,” says Fortenberry, who is also a member of the University Leadership Network and the Subiendo Academy, Longhorn Chapter. “By speaking to other FLI ladies I was able to discover the best professors to take, and the best study spots on campus.”

While working alongside successful alums, community leaders and fellow students, Chelsea Jones realized the FLI program was preparing her for so much more than the professional world.

“As women, we’re taught to leave our personal self at home for the fear of being seen emotional or inferior to our male counterparts,” says Jones, who graduated from UT Austin in 2015 with a degree in social work. “But because of FLI, I learned a lot about bringing my whole self to work and school and embracing the femininity that makes me powerful.”

Now a master’s student at Carnegie Mellon University, Jones is a Heinz Graduate Fellow at the National League of Cities in the Race, Equity and Leadership Initiative. Currently she is working with civic leaders to examine and resolve racial inequities in their cities. She attributes much of her success to the inspiring women who guided her along her undergraduate journey and prepared her for life after college.

“Without these amazing women (and men, Dr. Moore and Dr. Kelly) pouring into my life, I wouldn’t be the person I am today. You were the special family that God gave me to guide me and mold me into who I was to become. Thank you!” —Æ
1 Members of the Filipino Students’ Association get ready for the Asian American Student Welcome event on Sept. 6.

2 The statues depicting Robert E. Lee, Albert Sidney Johnston, John Reagan and James Stephen Hogg were relocated from the Main Mall on Aug. 20-21. Shown is the Robert E. Lee statue after it was removed from its pedestal. Photo courtesy of University of Texas Office of the President

3 Forty-nine high school athletes came to UT Austin on July 20 to experience College for a Day, an annual event hosted by the African American Male Research Initiative that gives young men of color exposure to higher education.

4 Longtime Austin resident Ronald Cheng, owner of Chinatown, received the Legacy Award at the Asian American Community Leadership Awards ceremony on June 7. A proud Longhorn, Cheng credits his success to the strength of his family and the support of organizations like the Asian Family Support Services of Austin.

5 The DDCE celebrated two remarkable students and one outstanding state leader at Evening of Honors on May 11. From left: Student Legacy Award recipients Dallawrence Dean and LaDee Maxie; with Legacy Award winner Sen. Royce West.

6 In celebration of our city’s robust LGBTQ+ community, the DDCE partnered with the Dell Medical School, Texas Athletics and the Texas Exes Pride Alumni Network at the annual PRIDE Parade on Sept. 30 in downtown Austin. Photo courtesy of Texas Athletics

7 Representatives from colleges, schools and units across the university came together on Sept. 26 to kick off the Hearts of Texas Charitable Campaign Drive, organized by the DDCE.
GOING FOR THE GOLD

Former UIL Athlete, UT alum Leo Manzano reflects on journey to the Olympics

by Jessica Sinn

Photos by Fa Bazadoni, courtesy of Leo Manzano
For more than a decade, Leo Manzano has amassed an expansive collection of prizes from countless competitions. But of all the colorful ribbons and gleaming trophies adorning his walls and shelves, his most precious memento is the memory of his first race.

“As a young child, I will always remember running with my grandfather in Mexico,” Manzano says. “While the sheep were herding, I challenged him to a race and it was so much fun. I didn’t know that running was a sport at the time. I just knew that I really enjoyed it.”

Growing up, Manzano was happiest while running outside, challenging anyone who was willing to a race. When his family moved from a rural town in Central Mexico to Marble Falls, he caught the attention of his coaches. They saw a bright future in cross-country racing, however, his parents needed more convincing.

“When I first started running, my parents didn’t know anything about it,” Manzano says. “They asked me why I was wasting my time and not getting a job. So I made a deal with my dad. I told him, ‘If you let me join cross country, I will work all summer.’”

True to his word, Manzano took on odd jobs during the summer and trained during his limited free time—winning track meets and impressing coaches along the way. Looking back at his first foray into competitive running, he credits his middle school coach Karen Naumann and high school coach Kyle Futrell for cultivating his love for the sport.

“Coach Futrell took time away from his main sport, which was football, to help me train and keep me in track and field for as long as he could,” Manzano recalls. “My coaches changed the training philosophy from quantity to quality to let me enjoy running and also nurture my competitiveness.”

Manzano’s love for the sport continued to grow as he competed in state-wide UIL competitions, taking home medals and trophies along the way.

“So many great things were happening,” Manzano adds. “I made a couple friends who came from the same cultural background and we experienced so many new opportunities like competing in relays across the state and meeting new people.”

More opportunities were opening as Manzano toured college campuses...
on recruiting trips. Soon enough, he had his pick of several Texas universities. But he was holding out for one school in particular.

“UT was one of the last schools to call me,” says Manzano, who graduated in 2008 with a degree in Spanish and Portuguese. “I remember I was working at a restaurant when I got the call and I was so excited. I ran in a UIL cross country meet then went to UT on a recruiting trip—and that’s when I knew I had to be there. The facilities were up to par and they went above and beyond for me.”

Over the next four years, Manzano became one of the most decorated male runners in UT history. However his climb to the top was anything but a sprint. During his freshman year, he found himself at a crossroads when he couldn’t keep up with his teammates. Unaccustomed to the longer mileage, he bonked halfway through a 40-minute training run.

“I couldn’t finish the run,” Manzano says. “Feeling defeated, I went back to my coach and he said, ‘Hey, you just have to get in shape.’” So he wrote me out a new training plan. By the next spring I was in the best shape of my life.”

His work ethic paid off at a meet in Nebraska, where he clocked a sub-4:00 mile, breaking a 21-year Longhorn record.

“I’ll never forget coming through the line, looking up and seeing the clock hit 3:59:86,” says Manzano, who later went on to become a five-time NCAA champion and an 11-time NCAA All-American. “Our team went wild. They picked me up in the air and carried me off.”

That victorious moment was only the beginning for this Longhorn, who soon became one of the fastest 1,500-meter runners in the world. In 2008 he went on to compete in the semifinals in Beijing—and in 2012 he made a big comeback in the London games where he captured the silver medal.

In the true spirit of the Olympics, Manzano feels a sense of solidarity with runners from across the globe. Despite the language barriers, they communicate on a whole different level out on the track.

“When I compete on the world stage, I’m proud to represent my country,” Manzano adds. “But at the end of the day, we’re all children of the world. There are similar themes we share as human beings—from nervousness before a competition to the joy of a big win to the loss of defeat. When I compete against someone from another country, we understand each other.”

In an unforgiving sport, Manzano has experienced his share of triumphs and losses. Though he has been sidelined by injuries, dropped by a major sponsor and lost his chance at winning another medal at the 2016 Olympics due to a respiratory illness, he never loses his focus. With the 2020 Olympics in his crosshairs, Manzano is training hard, logging more than 65 miles a week.

No matter what life throws his way, Manzano will soar over the hurdles as long as he follows his coach’s words of wisdom.

“It’s about having a plan and moving forward,” says Manzano, who is now sponsored by HOKA ONE ONE. “Be agile about your plan and know when to change it.” —Æ
Early this fall, a gathering of faculty, staff, students and friends came together to celebrate their new sport court at a University of Texas-University Charter School campus located at the Texas NeuroRehab Center. Complete with basketball hoops and a four-square court, this new gift, provided by the Jordan Spieth Family Foundation, is a welcome addition to school.

During the ceremony, Dottie Goodman, UT-University Charter School executive principal, expressed her excitement about the enrichment the new court will bring into the lives of her students with special needs. Located in South Austin, the school serves children and adolescents from across the nation who are debilitated by emotional and cognitive disorders. Many have suffered through severe trauma and are experiencing positive reinforcement and structure for the first time.

Thankful for the new cheerful spot on campus, several students expressed their gratitude at the celebratory event. One student stated that the sport court brought everyone together like a family reunion. Another said that it brought joy and happiness into his daily life.

Due to the rain, the ribbon-cutting portion of the ceremony was cancelled. Yet the weather didn’t dampen the indoor celebration. Dr. Melissa Chavez, superintendent of the UT Charter School System, provided welcome remarks, highlighting the educational value of outdoor recreation.

In addition to playing sports, students will use the space for various activities—from morning meditations to team-building exercises. The lessons they’ll learn from the court, Chavez noted, will serve them well when they transition into the next phase of their lives.

Chavez, along with Goodman and UT-University Charter School teachers, gave a special thanks to the Jordan Spieth Family Foundation and Eddie Cornejo of CCS Construction Services.

A former Longhorn, Jordan Spieth is a celebrated professional golfer and philanthropist. The Jordan Spieth Family Foundation offers a platform for Jordan to support four philanthropic areas: special needs youth, junior golf, military support and pediatric cancer. —Æ
Meet Royale Reeves, a student educator in the Gender and Sexuality Center’s Peers for Pride program. Since joining the GSC, Reeves has found their passion for helping people in a community counseling setting. We sat down with Reeves to learn more about their experiences here at UT Austin, and how they hope to empower students to make the Forty Acres safer, more inclusive and welcoming for all members of the campus community.

**CONVERSATION STARTERS...**
While training for the Peers for Pride program, Reeves took classes in theater techniques and facilitation skills to learn how to expertly guide constructive conversations. With guidance from the GSC’s Director Dr. Liz Elsen and Education Program Coordinator Dr. Kristen Hogan, they gained confidence in their group leadership skills. “A lot of social justice centers can be intimidating if you’re not comfortable with your language and knowledge. Liz and Kristen are so good at making the GSC a learning space, guiding conversations and turning them into learning experiences.”

**ACTING OUT...**
Workshops include theatrical skits, in which Reeves and their co-facilitators act out biased incidents that are commonplace on college campuses. After the scene unfolds, Reeves opens up the floor to participants, allowing them to ask questions and share viewpoints. The learning experience, Reeves says, goes both ways. “We talk a lot about being present with people in the room and taking the time to hear them out. I’m less nervous when I get up there to talk to a group because I focus on listening and being present. This will really help me in my future career because I’ve gained a lot of practice thinking on my feet and being in a leadership position.”

**PASSING THE MIC...**
When topics turn to particularly sensitive areas that may be more relatable to another team member, Reeves checks in with their co-facilitators to best navigate a particular discussion. “We always have to think about the ethics of representation. If something needs to be discussed in a workshop, we try to select the voices that need to be heard. We’re always making sure to talk to each other about what we need in that moment.”

**LIFE AFTER UT AUSTIN...**
Now a senior majoring in psychology, Reeves is excited about taking these skills into graduate school, where they plan to pursue a degree in social work and eventually find meaningful work in group counseling. “The GSC entirely changed my college experience. I realized there’s so much I can do in a community-based center, and that this is an area of social work I really want to pursue.”

**A WORD OF ADVICE...**
“When you’re at new student orientation, find a way to get involved. Throw your net far and wide and find your community.” —Æ
The forced movement of people, whether displaced within their own countries or across national borders, is a pressing concern for states and humanitarian organizations. Regardless of the cause, displaced people face a need for protection and support. But research is also needed. For UT Austin alumna Karin Wachter (Ph.D., School of Social Work, '17) an understanding of women’s experiences in forced migration is one path to a deeper understanding of displaced people and how humanitarian efforts can better serve them.

“The overarching question I sought to answer was, what are women’s experiences of social support in forced migration, the dynamics that shape and impact their experiences, and the factors that enable or impede their ability to maintain or recreate social support networks?” says Wachter, who is the 2016 recipient of the Hogg Foundation’s Moore Fellowship, a $20,000 award for doctoral students at UT Austin in support of research on the human experience of crises.

“In essence, I seek to bring to the forefront aspects of women’s experience of forced migration that gets less attention in literature and in practice.”

Wachter was deeply influenced by her ten-year career in humanitarian assistance. Most of her work was in African countries impacted by war and mass displacement. This includes refugee and internally displaced camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Chad, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania.

“When I came to The University of Texas at Austin to pursue my doctoral studies, I quickly came to appreciate the fact that Texas was one of the largest refugee resettlement sites in the country, and I realized that I would be able to put my professional background and lived experience to use here,” Wachter says.

The ultimate impact of Wachter’s work is to bring into focus aspects of women’s experience that are often overlooked in policy and practice.

“We may not fully appreciate or adequately recognize the severity of psychosocial impacts because we go about our lives quite differently compared to folks arriving from the DRC and elsewhere,” Wachter says.

A key part of the Hogg Foundation’s strategic direction is promoting new learning about how communities show resilience in the face of traumatic events—including disasters such as climate change, famine, war and disease outbreaks. With its focus on displaced women, Wachter’s work is making an important contribution to that understanding.

Wachter is now an assistant professor of social work at Arizona State University. She credits the Moore Fellowship for playing a pivotal role in her growth as a scholar and person.

“The dissertation process had a profound impact on me—personally and as a researcher, educator and advocate,” Wachter says. “This work has already shaped new research initiatives underway and my conversations with practitioners who work with displaced women.”

An unit within the DDCE, the Hogg Foundation serves as a strategic grantmaker to advance recovery and wellness for the people of Texas. In alignment with the university’s vision to transform lives for the benefit of society, the foundation aims to advance community support for mental health in everyday life. —Æ

UT Austin alumna Karin Wachter aims to help advance mental health programming for forced migration populations.
More research. Read Q&As with our travel grant recipients to learn more about their research and how they seek to bridge disparities in public health, technology access, education and various other areas.

More student advocates. Throughout the month of October, we celebrated Disability Awareness Month by spotlighting several students and alums who are making the campus—and the community—more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities.

More events. Read a recap from the Oct. 20 panel discussion, “Free Speech on College Campuses: Where to Draw the Line,” one of several events, co-hosted by the DDCE, that addressed current racial and political issues affecting college campuses and communities.

More game changers. Last summer, a group of rising sophomores and juniors from UT Austin and Huston-Tillotson University fully immersed themselves in the legal world during the five-week DiscoverLaw.org PLUS program. Read about their journey and their plans to make the world a more equitable place.

Accolades

UT Austin landed the 16th ranking among the 50 best colleges for LGBTQ students in 2017, according to the web publication College Choice. The announcement, featured in USA Today, spotlighted the good work of the Gender and Sexuality Center, stating: “They’ve connected students with internship and job opportunities, helped them understand their healthcare coverage, collated an impressive queer media library, established a mentoring program, and much, much more.”
“What I find to be both motivating and inspiring is that regardless of our political and social climate, students always engage with the work with so much hope for positive change. While they approach social justice issues with a very critical lens, they also do it with compassion and patience.”

— TONY K. VO
Assistant Director, Multicultural Engagement Center
“As We Saw It” Book Releases this Spring

We are proud to announce the upcoming release of “As We Saw It: The Story of Integration at the University of Texas at Austin” (University of Texas Press, spring 2018). Co-edited by DDCE faculty and staff, the book gives readers a glimpse into the lives of the first Black undergraduate students to enroll at UT Austin. Told against the backdrop of the Jim Crow South, this narrative is inextricably linked to current conversations about students’ negotiations of identity and place in higher education.