Access & Excellence

Delivering Success from Pre-K to Ph.D.
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.
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On the cover: A UT Elementary School student enjoying a book in the UTES Library. Photo by Kirk Weddle Photography

On the back cover: Students participating in The Project, UT Austin’s largest day of service. Photo by Shelton Lewis

Division of Diversity and Community Engagement
Welcome to the inaugural issue of Access & Excellence!

As Shakespeare once asked, “What’s in a name?” When choosing the name for the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement’s official magazine, it was important to convey how all of our programs, community partnerships and initiatives are setting a high standard of excellence here at UT Austin and beyond. The name should also convey how the DDCE is breaking down the myriad structural barriers that hinder equal access to higher education, quality health care, employment opportunities and many other areas with persistent disparities.

It seems only fitting to call our magazine Access and Excellence, two words that capture the essence of our core mission. In this first issue, we’re shining the spotlight on our education pipeline programs. Read on to learn more about the transformative power of social and emotional learning at UT Elementary School—and how college readiness programs such as Advise TX, Neighborhood Longhorns and UT Outreach are putting students on the path to success.

I hope you enjoy these and the many other stories in this magazine. It is our pleasure to bring them you.

Sincerely,

Jessica Sinn
Managing Editor
Providing Access and Excellence—
from Pre-K to Ph.D.

We are excited to present the first issue of Access & Excellence, the new magazine of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE). This inaugural issue focuses on many of the DDCE programs that serve students on campus and in the community throughout the education pipeline—from Pre-K to Ph.D.

Our education pipeline programs start with Pre-K students at UT Elementary School, intensify as students enter high school through our outreach centers and dual-credit coursework programs and culminate when the best and brightest students at The University of Texas at Austin earn their professional or doctoral degrees. Many of these students go on to teach at colleges and universities nationwide.

We work in partnership with school districts and community organizations around the state to ensure students from underserved schools receive the same advantages as those who attend schools in more affluent areas. And our student support programs are among the best on campus. The DDCE’s Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence houses several programs—Summer Bridge, Gateway Scholars, and the Longhorn Link program—that are part of the university’s initiative to improve four-year graduation rates.

From the UT-University Charter School System and the Neighborhood Longhorns Program, to UT Outreach, Chem-Bridge, SPURS and University Interscholastic League, the DDCE touches tens of thousands of students Pre-K to 12 around the state. Our programs here on campus touch thousands more as they embark on their college careers. It is our goal to provide access and excellence at every point of the education pipeline, helping the university to meet its missions of teaching, learning and service as we develop the future leaders of Texas.

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

“Let me be clear that I am fully committed to excellence and diversity as being mutually reinforcing, and we will look to new processes to advance both.”

—President Gregory L. Fenves in his inaugural State of the University address
For most incoming college freshmen, the word “intimidated” hardly covers how they feel on that first day of the fall semester. Not only do they have to contend with a massive college campus, they must also keep up with a whole new league of competitive classmates and rigorous courses.

A Summer Bridge student, however, is likely to have an entirely different experience. With six hours of college classes under their belt—and a built-in network of friends and mentors—they’re more than ready to start that first day of school with confidence and poise.

This level of preparation is especially needed for high-achieving students from low-income or first-generation college backgrounds. These students are often unprepared for college and falter at the first signs of perceived failure, says Dr. Charles Lu, Summer Bridge director and executive director of the Gateway Scholars Program.

“A lot of our incoming students think that they will thrive because they were ranked highly in high school,” Lu says. “Unfortunately a lot of times that doesn’t happen. We want to give them a taste of what college curriculum is going to look like, and the level of rigor the university expects them to be at.”
The five-week scholarship program, housed within the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence (LCAE), helps students transition into college life by providing tuition, housing, food, books and a $1,000 merit-based scholarship for maintaining at least a 3.0 average during the second summer semester.

Expenses aside, students receive a wealth of resources from the program’s peer-mentoring, academic advising and tutoring services. Whether they need help passing a test, managing their time, or dealing with personal struggles, the supportive team of faculty and staff are ready to help. Funded by the Provost Office’s student success initiatives, the goal is to boost the university’s four-year graduation rate.

“The support we get from the Provost Office and the collaborations we have with our campus partners are amazing,” Lu notes. “It has made me realize how much people on this campus truly care about students, which I don’t think you get at every university.”

Lu attributes much of the program’s success to its strong team of peer mentors who want nothing more than to see students succeed. Many were Summer Bridge students themselves. This year, more than 60 former Summer Bridge students applied for a mentoring position—a number that more than doubled since the previous year. Lu says he was thrilled to see how the program is inspiring so many students to pay it forward.

As Lu predicted, the student ended the fall 2014 semester with a 3.8 average and he is now doing well at his customer-service job on campus. This is just one of the many examples of how Summer Bridge is helping students not only stay in school, but also get an edge over their classmates. Out of the 244 students who participated in the program in 2014, 88 percent ended the fall semester with a 3.0 or higher average. Collectively the 2014 cohort earned a 3.46 average during the summer semester and 99 percent returned to UT in the fall.

The numbers clearly show that the program has been making great strides toward increasing the university’s graduation rate since it was established in 2013. When asked about what he loves most about directing Summer Bridge, Lu says there’s nothing more gratifying than seeing students overcome their struggles and surpass their peers.

“I love what this program stands for,” Lu adds. “Out of all my roles here at UT, this would have to be my favorite because I can see the direct effect the program has on these students.”
We have all heard the stereotypes about student athletes: they are “dumb jocks”; they aren’t interested in academics; they don’t care about earning a degree. In the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, however, the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence (LCAE) helps break down these stereotypes by helping student athletes succeed academically and encouraging them to earn a higher degree.

Dr. Darren Kelly is the director of the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program within the LCAE. The program is one of the federally funded TRiO programs at UT Austin that supports first-generation, low-income and traditionally underrepresented students at the university. Kelly and his team have taken the McNair Scholars a step further by encouraging student athletes to participate in the program, which is focused on undergraduate research.

“Some student athletes have never been given the opportunity to conduct research or work one-on-one with faculty members,” Kelly says. “We see real potential in our athletes. Contrary to the stereotypes, they are smart. They have to be smart on the field or court. They also spend most of their time preparing to play—they are under an enormous amount of pressure to succeed in their sport.”

Kelly says the combination of support and encouragement they receive through the McNair Scholars Program and others within the LCAE, such as the African American Male Research Initiative, gives them the confidence to succeed academically.

The McNair Scholars Program requires a two-year commitment and includes workshops, seminars, an introduction to graduate school culture and undergraduate research opportunities. Students have the opportunity to present their research, attend academic conferences and visit potential graduate schools beyond UT Austin. A faculty mentor works with each McNair Scholar and members of Kelly’s team serve as advisors.

Former UT football great Ricky Williams and walk-on basketball player Tarale Murry are two of the McNair student athlete success stories.
McNair Scholar Ricky Williams knows the importance of academic success

At age 38, Ricky Williams is not your average undergraduate. He never was. The San Diego native, who grew up in a single-parent household, was a Longhorn running back from 1995-98 and holds or shares 20 NCAA records. He was the second Longhorn to win a Heisman Trophy.

Following an NFL career, Williams has returned to the Forty Acres to complete a degree in physical education, culture and sports. Now a senior, he also is a McNair Scholar whose research focuses on racial differences in achievement motivation among elite college athletes. Williams became interested in examining the motivation of athletes while in Dr. Leonard Moore’s course, Race in the Age of Obama, which included a number of freshman football players.

“I was struck by how competent they were on the field, but [they] did not have that spirit in the classroom. They reminded me of myself,” he says.

Williams was a junior when he traded academic pursuits for the NFL.

“I came to college not planning on the NFL, just for the collegiate football experience,” he explains. “But choosing the NFL was easier than deciding on a career.”

Although a successful professional athlete, Williams laments that he wished someone along the way had encouraged him to do better academically during his initial college experience.

“It is definitely important to get student athletes to succeed academically,” Williams says, noting that paying adequate attention to both academics and athletics can be difficult when student athletes spend 20-30 hours a week at practice. “Not a lot of people talk about it, but sometimes academic success conflicts with creating a quality product on the field.”

With Moore, senior associate vice-president for academic diversity initiatives and professor of history, and Dr. Kevin Cokley, a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Department of African and African Diaspora Studies, as mentors, Williams has begun a quantitative research study based on attribution theory, looking at perceived causes of academic success and failure.

Being a McNair Scholar has motivated Williams to pursue a doctorate in psychology. “Dr. Williams—I like the way that sounds,” he says. “It excites me. I didn’t ever consider I could get a Ph.D., but I know it’s going to open even more doors in my life.”
Tarale Murry

The thoughtful athlete

Like many student athletes, Tarale Murry has multiple identities: walk-on basketball player, mentor, accounting major, McNair Scholar and Christian. Introspective by nature, Murry describes himself as a nerd who happens to be athletic. Now with guidance from Dr. Louis Harrison, professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and faculty advisor for the McNair Scholars Program, Murry envisions himself holding a Ph.D. by age 33.

It was Harrison’s African Americans in Sport course that exposed Murry to the history of African American athletes who were true scholar-athletes and prompted him to think about how stereotypes affect Black male youths. The course examined the role of stereotypes, identity formation and the impact of the media in framing African-American athletes as “dumb jocks.”

“Tarale began to ask questions that alerted me to his academic potential and his desire to be much more than just an athlete,” Harrison says. “I immediately pointed him to the McNair Program. Since that point he has really blossomed intellectually.”

Harrison sees the McNair Scholars Program as a perfect fit for student athletes like Murry.

“The program exposes underrepresented students to mentors they can identify with,” Harrison explains. “It also provides a structure that fills in areas of deficiency while building on student strengths by having high academic expectations and holding students accountable for producing valuable research.”

Murry is planning a research project that will examine how basketball, hip-hop and Christianity influence the Black male identity. He sees hip-hop as integral to Black culture.

“A vast majority of Black youths grow up without a father figure; hip-hop replaces that and Black males identify and embrace the hip-hop culture, often opposing Christianity,” Murry says.

Harrison says his passion is finding former athletes with substantial academic potential and taking them from player to Ph.D. to provide researchers who have an insider’s view on athletics.

“It is my hope that Tarale will join this group,” he says. —E
Star athletes, coaches, university leaders and researchers will come together at the second annual Black Student Athlete Summit Jan. 6-8, 2016, at the AT&T Executive Education Conference Center. Hosted by the DDCE’s African American Male Research Initiative, the three-day summit examines the challenges and opportunities facing Black athletes in college sports.

The January 2015 summit was featured in many local media outlets, with coverage the Austin American-Statesman, KXAN, Time Warner Cable News and several others. Sessions and keynotes are archived on the DDCE’s YouTube site.

Here are just a few highlights from the summit and some key observations about past, present and future challenges for Black student athletes. Register for the 2016 summit online at www.blackstudentathleteconference.org.

UT Austin sports icons Roosevelt Leaks, Retha Swindell and Jody Conradt participated in a panel discussion about integration on the Forty Acres.

Daron Roberts, former NFL assistant coach and founding director of the Center for Sports Leadership and Innovation at UT Austin, stressed the importance of thinking about life beyond college sports, asking student athletes to ponder this question: “Who are you without the ball?”

Dr. Akilah R. Carter-Francique, professor of health and kinesiology at Texas A&M University, discussed the need for more research on Black female athletes and shared research findings on cognitive and social development for young women in sports.

Leslie M. Satchell, manager of the National Football League Players Association, shared her perspective on an array of issues affecting Black athletes—from the differences between male and female Black athletes, to harmful stereotypes and misconceptions that continue to be enforced in the media today.
On the DDCE Scene

1. Vince Young encourages a young fan to do well in school.

2. A UT Austin student voices her concerns at the Public Forum on Statuary.

3. Honorees pose with Dr. Vincent, Austin Mayor Steve Adler and President Powers at the Asian American Community Leadership Awards.

4. Community Leadership Award honorees Teddy McDaniel and Dr. Larry Earvin pose with fellow members of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity at the Carver Museum and Cultural Center.

5. Dr. Miyong Kim, Dr. Melissa C. Smith and Ashton Cumberbatch participated in the Community Health Dialogue in East Austin.

6. Honorees at the Community Leadership Awards at the Mexican American Cultural Center gather after the reception.

7. President Gregory Fenves met with East Austin community leaders on his first day of office.

8. School of Social Work senior Chelsea Jones accepts the Student Legacy Award at Evening of Honors.

9. Fifth-grade students bid adieu to UT Elementary School at their graduation ceremony.

10. Students worked in the Holly Street neighborhood during The Project 2015.

11. LGBTQ Community Leadership Award honoree Randi Shade (center) celebrates with Dr. Sherri Sanders and Dr. Gregory J. Vincent at Texas Exes LGBT Network reception.
STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) teacher Felicia Adams working with a robotics class.

Photos by Kirk Weddle Photography
Being the Change

UT Elementary primes students for success in school and beyond

By Jessica Sinn
“They’re fully invested in what they’re learning, and I think it’s because the lessons are presented in a genuinely enthusiastic way.”
Just a few miles across the interstate from “the big UT,” there is a charter school filled with “Little Longhorns” dressed neatly in burnt orange polo shirts and khakis.

Every morning, they all gather together for a hot breakfast and warm hugs from their teachers and school administrators. At UT Elementary, a part of the University of Texas-University Charter School System located in East Austin, it’s important for students to start off on the right foot at school and in their daily lives.

Unlike any other school of its kind in Texas, UT Elementary has one enormous advantage: its partnership with a top-tier research university. It takes the best in teaching research and applies it to the classrooms—with impressive results. The goal is to help students, many of whom come from economically disadvantaged households, traverse their way from kindergarten all the way through graduate school.

A MODEL THAT WORKS

With a focus on social and emotional learning, UT Elementary revolves its curriculum around lessons in empathy, respect, problem solving and teamwork. Erin Taylor Green, a recent College of Education graduate, says she noticed a remarkable difference in how the students learned and interacted with one another when she began student teaching in Scarlett Calvin’s fifth-grade classroom last spring.

“I was so inspired by how much these teachers care about their students, and how invested they are in helping them learn and grow,” Green says. “They truly believe that every kid has the potential to succeed.”

Disenchanted by her previous student teaching stints in the public school system, she almost gave up on the profession altogether. That is until she realized how much of an impact she could make on her students’ lives.

“Fighting for students, and encouraging them to reach their true potential should be at the center of education, and UT Elementary is doing that in a way that I’ve never seen before,” Green says. “Our students’ test scores are higher, they’re reading at higher levels, they’re thinking critically—so it’s apparent that this model really works.”

At a school that feels more like a close-knit community than an institution, students feel more at ease with themselves and with others, she notes. They’re not afraid to voice their opinions and are quickly learning how to consider opposing viewpoints.
Fifth-grade teacher Mary Ledbetter inspires her students to change the world.

“When students feel like they’re in a safe, welcoming environment, they’re going to be happier and better behaved,” Green says. “They’re fully invested in what they’re learning, and I think it’s because the lessons are presented in a genuinely enthusiastic way. The teachers are passionate about their work and the kids pick up on that.”

AGENTS OF CHANGE

That sense of enthusiasm is palpable in Mary Ledbetter’s fifth-grade classroom, where students are absorbing their lessons through an array of hands-on activities. When they’re not out on field trips, they’re busy in the classroom reading chapter books with their resident bunny, examining historical documents or collaborating together on group projects.

To pique their curiosity about America’s founding fathers, authors, poets and activists, Ledbetter adorns her classroom walls with images of handwritten letters, portraits, quotes and collages. These items offer a glance into the lives of some people who worked hard, pushed the status quo and achieved greatness.

“It is inspiring for the kids to see that the people who we recognize as heroes in history are just human beings who worked really hard, took risks, failed and picked themselves up again,” says Ledbetter, who has been working in education for nearly three decades. “Every single one of my students can do the same thing, and we’re depending on them.”

Ledbetter explains that her students are learning how to become agents of change. To drive this message home, she often points to a quote posted on her wall by Mahatma Gandhi; “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

“I tell them that when they see something that they feel is wrong, they should...
take a step forward and make something happen,” Ledbetter says. “One of my favorite sayings is, ‘Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.’ I have to remind them of that because they want to be heard, but they have to also be willing to let others speak.”

**TALKING IT OUT**

Even at the tender ages of seven and eight, students in Brittany Bain’s second-grade class are learning how to find their voices as they broach sensitive topics such as race relations and discrimination. While working on an “African American Heroes” book project last February, the children found that talking about skin color can be rather difficult in today’s society.

“When one of my students pointed to a man in a photograph and referred to him as white, an African American student said, ‘Don’t call him white; that’s not nice,’” Bain recalls. “That’s when I asked the class, ‘Well then, what can we say? Let’s talk about it and figure it out together.’

Children are perceptive and notice racial and gender discrimination in their daily lives. That’s why it’s important to address this issue and enforce the need for equal rights in this country and around the world, Bain adds.

“I want them to start asking, ‘Why would we treat each other differently because of skin color or class?’ It’s important for them to learn at this young age that we are all human and that we are all the same,” Bain says.

This is a valuable lesson that Natacha Jones’ first-graders are learning as well. One of the many benefits of the school, she notes, is that they all get to interact with people from various socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures.

“Some of our conversations are far and away above what we expect from six- and seven-year-olds,” Jones says. “If you give them space and listen to their voices, they have a lot to say—and there’s a lot that us grownups can learn from their perspectives.”

**PRIMED FOR SUCCESS**

One of Jones’ biggest joys of teaching is sitting back and watching the wheels turning as students brainstorm in groups.

“It’s very gratifying watching them grow into independent learners,” Jones says, smiling. “When I take a step back and watch them work together, that’s when the magic happens.”

When her students leave for middle school, Jones is confident they will be well equipped to handle any obstacle that comes their way.

“Every month, we highlight a specific character trait at UTES. We want our Little Longhorns to be tenacious, to have empathy, and to be leaders,” Jones notes. “We want them to have a good strong sense of who they are and who they want to be. We strive to give them a solid academic foundation and send them to middle school with a lifelong learner mentality.”

That foundation is evident in the school’s first cohort of high school seniors who graduated last May. This fall, many of them are the first in their family to attend college. Like a proud mother, Ledbetter has high expectations for her alumni.

“Our students have been very successful in middle school and high school,” says Ledbetter, who joined UTES when its first graduating class entered fifth grade in 2007. “Many of them are already registered to vote, and they’re getting scholarships to universities all over the nation. It is gratifying to see them succeed.” —Æ
Since he was a kid, Thomas Delgado has always been fascinated with the natural world. While other boys his age were playing with video games and climbing trees, he was busy tinkering with his chemistry kit and telescope.

Now a teacher at Laurel Ridge, a school within the DDCE’s University of Texas-University Charter School system, Delgado is helping children (grades 4-12) discover their interest in the world around them.

“It’s so fun telling a student why something occurs in nature and seeing that ‘aha’ moment light up in their eyes,” says Delgado, who won the 2015 High School Teacher of the Year Award and the 2009 Rookie Science Teacher of the Year Award from the Science Teachers Association of Texas.

Delgado’s infectious enthusiasm for science shows in his classroom activities. Rather than sitting quietly at their desks and reading textbooks, his students are in the lab connecting scientific concepts with everyday situations. His goal is to show them how their lives are affected by science on a daily basis.

“I always try to use real-world examples in my teaching,” Delgado says. “Kids don’t want to sit and listen to lectures; they want a reason for why they’re learning, and a purpose for what they’ll get out of it.”

Using new technology to his advantage, Delgado is helping his students understand complicated lessons through a variety of digital tools, such as virtual periodic tables and interactive videos.

“Technology has really enhanced the classroom,” Delgado explains. “This is a great time to be a teacher because of all the resources we can offer to the kids.”

Teaching in a field that is so often associated with the word “hard” can be a rather difficult profession. Yet the challenge is what Delgado loves most about his job. That’s why he decided to teach special education students at Laurel Ridge, a San Antonio-based residential treatment facility for children with psychological, neuropsychiatric, sexual behavior and developmentally delayed issues.

When asked why Delgado chose this profession, he recalls a recent conversation he had with his daughter.

“She told me, ‘Dad, you would get bored teaching in a regular classroom,’” Delgado recalls, laughing. “And you know what, she’s right. I wouldn’t trade my job for anything in the world. It’s too much fun.”
Austin, Travis County Commit to My Brother’s Keeper

In 2014, President Obama launched the My Brother’s Keeper initiative, challenging local governments, philanthropists, nonprofit leaders, educators and individuals to address the significant challenges that young boys and men of color continue to face today. To advance this important national conversation, the DDCE has partnered with the city of Austin and Travis County on a MBK task force. The task force is co-chaired by Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, vice president for diversity and community engagement, and Mark Madrid, CEO for the Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

SXSWedu “My Brother’s Keeper” Community Dialogue—March 10, 2015

1. Dr. Leonard Moore, senior associate vice president at DDCE, presented some solutions for preventing students from falling into the school-to-prison pipeline.

2. Panelist Johnny Hill, shared how he defeated the odds by graduating from a top-tier university after serving time in prison. He plans to earn a Ph.D., a feat that he hopes to prove is possible to other young men of color who are at risk of falling into the school-to-prison pipeline.


3. Key participants in the Greater Austin MBK initiative include Dr. Paul Cruz, Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, Judge Sarah Eckhardt, Mayor Steve Adler, Mark Madrid and Dr. Richard Rhodes.
With no parents or teachers pushing them to reach their potential, many of these students prove their naysayers right by not going to college or dropping out of school altogether. After seeing this need for support, Alejos decided to join Advise TX, a state-wide program within the College Advising Corps. Advise TX hires new college graduates to help underserved high school students tackle the college application process and find a school that suits their needs.

Alejos formerly worked for the UT Austin chapter of Advise TX, which is now housed within the DDCE. As a guidance counselor, accountant and project manager folded into one, she worked hard. But it was well worth the effort when she saw her students’ eyes light up when they received that bulky envelope from their dream school, or when that critical scholarship came through.

“I’m so happy when students realize they can go to school, or when they...”
earn that scholarship,” Alejos says. “This is very gratifying work and I’m so grateful to have had this experience.”

The majority of Alejos’ high school seniors were from low-income households. Those who successfully got into college still had to face another daunting challenge: paying tuition. Of course, there’s federal grants and scholarships, but the process of securing those funds can be overwhelming to say the least.

Alejos remembers that process all too well. As a low-income high school student, she sought out every avenue for financial aid all on her own. Without internet access at home, she used the public library to scour the Web for every possible resource. As someone who experienced this painstaking task first-hand, she knows how important it is for students to have someone guiding them along the way.

Not only did she help students find a way to pay for college, she also stood in their corner and showed them that not all hope was lost when the rejection letters came.

“I tried to help them find a way no matter what,” Alejos says. “If they wanted to get into a particular college—even if they didn’t have the grades to get in—I would never tell them no, but I did show them the steps they needed to take to get there, and I showed them some better options. It’s all about finding the best fit for the students.”

In spring 2015 Alejos wrapped up the second year of the two-year program. When asked what’s next, she recalls some wise words that helped put the imposing “big picture” into perspective.

“I had a professor who once told me, ‘It’s not what you want to do with the rest of your life; It’s what you’re going to do next,’” Alejos says. “I like to tell this to my students when they worry about picking a major and planning their entire future. A degree is more than just a piece of paper, it’s a building block for so many different fields and opportunities.”

—Æ
The notion that we live in a “colorblind society” is carefully dismantled in a new edition of *Racial Battle Fatigue in Higher Education: Exposing the Myth of Post-Racial America* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Dec. 2014). Faculty from the DDCE are among several contributing authors examining an emerging body of research that suggests chronic exposure to racial discrimination can lead to a serious anxiety disorder.

In a chapter titled *Exercising Agency in the Midst of Racial Battle Fatigue: A Case for Intragroup Diversity*, they examine court decisions regarding diversity in higher education and point out several mitigating factors that create racial battle fatigue. As a solution, they state the case for advocating and obtaining support for diversity and inclusion efforts in colleges and schools across the nation. The chapter is co-authored by Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, vice president of diversity and community engagement; Dr. Sherri Sanders, DDCE associate vice president; and Dr. Stella Smith, DDCE postdoctoral fellow.

This is one of the many books written by faculty, staff, students and alumni that are featured on ShelfLife@Texas, UT Austin’s literary blog managed by the DDCE. Visit: sites.utexas.edu/shelflife/
Dr. Leonard Moore serves two roles at UT. As a professor of history, he teaches large classes like *Race in the Age of Obama* and *History of the Black Power Era*. When he’s not weaving the topics of race, sports and hip-hop into a lecture, he’s at his other job as senior associate vice president at the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, where he gets to interact with even more students, something he thrives on.

“If I had my choice, we wouldn’t have walls anywhere up here,” Moore says about the fourth floor of the Student Services Building, which houses part of the DDCE. “It would be all open.”

Openness is Moore’s philosophy on teaching. Moore teaches 1,100 students in his two fall classes—1,100 mentors, he calls them—and Moore uses his students as sounding boards both for the class and for the DDCE.

“If I’m launching an initiative up here, guess who I’ll ask? I’ll go ask the 19-year-olds,” Moore says. “The feedback they give me makes me a better administrator.”

The biggest misconception about his class is that “it’s all about Black stuff,” Moore says. “What I tell white students is that you will learn more about yourself in my Black power class than you will on any other class on campus. All the white Greeks take the course now.”

While Moore absolutely values the research side of academia, his first love is educating in the classroom. For that reason, he says he believes in bringing his “A-game” in every single lecture.

“I got in this first and foremost to motivate undergrads to do something dynamic with their lives,” Moore says. “Students have paid a lot of money to be here. They should never be bored.”

By Chris O’Connell

*Alcalde* Names LEONARD MOORE One of Its Annual “Texas 10”

By Chris O’Connell

Professor, History, Senior associate vice president Division of Diversity and Community Engagement

2015 Jean Holloway Award winner for excellence in teaching

- Years at UT: 8
- Dream student: “A kid with a 2.1 [GPA], a sophomore, just floating by at UT and thinking about dropping out. That student coming into my class, getting motivated, and taking off is my dream student.”
students interrupted

Law School research fellow aims to dismantle school-to-prison pipeline

By Jessica Sinn
Starting middle school can be a tough rite-of-passage for any child, but for the students in Meg Clifford’s Teach for America class, that transition would be especially difficult. In the Bronx, an area rife with drugs and crime, she knew her fifth-graders would soon face a number of obstacles along their way to graduation.

To help her students prepare for the challenges ahead, she tutored them after hours and on holidays, showing them that they can and will succeed.

“I was amazed by how hard my students were willing to work—and how much of an influence I could have on them,” Clifford recalls. “When I sent them off to sixth grade, I could no longer protect them from slipping into old patterns and undoing the work that we did. That’s when I realized that I wanted to have a broader impact on the challenges these kids are facing.”
Clifford’s three years of teaching at an inner-city school in New York galvanized her decision to become a lawyer, a profession that would allow her to make a significant dent in the school-to-prison pipeline, a national trend whereby children with disciplinary referrals are funneled out of schools and into the juvenile justice system.

“I want to do what I can to keep kids engaged in school, and protect them from the mistakes they make,” Clifford says. “Whether they want to attend correspondence school or get a Ph.D., I don’t want a criminal record to haunt them and stand in their way of achieving their goals.”

To help dismantle the pipeline, the DDCE partnered with the Law School’s William Wayne Justice Center for Public Interest Law to fund Clifford’s two-year research fellowship position. Now as a DDCE faculty fellow, Clifford has already helped a number of students—and even adults—turn their lives around.

As part of her project, she has focused on zero-tolerance penalties for infractions such as school ticketing and suspensions. In schools across the nation, students are being ticketed for misdeeds that would typically warrant a trip to the principal’s office. Students charged with Class C misdemeanor tickets must appear before a county or municipal judge and can face fines of up to $500. The overwhelming majority of these students are in homes that are classified as economically disadvantaged.

“These kids need to take responsibility for their actions, but making them pay court fines that should be going toward school supplies, food and clothes is not the way to do this,” Clifford says.

Under Texas law, students who are charged with a Class C misdemeanor are not provided with a court-appointed attorney. As a result, they plead guilty or no contest in court. Clifford found that many of her clients often have legitimate reasons for their “offenses,” such as chronic illnesses, learning disabilities and mental health issues.

Guilty or not, the majority of these children have no other choice but to pay the hard price—both financially and psychologically. That “guilty” label has a way of creeping into the child’s psyche, causing them to believe that they really are criminals, Clifford notes.
“At the end of the day, these kids are all on the same team and have the same goals,” Clifford says. “They don’t start out in school wanting to drop out and go to prison—and schools don’t want that for these kids either. We need to find a way to get the schools and the students to work together.”

One way to do this is to install early intervention models in schools with the most at-risk students. The Law School’s Youth Court program targeted Webb Middle School in Austin’s underserved St. Johns neighborhood. In partnership with the DDCE, the program works as an alternative disciplinary measure for students who would otherwise be facing zero-tolerance penalties. Through peer-run mock trials and other activities, the participants gain in-depth knowledge about the consequences of their actions and learn about the benefits of staying in school and out of the criminal justice system.

When she’s not supervising Youth Court, Clifford is at the courthouse defending students who have been saddled with tickets that can come back to haunt them well into adulthood. And if that doesn’t keep her busy enough, she’s also helping both students and adults expunge tickets from their records so they can finally break down the legal barricades that are keeping them from getting into college or landing a job.

She recalls a past client who was more than qualified to become a teacher, yet a background check kept standing in his way. Now that she successfully expunged a careless mistake he made as a teenager from his criminal record, he’s student teaching and well on his way to achieving his career goal.

“Back when I was an undergrad, I remember Dr. Vincent told me something that has fueled my work,” Clifford says. “He told me that at a large state university, it is our obligation and responsibility to support the community that supports us. And at the School of Law, it’s also our responsibility to promote and help a diverse college-ready population. His words continue to resonate with me, and I’m so glad to be where I am today.” —Æ
Back when Wendoline Gamez was a seventh-grader at Pearce Middle School, she didn't give college much of a passing thought until her best friend's grandmother asked her to get involved in UT Outreach-Austin. Enticed by the idea of palling around with her friend and enjoying free food at various spots around campus, she decided to enroll.

“I remember when I first started the program, they told us they were going to help us all the way from middle school through college,” Gamez says. “At the time, I just remember saying to myself, 'I don't want to hear about college; all I want to do is play volleyball or do cheerleading.'”

What began as a fun diversion from her daily routine turned into an unforgettable,
Now as he enters his senior year, he continues to take advantage of several student success programs, including the Gateway Scholars Program in the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence. Since he was a freshman, Green has benefited from a host of services within the center—from free tutoring to signature courses to academic advising.

As for life after graduation, that is yet to be determined. Whether he’s making a positive impact at a nonprofit, or going back to grad school to study ethnography, Green is not entirely certain where he’ll be two years down the road. The future is wide open and full of possibilities—another valuable piece of wisdom he gained as a Neighborhood Longhorn.

Jamal Green
Sociology Senior

Every student—no matter their economic standing—can fulfill their dreams of going to college. That’s one of the many important life lessons Jamal Green learned as a Neighborhood Longhorn.

Green fondly recalls roaming around campus with his fellow Neighborhood Longhorns and learning about the many aspects of student life. The program has helped thousands of economically disadvantaged students (grades 2-8) in schools across Austin find their path to college.

“If you’re a young kid, the Neighborhood Longhorns Program really helps you put college into perspective,” Green says. “It’s a great program for a lot of kids who don’t really have aspirations for going to college.”

Now as Gamez is ready to embark on an exciting career as a health specialist, she has UT Outreach to thank for her bright future ahead.

“Looking back, I’m so glad I was in that program,” says Gamez. “Otherwise I wouldn’t be thinking about college. Every time I see the kiddos taking a tour around campus, I remember how exciting it was to experience college for the first time.”
Dr. Christopher Salas-Wright, assistant professor in the School of Social Work, specializes in research on substance use and health-risk behavior among adolescents in the United States and Central America.
We caught up with him to learn more about his experiences volunteering at a substance use treatment center in El Salvador, where he devoted much of his time to working with young men—many of whom were about his age at the time—who were struggling with serious drug problems. Read on to learn more about his experiences abroad and how he found his calling in the field of social work.

**The gentle art of listening...** At the substance use treatment center, Salas-Wright spent months getting to know the young men who were living in one of San Salvador’s most violent neighborhoods. Though the experience was heartbreaking and often overwhelming, he said it was a privilege to learn about their lives and how they became entangled in drug and alcohol addiction. “Listening in this way impacted me profoundly—the struggles of the young men moved me and inspired me to try to learn more about substance use prevention and treatment. And so, I have spent much of the last decade pursuing clinical and research training that can help me make an impact in the lives of young people who struggle with substance use disorders.”

**Music—the great connector...** Salas-Wright connected with the young men through one-on-one guitar lessons. “We would sit outside in the shade and strum simple songs for hours on end. It was so wonderful to see these guys, many of whom had a very tough exterior, light up like delighted little boys as we were able to make music together. For a moment, all of the struggles that they faced were carried away by the fun of feeling like a rock star. I got carried away too. It was always a profoundly human moment and the joy of that particular form of fellowship has stuck with me.”

**Considering the big picture...** Salas-Wright’s experience in El Salvador taught him that context really matters, meaning social workers must think about helping from a person-in-environment perspective. “Trying to make an impact in the lives of the young men in the substance use treatment center made little sense without thinking about the broader family, community and social and economic systems that impact health and well-being. This kind of thinking is very natural to social work and it made the profession very attractive to me. One of the most enjoyable things about being a professor in the School of Social Work is the opportunity to work with students in a way that prioritizes thinking about how context influences our well-being and life course trajectories.”

**Why UT?** “UT Austin has one of the nation’s top social work programs and has a great reputation. Austin is also a great city and one that really is wonderful for families raising small children (I have two small children at home.) When the opportunity to come and be part of the faculty in the School of Social Work presented itself, I was very excited and it was an easy decision.”

“UT Austin has one of the nation’s top social work programs and has a great reputation.”
William C. Powers wasn’t destined to be a national leader in higher education on issues of race and diversity. Born in 1946 and raised in Los Angeles in a middle-class family, he remembers himself as a typical product of the liberal consensus of the post-war era, when a broad philosophical commitment to racial equality often coexisted with a blindness about how racism and discrimination played out closer to home.
“I remember in junior high and high school being appalled by segregation in the South,” he remembers. “At the same time, though, racial epithets were a commonplace. De facto segregation was unnoticed and unquestioned. And I didn’t notice that complexity.”

When Powers became dean at the law school in 2000, his emphasis on diversity led to the quadrupling of the number of African American students and doubling of the number of Hispanic students.

“It was retail 101,” he says. “We really recruited. I had every student of color to my house. We set up programs in the Valley. We focused on orientation, and on making sure that it was student-friendly. Our goal was to change the perception one student at a time if necessary.”

THE COMMITMENT TAKES FORM

In 2006, not long after taking office as the 28th president of UT Austin, Powers promoted Dr. Gregory J. Vincent to the position of vice president for diversity and community engagement.

The promotion signaled a recognition from Powers that there was no simple way to reckon with the university’s complicated relationship with race and diversity.

In 2007 the DDCE was established, with Vincent at its helm. In addition to the programs that Vincent had already had in his portfolio as vice provost, the new division included programs and initiatives from the community relations portfolio, from academic affairs, and from the provost’s office.

The goals of the division were manifold. It was involved in efforts to recruit and retain students and faculty of color. It assisted in the creation of the new Department of African and African Diaspora Studies, one of the largest of its kind in the nation, and the Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies. It continued and deepened the conversation about the university’s fraught history with race and racism. It reached out to alumni of color to make sure that their voices and stories were integrated into the larger story of the university.

And it did the kind of retail work that Powers had done at the law school, but on a much larger scale, persuading people and communities across the state that the university valued diversity.

The University of Texas and its VP for diversity and community engagement are among the most visible in the country. The unique scale and scope of this particular division is broadly recognized across the country as one of the largest and most influential in higher education.

—Juan Sánchez Muñoz
Senior Vice President for Institutional Diversity, Equity & Community Engagement
Texas Tech University
GOING TO EAST AUSTIN

When Powers took over as president, and installed Vincent as a vice president, one of the first charges he gave him was to put the university at the service of the East Austin neighborhood, and to look for opportunities for collaboration and engagement.

The campaign included, the creation of the Community Engagement Center, which acts as a home base for a variety of East Austin focus projects; support for East Austin-based community nonprofits; and the creation of a series of civic awards to honor leaders in Austin’s African American, Hispanic and Asian American communities.

NEW LEADERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA OF DIVERSITY AND EXCELLENCE

Just hours into his first morning as President of UT Austin, Gregory L. Fenves left campus to meet with East Austin community leaders at the David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. While responding to questions during a panel discussion with Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, vice president of diversity and community engagement, Fenves noted that although there had been a history of poor relations between the university and East Austin, he hoped to build on the momentum of a string of successful partnerships. He finished by saying he would continue to rely on the community for support in the university’s diversity and community engagement initiatives.

If there were any doubt as to whether or not Fenves would be as strong on diversity as his predecessor, it was immediately laid to rest.

Of course, Fenves’ stance on diversity should come as no surprise. As executive vice president and provost, he consistently defended the educational benefits of diversity, leading initiatives designed to increase minority enrollment.

In outlining his vision for the university’s future during his inaugural address, Fenves reaffirmed his commitment to excellence and diversity. “As we plan for the future of the university, we do so mindful not only of where we are going, but of who we are,” he said. “We are a diverse community that is able to address the challenges facing the world in part because our student body looks like the world.”
Under Powers’ leadership and with more substantial resources, we have had the personnel and the infrastructure to offer programming and support for programs in East Austin and to integrate service learning and community engagement more fully into our curriculum.

—Shirley Thompson
Associate Professor
Department of African and African Diaspora Studies

With the recent announcement that the Supreme Court will reconsider a challenge to the university’s limited consideration of race in its admission policy in *Fisher v. Texas* (the Supreme Court had previously remanded the case to the Fifth Circuit court in 2013), the topic of diversity on the Forty Acres is sure to become a hot button issue once again.

“We know that students have a better educational experience in diverse classrooms, and we know that the best environment we can provide our students is one in which we prepare them for the society and workforce they will enter after graduation,” Fenves says. “As the president of UT Austin, I will always do what is in the best interest of our students.”
Universities throughout the nation watched with gratitude as UT Austin mounted a vigorous defense of affirmative action in the Fisher case.

—Gibor Basri
Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion, University of California at Berkeley

FISHER V. TEXAS

Of all the diversity efforts that Powers vigorously led as president, the one that he’ll be most remembered for, ironically, is one that he didn’t choose.

In 2008, Abigail Fisher, along with another white student who was denied admission to UT Austin, filed suit against the university. She alleged that she was denied admission in favor of less qualified Black and Hispanic students.

“It never dawned on any of us not to fight,” Powers says. “We never sat around and asked what we should do on Fisher. We got sued. We defended.”

In 2013, Powers was elected chair of the Association of American Universities, an elite group of research-intensive public and private universities. It was as clear a signal as possible that Powers was recognized, by his peers, as a national leader in higher education.

It was also evidence that Powers had become a symbol of a certain vision of what higher education in the United States should look like, and of the willingness to fight for that vision against competing visions.

On campus, as well, he has become a symbol, of the possibility of forging a 21st century university that is both true to the best in its traditions and committed to reckoning with the worst of its history. Through his leadership, students, faculty, staff and the community have seen that it’s possible to have a modern university with a soul.
Since 1910 the University Interscholastic League (UIL)—housed within the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE)—has played a role in character and leadership development among hundreds of thousands of Texas public school students. Beaumont attorney James E. Payne was one of those students.

Created by UT Austin, UIL has grown into the largest inter-school organization of its kind in the world. Any Texan who participated in school competitions has been touched by UIL at some point in their lives. As part of its mission, UIL aims to instill life lessons in sportsmanship and work ethic through competition. Payne, a senior partner with Provost Umphrey, one of the largest personal law firms in the South, attributes much of his personal and professional success to the wisdom he gained while competing in UIL basketball tournaments.

In 2012 Payne was elected to serve as the youngest leader ever of one of the most prominent fraternal organizations in the country—Sigma Pi Phi. The century-old professional fraternity boasts more than 5,000 members, including men like U.S. Attorney Eric Holder and Broderick Johnson, assistant to President Barack Obama and cabinet president.

Payne developed many of his leadership skills on the basketball court in his hometown of Port Arthur, Texas. By the time Payne got to Lincoln High School in 1983, the basketball team was on its way to becoming one of the great dynasties in the history of the UIL under the guidance of coach James Gamble.

For student athletes like Payne, playing basketball was not just the opportunity to win, which the team did with regularity, but the chance to learn from Gamble who had come to Texas from South Central Los Angeles in 1953, on a track scholarship to Prairie View A&M.

Gamble believed the primary way to build a great program was to cultivate the right ethos and habits in his players. That meant, among other things, his players had to show respect for Gamble, as well as for their teammates, their teachers, the community and their opponents.
They had to be punctual to practice, on their best behavior whenever they were representing the team, unruffled in reaction to whatever provocation they got, intensely dedicated to winning, and willing to assume responsibility for whatever happened. No excuses.

“Coach’s attitude was, if we let a game get close enough for a referee's bad call to make the difference in a game, that was our fault,” says Payne.

What the players got in return was a years-long course in what it meant to be a winner. Put in the hours, develop the discipline, play as a team, and on the other side of that lay respect, self-confidence, cheering crowds, exhilarating victories and a clarifying sense of purpose. Underneath all of the rituals, practices and expectations, says Payne, was an unspoken message from Gamble. He had faith in them. They had the character to do things that weren’t easy.

For Payne, the habit of winning became intrinsic, on the court and off. He graduated second in his class at Lincoln High School, and then moved on to the University of Houston, where he finished with honors in three and a half years. After spending a year working on Capitol Hill, Payne returned to the University of Houston for law school.

In 1993 Payne was admitted to the Texas bar and began his career as an attorney with a firm in Houston. Two years later he moved to Provost Umphrey in Beaumont, Texas, where he has made a name for himself winning multi-million dollar judgments and settlements in product liability and personal injury cases. In 2000 he was made senior partner at the firm and has been named to the Texas Super Lawyers list every year since 2003. Payne also developed the nationally recognized Buy 90 Campaign which was designed to economically empower the African American community in Southeast Texas.

In February 2014 when President Obama announced the launch of My Brother’s Keeper, the national call to action to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by young men of color, Payne had already been working for a decade as an officer of Sigma Pi Phi to marshal the energies and resources of the members to address the issue. As leader of the Boulé (as Sigma Pi Phi is known), he initiated a number of collaborations with the DDCE to take the effort to the next level.

“James has been a national leader in engaging the African American community in responding to the challenges facing our young people of color,” says Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, vice president for diversity and community engagement. “Thanks to James, the Boulé was prepared to take the lead on a number of levels for My Brother's Keeper.”

A few months after President Obama’s announcement of My Brother’s Keeper, Sigma Pi Phi’s Grand Commission on Young African American males released Pathways to Young Black Male Excellence, under the leadership of Payne and Vincent.

The secret to his success, Payne says, isn’t any secret at all. It’s what he learned from UIL competitions and Coach Gamble: intense preparation, and the confidence that comes from that.

“On the court, if we are beating you by 20 or 30 and get a bad call, it shouldn't matter,” Payne says. “Same thing in the courtroom. The goal is to take the game out of others' hands. If it’s not close, they can’t take the game away from you. I’m not saying I’m Perry Mason. What I’m saying is I’m going to be more prepared than anyone else in the room.”

Payne says that he and other members of the 1986 championship team “were able to use basketball, and what Coach Gamble taught us, as a way to go to the next level. That’s what UIL competition drives. It allows you to be competitive, be the very best, and do it in an arena where it doesn’t cause you harm.” —E
Supporting diverse graduate students is one of three elements of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement’s Thematic Faculty Initiative (the other two are our thematic faculty hiring and faculty fellows programs.) The division currently supports 32 graduate students from an array of disciplines, providing students crucial professional experience and scholarly opportunities as they work toward advanced degrees. It is our goal that many of these students will be future faculty members at universities nationwide.

Ashley Barraza
School of Social Work

Briana Barner
Women’s and Gender Studies

Dominque Batiste
African and African Diaspora Studies/Anthropology

Jasmine Clayton
Educational Administration

Virginia Cumberbatch
LBJ School of Public Affairs

Dallawrence Dean
Educational Administration

Jose Del Real
Curriculum and Instruction

Bisola Falola
Geography

Shane Graber
Journalism

Anthony Heaven
Higher Education Leadership

Helen Hicks
Women’s and Gender Studies

Ashley Hurst
Educational Psychology

Marcus Johnson
Curriculum and Instruction

Jessica Khalaf
Educational Administration

Juan Lopez
Higher Education Leadership

Tracie Lowe
Educational Administration

Tina Mao
Business

Tessa Mauer
Public Affairs

DeAna McCusky
Higher Education Leadership

Kathy Mariscal
Curriculum and Instruction

Chelsi Ohuere
Anthropology

Nicholas Phelps
Educational Administration

Jorge Rodriguez
Higher Education Leadership

Michael R. Scott
Educational Administration

Carmen Serrata
Educational Administration

Chloe Sikes
Curriculum and Instruction

Ashley Stone
Educational Administration

Sierra Sullivan
Educational Administration

Yohanna Tesfai
Art History

Ashley Thibodeau
Educational Administration

Phillip Townsend
African and African Diaspora Studies

Devon Walker
Curriculum and Instruction
The University of Texas at Austin aspires to maintain a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, faculty and staff. We strive to reflect the multicultural diversity of Texas and the nation.

Our students will be asked to solve complex problems that today are not known, using technology not yet developed, in jobs that currently do not exist. Diverse work groups incorporating many points of view, experiences and backgrounds will improve students’ ability to respond to tasks and challenges.

The Division of Diversity and Community Engagement helps students enter college and provide them with the academic, social and cultural capital to succeed at the university and to become leaders in their communities and professions.

We welcome your support—whether your time, treasure or talent.

Contact Gregory Perrin, associate vice president and executive director for development, at 512-471-5977 or perring@austin.utexas.edu for an informational meeting on how you can make a difference.

Make your gift today to impact the lives of the young women and men who will lead us into the future.

ddce.utexas.edu/giving
Or by mail:
Division of Diversity and Community Engagement
Office of Development
2304 Whitis Avenue
Stop G4600
Austin, TX 78712

Consider investing in the lives that will change our future

Thanks to our many donors including Alice and Michael Kuhn (left), Keith and Alice Maxie (top) and Jeanne and Mickey Klein (bottom).
Calling all Longhorns!

Join the DDCE's Longhorn Center for Community Engagement at The Project, UT Austin's largest day of community service. It is always scheduled for the last Saturday in February. Visit http://ddce.utexas.edu/theproject/ for information on The Project and other service opportunities.