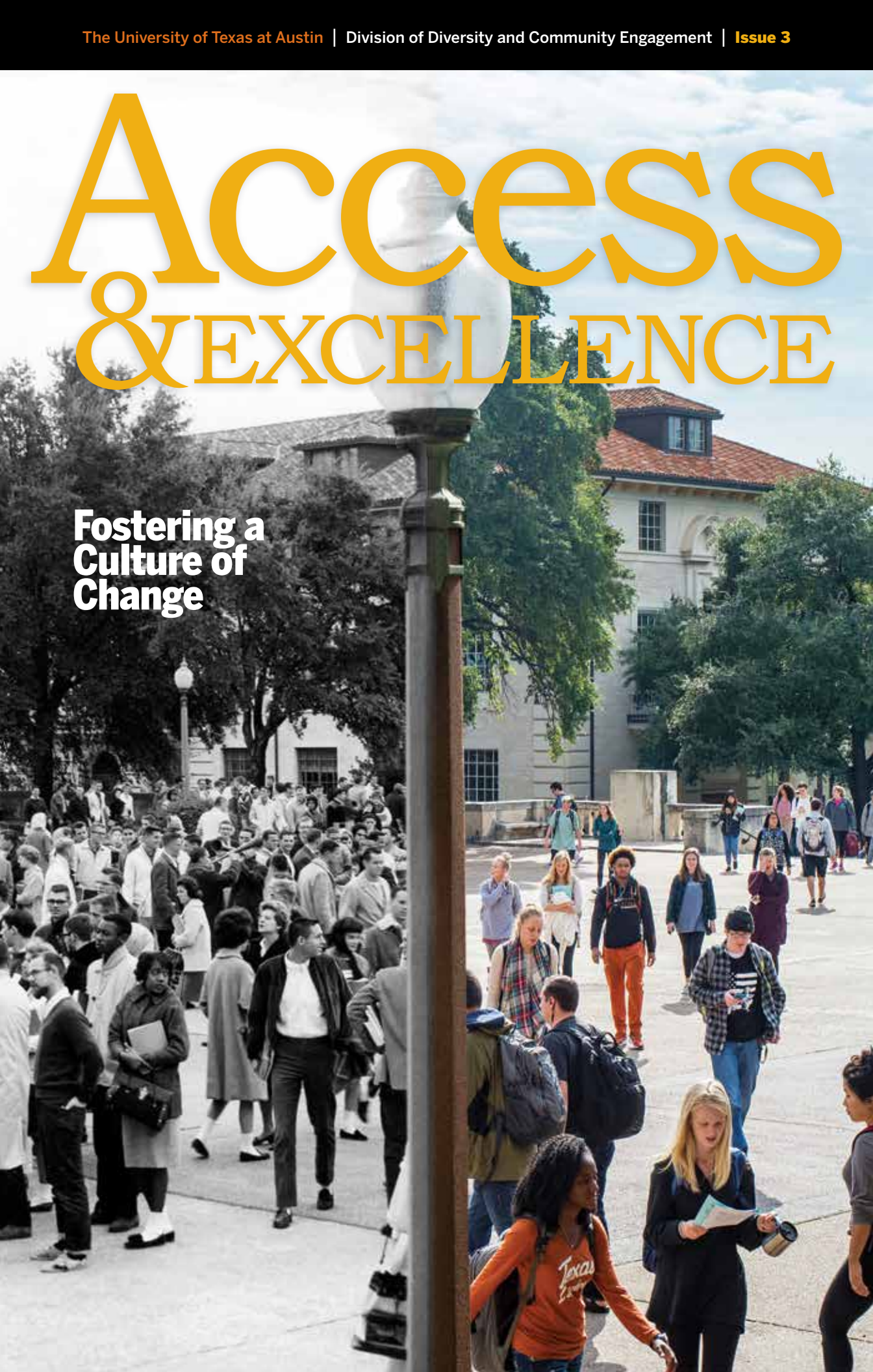


Access & EXCELLENCE

**Fostering a
Culture of
Change**



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 juxtaposed “then and now” image of campus life in the early 1960s and today. Pictured in both photographs are students at the Main Mall. This is the spot where Longhorns begin their journey at the “Gone to Texas” welcome event and say goodbye to the Forty Acres at the university-wide commencement ceremony. Designed by Ron Bowdoin.

We are the Champions



UT Austin has been recognized as a national leader, just one of 13 U.S. universities

honored as a Diversity Champion by Insight into Diversity magazine, the largest and oldest diversity and inclusion publication in the nation.

This award—in addition to the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Classification, the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll and the HEED Award—demonstrates once again that The University of Texas at Austin is a national leader in diversity and community engagement.



Access & Excellence

The Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin publishes *Access & Excellence* for its community of scholars, alumni and friends.

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Ten Years, How Time Flies

When former President William Powers Jr. realigned diversity and community engagement initiatives across the university in 2007, forming the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, UT Austin instantly stood in a class all its own.

With very few peers organized in similar fashion, the DDCE quickly became a model for other institutions establishing diversity portfolios. As we near our 10-year anniversary, the DDCE now includes more than 50 units and initiatives and 400 community partners, stretching across the state of Texas and beyond.

Under the leadership of President Gregory L. Fenves, our commitment to diversity in all its forms continues. This year, the university celebrated both the 60th anniversary of the admission of the first Black undergraduates as well as the Supreme Court decision in *Fisher v. Texas*, affirming deference to academic freedom and our holistic admissions policy. Now the university is developing its first Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. Once finalized, it will impact every college, school and unit on campus.

Looking back, I've grown both nostalgic about our past and optimistic for our



future. We have accomplished so much, yet I know we have so much more to achieve.

Our current issue of Access and Excellence is dedicated to telling the stories central to creating our unique campus culture that enhances learning for all. The stories are a reflection of our progress here at UT Austin, yet set the stage for what is to come. We include brief oral histories from several of the earliest African American students who left an indelible mark on campus and profiles of current students changing our world.

I'm amazed at what we have been able to accomplish in the DDCE's first 10 years, but with our innovative students, faculty and staff, I am all the more excited for what is to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Vincent".

Dr. Gregory J. Vincent

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

AS THEY SAW IT

UT's first Black undergrads share stories of integration on campus

by Kevin Almasy

On July 8, 1955, The University of Texas Board of Regents voted unanimously to admit African American undergraduate students. “By adoption of this recommendation, it would become the expressed intention of The University of Texas to formulate a policy of selective admissions, based on merit and applied equally to all regardless of racial origin, and to institute this policy beginning with the academic year 1956-57.”

Chairman Tom Sealy, who called the decision “historic” in a Daily Texan story, said that the change in admission policy represented a good faith effort to comply with the recent *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court Decision.

The stories of the initial years following the integration of The University of Texas at

Austin are many and varied. Collected are just a few points of views from the Precursors, the fearless African American students who were among the first to desegregate the university. This year, the university celebrates the 60th anniversary of the first Black undergraduates to enroll in 1956. Their words are presented as they saw it.

“I was not looking for a place of ease. Quite frankly I was discouraged from going here [to UT Austin]. I was walking around as a senior in high school and my principal asked me, ‘Son where are you going to school?’ and I said, ‘I think I am going to UT.’ He said, ‘Son, why are you going there? They don’t want you there,’ and I said, ‘That’s why I’m going.’”

—Emanuel McKinney

**Enrolled 1957, Heman Sweatt
Symposium, April, 2010**



Students gather on the Main Mall at The University of Texas at Austin campus c. 1960.

“My grandfather would take us on a Saturday excursion and it always ended at the Littlefield Fountain. I remember mentioning to my grandad how green the grass was and asked him if I may walk up the stairway and sit in the chairs under the beautiful trees. He said, ‘I’m sorry honey, you’re not allowed to be on campus.’ Naturally I asked, ‘Why not?’ He said, ‘Well, there are some rules we have to abide by.’ And he went on to explain some things that I didn’t understand because I was eight years old. After that we would come back and he said, ‘You see that clock on that tower? One of these days you are going to be able to study under that tower.’”

—Edna Rhambo

Enrolled 1956, Precursors 60th Anniversary Celebration, September, 2016

Once enrolled and on campus, African American students faced many hardships, from

disinterested faculty to a divided study body and a segregated city. Getting used to life away from home in a place that did little to welcome them made assimilating on campus difficult.

“There was very limited housing for Blacks. The women had no housing on campus at all. The fellows had two sets of residences. One was some little barracks at the foot of San Jacinto and what is now MLK. These huts had been built for, as I understand it, for married students during World War II. The other one was a wooden building. We could not live in the nice brick dormitories period. I believe it was not until 1960 that we were permitted to live in the nicer brick dorms [Brackenridge].”

—Emanuel McKinney

Heman Sweatt Symposium, April, 2010

“My very first day in class, we had this 35 mm slide that portrayed a big joke on a ‘picaninny’ Black girl with curls. Being the only person of color, I said to myself, ‘Maybe I had come to the wrong place.’”

—Dr. Exalton Delco
Enrolled 1957, Evening of Honors, May, 2016

“Some students would walk and bump right into me and knock the books out of my hands. In class, they chose not to sit next to me. If I got there before they did, they wouldn’t sit next to me. If there was a seat empty and I filled it, they would stand up and sit somewhere else. But on the other hand, I had some outstanding instructors who were very humane and fair.”

—Peggy Drake Holland
Enrolled 1958, Heman Sweatt Symposium, April, 2010

the campus again. Yet many have begun to return to their alma mater to rightly claim their places among those who forever changed The University of Texas at Austin.

“I was once asked, ‘Why did you go to UT when you could go to any school?’ I answered by saying, ‘Why not?’ My parents and their parents were tax payers. They had paid for me, but yet due to Jim Crow laws I could not, or they could not, achieve their dreams. I knew I would get a quality education, the top education I could get. If I were to look at some of the difficulties of being a student on campus, I would say to myself, ‘You cannot stop the waves or the tide, but you sure can learn how to surf. And I am still surfing.’”

—Edna Rhambo
Precursors 60th Anniversary Celebration, September, 2016



Members of the first group of Black undergraduates to enroll at UT Austin in 1956 gathered at the university-wide 60th anniversary celebration in September 2016.

“I attended as a graduate student and there were about 13 or 14 of us [in the graduate program] who began together. All of these guys had work within the first two weeks—given jobs teaching a course, grading papers. I had three mouths to feed and I didn’t get any work. So I had been here a year-and-a-half and one of my professors got a NSF grant and asked if I’d work with him. I didn’t want to appear too aggressive, so I wrote back a week later and said I did want to work with him.”

—Dr. Exalton Delco
Evening of Honors, May, 2016

Yet The Precursors persevered and graduated. In fighting for all that they were owed, they would in turn inspire generations of students to reach for the heights of academia, just as they had. Although the wounds caused by decades of state-sponsored segregation and Jim Crow ran deep, some vowed to never set foot on

“My legacy is not a singular legacy, but it is all part of the whole precursor legacy that we’ve all helped to establish. It’s what we all did alongside each other as we went through those early years. Current students are going to leave their own legacy here. What I hope is that they look at what The Precursors have accomplished in breaking down barriers and see that they are the fruit of what we accomplished.”

—Fred Alexander
Enrolled 1960, Evening of Honors, May, 2016

“We did not necessarily support the university as a student normally would, unlike today. To come back to Austin after many years—after having said I would not set foot on this campus—to see the opportunities available to all the students. I now bleed burnt orange.”

—Col. Leon Holland
Enrolled 1956, Precursors 60th Anniversary Celebration, September, 2016

As He Saw It

By Jessica Sinn

When Dr. Richard Reddick walks underneath the shady oak trees lining the liberal arts hub known as “the six pack,” he smiles to himself as he reminisces about his first two years at UT Austin.



Dr. Richard Reddick showing his school pride as a member of Bevo's entourage (known as the Silver Spurs) back in the mid-90s.

“I remember walking by these buildings 25 years ago with a D-minus paper in my hand and wondering how I’d ever get through college,” says Reddick, associate professor of higher education administration and leadership. “Now it’s kind of mind-blowing when I think about the fact that I’m a professor and an administrator in the DDCE, setting the agenda for the university on how we educate our students about diversity.”

When Reddick first came to the Forty Acres in the spring of 1990, he moved into a residence hall where he felt disoriented in an environment so far removed from that of his home. Yet he was only a few miles away from the Southeast Austin neighborhood where he grew up.

“I had no engagement with the university until I became a student here,” Reddick recalls. “In my neighborhood, people saw UT as more of an athletic institution than a place where they would send their kids to college.”

While navigating an expansive, predominately white campus, Reddick started to feel out of his league in the College of Liberal Arts’ prestigious Plan II Honors program. It didn’t help that his peers blatantly questioned whether he belonged with them at all.

During his sophomore year, Reddick found himself at a crossroads. He could either succumb to self-doubt and quit or find a way to push forward. Fortunately, there were several people on campus who wouldn’t allow him to go with that first option.

Instead, professors, staff and administrators challenged him to make the campus his own.

“I will always be grateful to Brenda Burt, who worked in a program within the Dean of Students Office that was analogous to what’s now called Gateway Scholars,” Reddick says. “She helped me realize the source of my problem: I wasn’t feeling connected.”


Reddick took her advice and sought opportunities to connect with the campus community. He met with professors after class, joined student groups and spoke at campus events.

More than two decades later, Reddick still feels indebted to his campus allies. He continues to pay it forward by reaching out to his students and letting them know that they are not alone in their struggles. As the leader of the campus-wide Student Diversity Initiatives and Diversity Education Initiative, he encourages professors and students to help make the university a more welcome, inclusive place.

“The burden is this secret that you’re really struggling and everyone else is excelling,” says Reddick (B.A. Plan II Honors, ’95; Ed.D., Higher Education, Harvard University, ’07). “I always encourage my students to come to me and just talk. I feel it’s important to let them know that I know exactly what they’re going through because I’ve been there.” —Æ

By Joseph Gallardo

I'M A LIVING ARGUMENT FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION



As a beneficiary of the exact affirmative action policy that was at issue in *Fisher II*, I am pleased with the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the constitutionality of The University of Texas at Austin's limited use of race in its admissions decisions. This is certainly a huge win for proponents of affirmative action, but the litigation efforts to put an end to this practice will undoubtedly continue.

This abridged editorial first appeared in USA Today, June 23, 2016. UT alumnus Joseph Gallardo (B.A., Public Relations, '14) participated in several programs within the DDCE including Longhorn Link and the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Pre-Graduate Internship Program. He is currently a student at Harvard Law School, class of 2019.



While I know that there are many criticisms of affirmative action, most of which I believe are flawed, I'd like to address just one of the misconceptions: the idea that affirmative action is counter-productive for minorities, or that we are better off at "slower-track schools." I respectfully disagree, as my life is evidence to the contrary.

I entered college with no knowledge of the history of our great country, no understanding of math beyond basic addition and subtraction, and could not differentiate between "to," "too" and "two." But as much as I struggled to grasp what seemed like an endless avalanche of new information, I was able to graduate and transfer to The University of Texas at Austin.

I admit to feeling alone and intimidated when I first arrived at UT. I truly believed that everyone was a genius, and I just wanted to fit in. One evening I went back home to San Antonio—I rode the bus from San Antonio to Austin and back every day during my first semester in order to attend classes—and cried to my sister, saying, "I'm way out of my league here; I'm just not UT material." Proponents of mismatch theory would have had a case to be made of me when I first arrived on the Forty Acres.

But then something happened. With the help of the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence, caring professors such as Dave Junker, and mentors such as Dallawrence Dean, I excelled at the university. I was capitalizing on the many opportunities UT provides for students like me who needed additional guidance. In a matter of months, I belonged at UT—and I knew it.

I blossomed at UT, and my journey to becoming the first person in my family to earn a degree culminated at the university-wide graduation ceremony, where I was honored as one of three Most Outstanding Graduates. I then spent my final semester as an Archer Fellow in Washington, D.C., where I interned at the Supreme Court of the United States in the Office of the Counselor to the Chief Justice.

While the trajectory of my life has been permanently altered, it's the indirect impact of affirmative action which makes it so important. You see, affirmative action allows us to set precedents for our families which will ripple down generations to come and extend way beyond our lifetime.

I gave a speech at a UT graduation ceremony where I joked about being admitted to the university by mistake. "To this day I still believe that admissions must have made a mistake when they accepted me," I said. "Maybe there was a strong gust of wind that blew my application from the denial pile to the acceptance one, or some act of God must have happened." I joked, and people laughed—but I meant what I said.

I concluded my speech by saying, "I really don't know how I snuck into this amazing place, but I wish I could find the person who took a chance on me and give them the biggest hug, because The University of Texas has truly changed my life."

Truth is, I know exactly how I "snuck into that amazing place." Thank you, affirmative action. —Æ

UT Austin senior Christle Nwora speaks on the steps of the Supreme Court in Dec. 2015 regarding the *Fisher v. University of Texas* lawsuit. With Nwora is UT Austin President Gregory L. Fenves, Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement Gregory J. Vincent, and attorney Gregory G. Garre.

MAKING WAVES

By Jessica Sinn

Changing Campus Culture, Changing the World

Elyse Aviña



Co-founder, Students Against Campus Carry

The grim reality of gun violence became all too real for Elyse Aviña when she found herself on the business end of a handgun. In the heat of the moment, a family member held her and several others at gunpoint, threatening to end their lives over an argument.


“Fortunately nothing happened aside from property damage, but it was scary to

think that I almost became another statistic,” said Aviña, a rhetoric and writing senior. “Afterwards, I had a better understanding of how that fear never leaves you—and I know I’m not the only one at UT who’s experiencing this anxiety.”

Now that House Bill 11, known as campus carry, has gone into effect, she feels uncertain about her surroundings. Given the campus-wide outcry against the new law, she knows she’s not alone.

“We shouldn’t have to worry about someone carrying a loaded gun that could accidentally discharge,” Aviña says. “We shouldn’t have to worry about someone pulling out a gun to intimidate someone at a party. This campus is a place where we should all feel safe, but that doesn’t seem to be the case anymore.”

Last April she co-founded Students Against Campus Carry to motivate more of her fellow Longhorns to fight against the controversial law. Inspired by Gun Free UT, a protest group led by professors and graduate students, she and her



co-founder Ana López noticed there was something missing from the movement.

“I wanted to help Gun Free UT as much as I could because their arguments were very compelling,” she says. “They didn’t have much of an undergraduate voice, so I wanted to bring in more students who felt left out of the decision-making process.”

Though the group is only in its beginning stages, she is already building a network of anti-campus carry groups, including Moms Demand Action and Texas Gun Sense. Aviña and López were also invited to the White House last October to participate in a conference about gun control advocacy on college campuses.

“We’re just laying the groundwork for now, but eventually we want to see this group as a lobbying power,” she says. “In the meantime, we’re working with other groups in the community to get advice and a sense of how we can structure ourselves.”

As Aviña and López continue to build upon their group, they’re reaching out to

students at campus events. Most recently they partnered with another likeminded group that takes a rather clever approach to “fighting absurdity with absurdity.”

“We combined forces with Cocks Not Glocks at the big rally last August,” she says. “I really like their message, and it resonates with the students. However our group focuses more on gun-prevention legislation.”

As Aviña wraps up her senior year, she’s building a coalition to stop the permit-less carry bill from moving through the 2017 legislative session. She’s also working toward connecting with marginalized student groups that are disproportionately affected by gun violence.

“I want to create an atmosphere on campus that rejects the normalization of guns everywhere in our society especially on our campus,” Aviña adds. “We’re not trying to abolish the Second Amendment. We’re trying to get on the same page about prevention and gun safety practices.”

Adit Bior



Administrative director, UT Student Government

Adit Bior is like a whirlwind. When she's not in class, she's planning social media campaigns, meeting with college deans or building up a campus-wide Black Lives Matter initiative. During her "downtime" she's cheering the Longhorns at sporting events with her fellow Texas Sweethearts.

Although her jam-packed days can be exhausting, the work is well worth the effort, she says, because it all leads to one important goal: making the world a better place. Not just for herself, but for her mother who sacrificed so much to bring her family to safety.

"My parents were both refugees," says Bior, a philosophy and government senior. "We came here from South Sudan when I was two months old. My mom has gone through unimaginable hardship, yet she has had such a positive outlook on life."

When she assumed her new role as administrative director in Student Government last May, she focused her efforts on making

the university a more welcoming, inclusive place for all students. This involves a lot of boots-on-the-ground meetings with deans, student groups and various units and offices across campus. She also meets with students on the Campus Climate Advisory Board to share updates on campus-wide diversity and inclusion measures, and to explore areas that could use improvement.

"The best way to make things happen is to meet with people and learn about how they're diversifying the campus, then see how we can help," she says. "This is a great learning opportunity because a lot of students don't know the amount of work that's being done in departments across the campus."

One area that could use some work, she notes, is diverse student recruitment. Though several programs within the DDCE, such as UT Outreach, are making advancements in campus diversity, she says the university could bring in more students of color by providing better scholarships.

"Black students tend to get a lot of offers from HBCUs with generous scholarships," she says. "UT needs to work on providing minority students with more resources and also help them while they're in high school."

Her best piece of advice for future Longhorns: Get in involved in campus life and make the university your own.

"My two big pieces of advice: Don't be afraid to ask for help," Bior adds. "The sooner you ask, the sooner you'll fix the problem. And don't be afraid to fail. What separates Longhorns from the rest is that we know how to fail well. We know how to get back up and persevere."

At the start of Kevin Helgren's campaign for student body president, he and vice president Binna Kim invited students to share their story. Diagnosed in the sixth grade with Tourette Syndrome, Helgren can relate to many of his peers who feel marginalized and alone.

The SG candidates turned to social media to get the storytelling movement started, encouraging students to frame their profile photos with a specially branded "Share Your Story" template and post a personal essay.

Though the project was a part of their campaign, Helgren and Kim considered it to be more of a campus-wide cultural shift. With several committees of web savvy students, they successfully reached out to thousands of participants who candidly shared their stories online.

"We wanted to create a space where students can feel comfortable, to be themselves and share their experiences with their peers," says Helgren, a neuroscience senior.

Now as student body president, Helgren is continuing the "Share Your Story" events on campus, inviting students to go offline and connect with one another.

"People fail to acknowledge just how far an in-person conversation will get you," Helgren adds. "A meaningful conversation hinges upon getting these people together in the same room. Don't just communicate via email or social media. Get together in the same space and really listen to each other."

He knows from experience the power of storytelling. That's why he is willing to talk openly about what it was like growing up with a neurological disorder that causes motor and vocal tics. With a focus on mental health, he aims to increase awareness about disability resources and empower more people to become advocates.

Kevin Helgren



President, UT Student Government

Another top priority is campus safety, an issue that came into the forefront after the tragic murder of Haruka Weiser, a theater and dance freshman. Student Government partnered with Parking and Transportation Services to create SURE Walk, which offers volunteer companionship for students walking home from campus. Helgren's team is also working on a safety map highlighting well-lit places on campus.

"We're making tremendous progress with SURE Walk," Helgren says. "We're now offering cart and vehicle services and 'trailblazers' to get people to off-site locations. We're creating a culture in which Longhorns take care of each other. Asking someone to walk with you isn't a sign of weakness; it's a sign of companionship. That's our message."

Although he has no aspirations to become a politician, he wants to devote his career to making a positive change. After graduation, he plans to get some professional work experience in the consulting world and later go on to graduate school to pursue a career in higher education.

“I’m not a politician and I don’t want to be a politician,” says Helgren, who recently accepted a consulting job for Accenture in Chicago. This—me being the student body president—is an anomaly in itself. My dream job is to work in a dean of students office or to maybe even be a university president one day. This is where I’m meant to be. This is my calling.”

Leah Kashar

Leah Kashar (left) with a fellow White Rose Society member



President, White Rose Society-Texas Hillel

Each spring, the campus community can look forward to that one day of the year when the Forty Acres is abundant with beautiful white roses. They’re dangling from backpacks, tucked into bicycle baskets and perched upon desks in classrooms and offices.

Each of the 10,000 carefully de-thorned roses symbolizes one life that was lost in the Holocaust. Organized by the student-led White Rose Society, the annual event is meant to spread awareness of genocide and commemorate those who suffered from the atrocities of World War II.

“When people see these roses, I hope they take a step back and realize that a horrible thing happened, and that genocide is still happening,” says Leah Kashar, a sophomore majoring in English. “I want them to look at these global issues from a more humanitarian perspective rather than something they see on the news that seems so far away and irrelevant to their lives.”

When Kashar joined a Jewish sorority, Alpha Epsilon Phi, she started to explore her family heritage. As she learned more about her ancestors and the horrors they faced during World War II, she became more invested in helping others who are displaced by political unrest.

“Joining the sorority opened my eyes to issues I’ve never explored,” Kashar says. “I really began to explore myself and my identity. When I learned about the White Rose Society and what they do for refugees in Austin, I was hooked.”

Without hesitation, she took on the role as president of the society and spearheaded the 10,000 Roses event. She also began volunteering with her fellow society members at an emergency homeless shelter that serves Austin’s refugee community.

“It is so gratifying volunteering at Casa Marianella,” she adds. “These people have incredible stories, and I’ve learned so much just by sitting down with them and hearing about their experiences.”

Every year, the society focuses on a specific cause. Last spring, they decided to bring the Syrian refugee crisis into the forefront. Tied to each rose was a pamphlet detailing the parallels between the crisis in Syria and the Holocaust.

“Each rose represented a person who is not alive as a result of genocide,” Kashar says. “Our goal was to get more people to pay attention to [Governor] Greg Abbott’s actions with refugees in Texas, and this event helped to push the agenda.”

Looking back at her first 10,000 Roses event, Kashar is grateful to be surrounded by so many students who care about humanitarian issues. More than 250 students volunteered to prepare and distribute the roses, and more than 300 people—students, faculty, staff and community members—came to the evening event to listen to Max Glauben speak about his experiences as a Holocaust survivor.

“It was amazing to see all these people who I’ve never seen at Hillel,” Kashar recalls. “We can’t let these stories die because we are the last generation to hear them first-hand. We need to keep pushing forward and telling people what happened.”—Æ



On the Rise

DDCE education pipeline programs help improve campus diversity, graduation rates

by Kevin Almasy

For the fifth year in a row, traditionally underrepresented students constitute more than half of the entire study body at UT Austin. At the same time, four-year graduation rates continue to increase—rising to just over 60 percent, according to a 2016 report released last fall by UT Austin.

Several programs within the DDCE have helped contribute to these promising statistics. One such program is UT Outreach, a pre-college preparatory program within the Longhorn Center for School Partnerships that targets students in underserved high schools across the state.

“The level of contact our students receive from the university level is what sets us apart,” says Brian English, executive director of UT Outreach-Dallas. “We are able to tell students that it doesn’t just stop with you all in high school. We stay connected with students through the education pipeline and all the way through to graduate school and employment.”

If not for UT Outreach, Madison Beasley, who earned a recurring scholarship as well as SAT prep, is unsure if she would have ended up at UT Austin.

“I appreciate the opportunities UT Outreach has provided me as well as introducing me to the skills I need in order to thrive in college,” says Madison, an exercise science sophomore. “We learned about what it takes to be a leader and that helped me prepare for UT.”

As students like Beasley transition from high school to UT Austin, UT Outreach makes sure they are connected with the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence before they even attend summer orientation. Much of that work falls within the Gateway Scholars, a program that recruits prospective Longhorns and advises students after they enroll.

“We have heard from students that they decided to come because of the direct approach,” Lu says. “Even though UT is big, our model provides a more personal feel.”

Both Lu and English believe the university will only see further success in the recruitment and retention of students of color.

“The DDCE is now more involved and we do a much better job of informing our targeted communities,” Lu says. “Our students are no longer submitting applications into a black hole, but they understand how the process works and that their applications are valued. As word continues to spread, we expect only greater things to come.” —Æ

Historic Hires to Lead Vice Presidential Portfolios

by Kevin Almasy



From Left: Dr. Maurie McInnis, Dr. Soncia Reagins-Lilly, and Darrell Bazzell



For the first time in The University of Texas at Austin’s history, three African Americans lead administrative portfolios. Joining Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement Dr. Gregory Vincent, who came to UT Austin in 2005, are Darrell Bazzell, senior vice president and chief financial officer, and Dr. Soncia Reagins-Lilly, vice president for Student Affairs and Dean of Students (Reagins-Lilly has served as Dean of Students since 2006).

Also for the first time in UT Austin history, a woman, Dr. Maurie McInnis, leads the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost on a permanent basis. Together, McInnis, Bazzell and

Reagins-Lilly represent a new era in the makeup of university leadership.

“Not only are these three leaders exceptionally suited for their positions, but they also illustrate the university’s commitment to diversity in all its forms,” Vincent says. “As our president has said, diversity and excellence are mutually reinforcing and these appointments serve to further prove that point.”

As these recent hires indicate, meeting the goal set by President Gregory L. Fences to diversify university leadership is already well underway, reflecting the university’s longstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion. —Æ

Meet a Thematic Faculty Member

DUSTIN TAHMAHKERA

by Jessica Sinn

Dr. Dustin Tahmahkera, a citizen of the Comanche Nation of Oklahoma, examines how native people are represented in music, television, film and online. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies and the author of “Tribal Television: Viewing Native People in Sitcoms” (University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

Capturing Johnny Depp... After Johnny Depp reprised the historic role of Tonto, he was “captured” by Tahmahkera’s auntie LaDonna Harris and named an honorary member of the Comanche Nation. “She embraced him for many reasons, particularly for his genuine interest in learning about indigenous people and his efforts in putting forth a fully rounded view of Comanche culture.”

Moving beyond the captivity narrative...One important message he hopes readers will take away from his forthcoming book “The Lone Ranger: Captivating Comanches in Media Borderlands” (University of Nebraska Press) is that the story of his tribe doesn’t end at the fall of the Comanche empire. “I want people to see how history has informed and shaped who we are in the present and into the future. The narrative doesn’t stop in 1875. We continue to endure, to be critical, to be creative in all kinds of ways in pop culture.”

Finding common threads... To say that Tahmahkera is a movie buff would be an understatement. He keeps a close watch on small- and big-screen movies created by both native and non-native filmmakers. One film he recommends is

“Winter in the Blood,” a drama directed by UT Austin Radio-Television-Film alum Alex Smith. Though the film has been criticized for playing into stereotypes about Native Americans and alcoholism, Tahmahkera says it is a beautifully told character-driven story of love, loss and healing. “It is an incredible story that everyone can identify with in different ways.”



Portrait of Dr. Dustin Tahmahkera courtesy of Alberto Gonzalez, Center for Mexican American Studies

Fun trivia fact... Tahmahkera is the great-great-great grandson of Quanah Parker, a legendary Comanche chief who co-starred in the 1908 silent film “The Bank Robbery.” “The film showed a very early instance of a Comanche playing a Comanche, and it is a radical departure from the Hollywood westerns in subsequent decades.”

More about the Thematic Faculty Initiative... Tahmahkera is one of several thematic faculty members in the DDCE who are serving underprivileged people and communities through their research. To support an inclusive and diverse campus, the Thematic Faculty Initiative works to prepare, recruit and retain scholars whose research, teaching or special projects focus on diversity and community engagement issues. —Æ

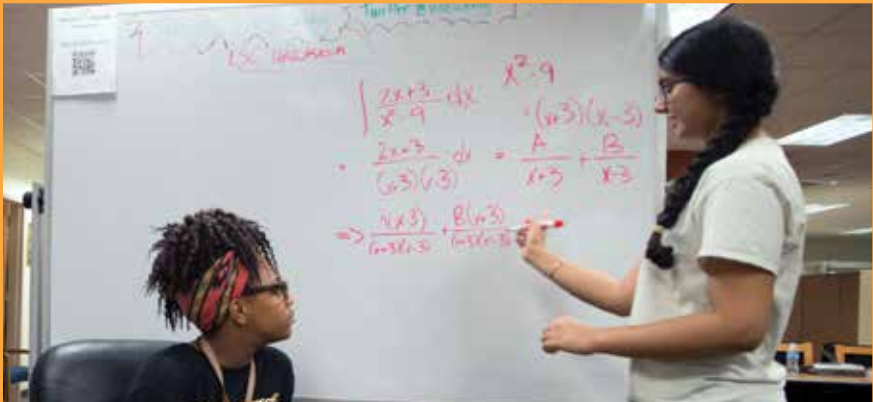
Home Away from Home

Supportive spaces help diverse students thrive

By Jessica Sinn

Images of students at various events on campus including the New Black Student Weekend Block Party (top right), a tutoring session at the LCAE (middle), the Queer People of Color and Allies fall student welcome (bottom left), and the SSD's Adapted Sports Night (bottom right).

Opposite page: MEC Director Brandelyn Franks (center) at the New Black Student Weekend Block Party held by Afrikan American Affairs, along with former student body president Michael Ugeo Williams and alumna Harmony Smith.



THE MULTICULTURAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER

On any given day, the colorfully decorated Multicultural Engagement Center within the Student Activity Center is buzzing with activities—from student advocacy meetings to diversity training sessions to informal gatherings with friends in between classes.

Established in 1988, the center encourages all students to stop by, check out the lending library and explore various opportunities to connect with like-minded peers. Whether they're stopping by for a specific purpose, or if they just need to unwind in a comfortable space, the doors to the MEC are wide open, says Brandelyn Franks, director of the MEC.

“The MEC is a place where students can feel welcome and comfortable,” says Franks, a UT Austin alumna (B.A. History, '07/M.Ed. Higher Education, '13) who frequented the center as a student. “We want our students to break out of their shells, listen to other people’s viewpoints and learn from them.”

Home to six student agencies that serve historically marginalized groups, the MEC offers a number of support services to student leaders. Adit Bior, a philosophy and government senior, is a regular at the MEC. Currently she is working with several student organizations on a campus-wide Black Lives Matter movement.

“It’s hard to feel welcome on campus when only three percent of the population looks like you,” says Bior, who serves as administrative director of UT’s Student Government. “I’m not the only one on campus who faces that struggle, so I encourage students to find a place where they can connect with a community that supports them no matter what.”

Bior is among many student leaders who have honed their leadership skills at the MEC. One important lesson they learn, Franks notes, is that there’s more than one way to advocate.

“People have ideas of what participation in a movement should look like and believe that others who don’t share those ideas aren’t as invigorated or passionate,” Franks says. “That’s not true at all, and our job is to get them to understand there are many methods of advocacy.”

Though the MEC is a major hub for campus advocacy work, the center works to connect students with opportunities

in various other academic departments and units across the campus.

“We tell our students the entire campus is theirs, and that there are many other places where they can feel included and welcome,” Franks says. “If there’s something we can’t provide, we’ll make sure they’re connected to someone who can help.”

Whether they become regulars at the MEC or go elsewhere to find a place of belonging, Franks just wants her fellow Longhorns to feel welcome and safe on campus.



“Over the years, students have dealt with some hurtful situations on and off campus,” Franks says. “We’re here to help them report an incident and also to process those negative experiences. If they’re told they don’t belong on campus, they start to feel that way. So we’re here to have conversations about that.”

The MEC isn’t just a place for students to lay down their burdens, Franks adds. There’s a lot of fun to be had—especially at graduation time when several student agencies throw their own commencement ceremonies. Impromptu parties also tend to break out when social justice victories—large or small—make national news.

“This is a fun-loving place,” Franks says. “There are so many opportunities for celebrations, like recognizing our students for graduating or for getting into grad school. A lot of times, when you’re doing this type of work you forget about the victories, such as the SCOTUS decision in favor of UT’s affirmative action in admissions. Even when more bad news comes your way, you must acknowledge the victories you’ve made.”

THE GENDER AND SEXUALITY CENTER

Just upstairs from the MEC is the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC), a space on campus that's dedicated to women and the LGBTQA+ communities. Upon entering the center, newcomers and regulars alike are greeted with smiles from staff and students.

"There are more than 50,000 people on this campus," says Liz Elsen, interim director of the GSC. "It can be exhausting navigating that, so we make sure to give a warm welcome to everyone who walks into this space."

This is just one of the many ways staff at the GSC are empowering students to take pride in themselves and others during their journey on campus. Now well into its 12th year, the center has grown into a major hub for student organizations, trainings and workshops, speaker events and various other activities.

"This is a place where students can put down the bag and shake off the world," Elsen says. "When students come back to campus, I often see them running up to each other and hugging. It reminds me of how vital it is to find a place where you can be your full self in a supportive environment."



Students participate at welcome events each fall presented by the student agencies within the MEC, such as this one sponsored by Queer People of Color and Allies.

Visitors are encouraged to peruse the free Ana Sisnett Library and grab a colorful button from the front desk that exclaims "Cats not Catcalls!" or "Call Me by My Correct Pronouns!" They'll also find retooled body scales that display positive affirmations instead of numbers.

"Go ahead and step on it, and the scale spins to "fierce"—and this other one over here spins to a series of smiley faces," says Dr. Kristen Hogan, UT Austin alumna (M.Ed. '08) and education coordinator at the GSC. "Students created these to affirm all of us and to challenge harmful messages about size – like a recent summer program about the 'freshman fifteen.'"

This is especially true for Johnathan, an engineering freshman, who came to the university with the hopes of forging connections with the LGBTQ community and advocating for transgender rights.

"During freshman orientation, I felt anxious not knowing whether or not my peers were as accepting or liberal as the city of Austin is known to be," says Jonathan, who asked to not be identified in the story. "However, when I went to the open house at the GSC, I instantly felt safe knowing there is a substantial community on campus that accepts me for exactly who I am."



During his short time on campus, he has used the GSC as a resource to connect with other student groups and organizations that align with his passions.

“As opposed to my high school where there was a small group of people in one club, the GSC and the organizations offer multiple groups that focus on different parts of the LGBTQ community,” he adds. “It’s great to see representation.”

Lydia Tsao also became active in student life when she joined the Student Leadership Committee, the GSC’s advisory committee. Through her campus advocacy work, she decided to set her sights on a challenging, yet meaningful career.

“The GSC gave me a platform to explore my interest in social justice and greatly affected my decision to pursue a career in eradicating social inequalities and promoting social awareness through law,” says Tsao, a psychology senior.

Tsao is among many students who call the GSC a “home away from home.” However, for others who are dealing with unaccepting family members, this is their home, Elsen says.

“I tell my students who work at the front desk to keep in mind that students are coming in here for a reason, and that they need to do everything they can to find an answer to their questions,” she adds. “We want to make sure

our students are getting connections to all the many great resources here in Austin.”

SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Another space on campus that connects students with valuable resources is Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Located on the fourth floor of the Student Services Building, the office provides accommodations to more than 2,600 students per year.

Keeping with its mission to make the campus more accessible, SSD aims to provide accommodations to students with disabilities right when they begin their college career. This can be challenging for those who are new to the accommodations process.

“It’s important that freshmen know what supports are available to them before they need us,” says Kelli Bradley, executive director of SSD. “The largest group of students registered with SSD have psychological disabilities, and many of them are diagnosed for the first time while they are in college.”

Although the SSD office isn’t necessarily a spot where students can relax with friends in between classes, it’s a place where they can meet with a trusted coordinator who can help them find solutions. Whether they need accommodations



for a test or to convert their text books into audio files, SSD is their first point of contact.

“We want the incoming students to know about our resources and services before the need arises, and for them to know that help is available.” Bradley adds. “Much in the same way that students know where to go for tutoring, career services or medical attention.”

Another big challenge for many new students, Bradley notes, is self-advocacy. This includes following through with accommodation letters and reporting any physical, instructional and attitudinal barriers.

“We will work with students on the best ways to talk to professors, explain the purpose of the accommodations, and help the students understand that using accommodations does not give them an unfair advantage, but ensures they have equal access to learn and demonstrate their knowledge,” Bradley says.

To help guide students through the process, the SSD office offers walk-in hours every day to answer questions and provide referrals. A testing fund is also available for students who need some help covering the cost of a psychoeducational evaluation.

“It’s really helpful for students to have a person on campus who they can approach with questions and concerns,” says Emily Shryock, assistant director of SSD. “This is especially valuable for incoming freshmen because they often have a hard time figuring out where to go for help.”

Outside of the office, SSD encourages students to forge connections at campus events. In

collaboration with the disABILITY Advocacy Student Coalition, they host an array of awareness activities such as Adapted Sports Night, Study abroad info sessions and panel discussions with Paralympic athletes.

“We want to provide events that are encouraging everyone to learn about what’s possible for people with disabilities,” Shryock says. “For our Adapted Sports Night, we want everyone to come try out a different sport. It’s a way to build a more unified community and break down assumptions about people with disabilities.”

Shryock and her colleagues also provide disability education and awareness in campus-wide disABILITY Advocates training sessions. She notes that participants are often surprised when they learn that the majority of disabilities on campus are not outwardly visible.

“We use a pie chart representing the different types of disabilities to demonstrate the prevalence of invisible disabilities, and to highlight the importance of always considering accessibility and creating an inclusive environment,” Shryock adds.

Shryock and her fellow staff members are also spreading awareness about invisible disabilities among their students who oftentimes feel alone in their experiences.

“We want to help them realize that being a student with a disability is not rare or a strange thing,” she adds. “It’s a part of campus diversity. This is a time for them to rediscover who they are and who they want to be, and we want to help facilitate that process.” —Æ



A LEGACY OF DIVERSITY

REFLECTIONS ON UT'S FIRST MULTICULTURAL CENTER

by Jessica Sinn

In the mid-1980s, student activism reached new heights on the Forty Acres. Students held sit-ins, protested on the mall and demanded UT Austin to withdraw investment and support for the South African economy.

The student-led anti-apartheid struggle spurred increased awareness of racial fissures on campus. Most appalling to Michael L. Davis (B.B.A, Finance, '88) and many of his peers were the low graduation rates for students of color. At the time, only 35 percent of Blacks and 45 percent of Hispanics graduated in five years or less. Many didn't graduate at all.

"There was a general feeling of distrust and isolation that many students of color felt at the time, and we believed this experience was leading to reduced graduation rates among them," Davis says.

During this challenging period in UT history, Davis founded the Minority Information Center, the campus' first multicultural center that provided a range of services to help close the graduation gap. Given the students' widespread distrust of UT administration, he knew it had to be student-led to get the buy-in from his fellow Longhorns.

"With the center, we wanted to create a safe space, a sanctuary, where students of color could come, relax, connect and engage," says Davis, who went on to graduate school at Harvard University. "We wanted to centralize academic, social and financial support resources available from the university and deliver them to our communities of color in an environment that felt like home."



Since its early beginnings in 1988, the center—now called the Multicultural Engagement Center—has built strong relationships with administrators and student groups. Now it operates as a major hub for all students, faculty and staff and community members who are interested in learning about and promoting diversity on campus and beyond.

"The Center has far exceeded anything I could have ever imagined," says Davis, who served as deputy assistant secretary of labor during President Obama's first term and is now a member of the Global Institutional Services management team at T. Rowe Price. "The fact that it still exists after more than 25 years, has evolved to meet the needs of a broader community, and most importantly has helped so many students navigate and succeed at the university makes me smile."

In 2014, Davis was honored with the Heman Marion Sweatt Student Legacy Award at the Evening of Honors ceremony. After accepting his award, he was overwhelmed with pride when several students were asked to stand up and be recognized for their involvement in the MEC.

"I marveled at the diverse and accomplished palette illustrated by those students and it was hard not to be emotional about having been a small part of something that had helped them so much," he says. —Æ



The Gay Tree

by Kevin Almasy

Some 10 years before the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC) opened its doors in the fall of 2004, there was a tree. Located on the West Mall near the Texas Union, the tree, known by those who congregated under it as the “Gay Tree,” served as the unofficial meeting place for the LGBTQA+ community and its friends and allies.

Under the tree’s branches, students would come together in a welcoming place, where they could build a community during their time here on campus.

“I loved seeing these students make their own space,” says UT Austin alumnus Ron Bowdoin (B.F.A, Studio Art, ’93), who is the art director for the DDCE. “They built a place where they could hang out and where they could identify with themselves and others and not be fearful.”

In time, the tree was replaced and the wood decking that surrounded it was removed. Visitors today who sit on the limestone wall that surrounds the space know nothing of the community that once gathered at that spot. But the roots of the Gay Tree run deep within the GSC, a hub of student activity and support for the LGBTQA+ community.



Promoting Pride and Justice

Q&A

with Kristen Hogan,
GSC Education Program Coordinator

by Jessica Sinn

Dr. Kristen Hogan strives to make UT Austin a safer, more inclusive campus at the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC). When she's not training faculty, staff and students how to become Allies in Action, she's helping undergraduates become leaders in the Peers for Pride program.

This is just a small snapshot of her work at the GSC, where the doors are always open for anyone on campus who is looking for a place of belonging. We caught up with Hogan to learn more about her work in the GSC, a unit within the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement.

? *What drives your passion for serving women and the LGBTQA+ community?*

The inspiration that I keep coming back to is a quote from the Trans Activist Movement, "No pride for some of us without liberation for all of us." That's something we live out every day—thinking about creating liberation for all people of color, for all women, for all LGBTQA+ folks, for all people with disabilities, and for those who share some or all of those identities. This is what makes my work so fulfilling, and why I'm excited to come to the office every day.

? *How are you and your team of education leaders spearheading gender justice and LGBTQA+ justice here on campus?*

There are students, staff and faculty who want tools for making their spaces safer for all LGBTQA+ folks and women. As education

coordinator at the GSC, that's what I do. I go to different sites across campus and teach Allies in Action workshops with our education team to provide those tools and learn from other people about what they're doing to make our campus more inclusive. At the GSC, we're really providing an education clearinghouse to make things better here on campus and out in the community.

? *What do you enjoy most about teaching these workshops?*

I enjoy working with people who are intentional about their practice and want to create safer and more welcoming spaces for all LGBTQA+ folks. It's very rewarding to see how changes are being made over time, and hearing back from our Allies about how they made a positive impact on their departments, centers and student organizations. Allyship is really a wonderful and inspiring life practice.

? *What is Peers for Pride, and how are students benefiting from this unique course?*

I teach the Peers for Pride class, an undergraduate course that covers LGBTQA+ realities, oppression and activism. Students learn how to develop performance-based workshops, in which they shape the discussion around fictional and realistic scenes of experiences of LGBTQA+ students on campus. It's really a great way to create a space for people to learn about and envision what healthy LGBTQA+ communities look like with attention to gender, sexuality, and racial justice, and to also show our undergraduates how to engage and educate people in a conversation that matters to them. —Æ

BREAKING the Bamboo Ceiling

by Jessica Sinn

In the American workplace there's a well-known phenomenon called "the glass ceiling," a structural barrier that keeps women from climbing to the top of the corporate ladder. Asian Americans also face similar barriers as they struggle to land leadership positions.

Studies have shown that Asian Americans are far more likely to have a college degree than the average American and have little trouble getting hired. Yet the picture changes as they move toward senior-level positions. According to national statistics, they are noticeably absent from the top of Fortune 500 companies, universities and the tech industry.

What's causing them to stall in their careers? It isn't that they lack the ambition to make it to the corner office, says Charles Lu, director of the Gateway Scholars Program in the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence. A large part of the problem, he says, stems from cultural norms.

"Culturally we are taught to behave in ways that are not conducive to what leadership looks like in America," Lu says. "We're taught to have a lot of humility, to shake off compliments

and not show emotions. During my career I had to learn how to shape my behaviors—to smile and say thank you when someone gives me recognition."

Early into his career, Lu was reminded of the "bamboo ceiling" at a business lunch when he engaged in an age-old Asian American custom called the "polite check fight."

"In our culture, we are taught to never accept a free lunch," Lu says. "It was a big learning experience when my mentor pulled me aside and said, 'You're the only person in the room to refuse a free lunch, and that shows you don't believe you're good enough or valued enough to deserve a free lunch.'"

Though refusing to let someone pay for lunch may seem like a mundane issue, it's a big part of the reason why Asian Americans aren't advancing into leadership roles, Lu says. In today's business world, leaders are expected to stand out in the crowd.

To help students break through the bamboo ceiling, Lu and Dr. Suchitra Gururaj, assistant vice president for the Longhorn Center for Community Engagement, taught an undergraduate course called "The Challenges



of Asian American Leadership.” In addition to teaching the nuances of corporate leadership, the course dispelled common misconceptions about the “model minority.”

“A lot of people assume that Asian American students are doing fine academically and we don’t need to worry about them,” Lu says. “It’s true that they typically do very well in school, but once they get out in the working world, we’re not seeing them in roles where they could make a big impact. To me, that’s unacceptable.”

Another important lesson that will take them far, Lu adds, is to ask for help.

“We’re taught to operate off of such a merit-based model,” Lu says. “Asian American students believe that working hard and making good grades is all they need to get to the top. What they don’t realize is that they need to build a good network with people in positions who can advocate for them. They need mentors who can guide them through their careers.”

The leadership class is currently on a hiatus, but Lu and Gururaj are always available to any student in need of guidance and mentorship. They also encour-

age students to head over to the Counseling and Mental Health Center and participate in a new informal discussion group called “Asian American Voices.”

“A lot of students across the board are dealing with anxiety and perfectionism, but for Asian Americans, they sometimes have this pressure to over perform because of the ‘model minority’ myth,” says Dr. Mona Ghosheh, diversity coordinator and psychologist at the Counseling and Mental Health Center. “We created this informal discussion group so they can connect with others who are facing similar experiences.”

Though Lu rarely has Asian American students come for advice, he hopes more of them will seek support from advisors, counselors and their peers. In time, he is confident that they will leverage their strengths to break through the structural and cultural barriers in school and in the workplace.

“As the Asian American population grows, we will see more of them in leadership positions,” he adds. “And as we see more of them emerge—in the mainstream media, Fortune 500 companies and top administrative positions in higher education—the Asian American community will be much stronger in the future.” —Æ

On the *DDCE* Scene

1. Dr. Ryan A. Miller and Ixchel Rosal, shown here with Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, were awarded Community Leadership Circle Awards at the May 2016 LGBT Alumni Network reception following Lavender Graduation.



2. The University of Texas at Austin honored Paul Kim, Victoria Li and Rashad T. Islam for their outstanding community service during the June 2016 Community Leadership Awards at the Asian American Resource Center.

3. Honorees of the 2016 Community Leadership Awards at the Mexican American Cultural Center were celebrated Nov. 7. From left: Mark Madrid, Teresa Lozano Long, Lonnie Limón, Josefina Villicaña Casati, Joe Long, Melissa Ayala and Felicia Peña.

4. The Precursors, the first African Americans at UT Austin, were honored with the Heman Marion Sweatt Legacy Award in May 2016. From left: Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, Col. (Ret.) Leon Holland, Charles Miles, Jacquelyn Hawkins, Judge Harriet Murphy, Judith Jenkins, Cloteal Haynes, and Fred Alexander.



5. The Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities awarded Emily Shryock, associate director of Services for Students with Disabilities, the Employee of the Year Award. Shryock is shown with her service dog Morey and Dr. Amy Sharp, UT Texas Center for Disability Studies.

6. Dr. Gregory J. Vincent greets attendees at "A Night Under One Sky" sponsored by Interfaith Action of Central Texas. Vincent was the keynote speaker.

7. UT Outreach students from Dallas do a bit of shopping while visiting campus.

8. David McDonald and Christle Nwora, both graduating seniors, received the Heman Marion Sweatt Student Legacy Awards in May at Evening of Honors.





SIGAFOOS

STUDENT, TEACHER, SUPERHERO

by Leslie Blair



As a child, graduate student Lisa Sigafoos loved Superman. And no wonder—he was the man of steel with a huge heart and capacity to do good, championing truth and justice. He clearly left an impression on her.

Despite the odds of being diagnosed with dyslexia, anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and ADHD, Sigafoos has followed her heart and has used her talents to help children with special-needs. And she put in a heroic effort to get her bachelor's and master's degrees and is now working on a doctorate in the College of Education.

Throughout her early school years Sigafoos taught herself to put in extra hours and work harder than anyone else in the classroom—essentially providing her own accommodations. But throughout her college career at The University of Texas at Austin, she has relied upon Services for Students with Disabilities for assistance, support and accommodation letters—even now as a doctoral student.

"I know I would have never made it without SSD," says Sigafoos. "I owe so much to the staff there, who have been so kind."


She reports that taking accommodation letters to a professor can be scary.

"You think, 'Will they judge me? Will they want to provide those accommodations?' It was always positive, though," she says.

Sigafoos also needs a reader for tests and therefore took tests in the SSD office.

"They [SSD staff] made the transition easy as I came back to school," she recalls. "They told me, 'We're here for you no matter how long you stay in school.'"

After graduating from UT Austin in 2009 with a general teaching certificate, she taught for five years. She began teaching fourth and fifth grades but then began teaching second grade in



the Lake Travis School District in an inclusion classroom. Sigafos identified on some level with every student in that classroom and made the conscious decision to create a classroom that was understanding and accepting.

She drew on her superheroes theme to encourage students to do their best.

“I taught them that we all have our strengths and differences but we have to stick together to help each other,” she says. “It helped my students see each other as equals whether they had a disability or not.”

Sigafos also tried to instill a love of learning.

“They are so malleable at that age,” she explains. “You can help them see school positively, even as it starts to get difficult for them given their disability.”

But Sigafos realized that she had not received all the training necessary to best educate students with differing abilities and went on to get a master’s degree in special education. She was surprised when professors in the Special Education Department asked if she was going on to get a doctorate. But their comments planted the seed.

Now she is the mother of a 1-year old and working on a doctorate in special education. She is also a teaching assistant in the Individual Differences course and a research associate.

“I want the knowledge and want to work to my best capacity to help students with disabilities,” Sigafos notes. “I have found my niche in life.”—Æ

Living her Values

Alumna Taylor Woodard aims to make the world a more accessible place

by Seamus Gude

After graduating in the top 4 percent of her class from Trinity University, Taylor Woodard landed a lucrative banking career at JP Morgan Chase. She was living what many would perceive as the “American Dream,” yet she soon realized that something was amiss.

“I moved to Manhattan with great hopes of continuing my personal campaign of spreading hope and making a difference from within the corporate world,” Woodard says. “However, once inside, those opportunities simply were not there.”

When she found herself stranded on her scooter—for the third time that week—on the platform level of Grand Central Station due to elevator outages, she realized that she needed to make a change.

“That situation forced me to see that not all public policy was effective public policy. This, and other situations coupled with my dismay at the prevailing values of the financial industry, drove me to acknowledge that I was in a field for which I had no zeal.”

With the goal of making the world a more accessible place for people with disabilities, Woodard researched graduate schools within the realm of social work. After some research, she found UT Austin had the most to offer. In 2010 she pursued dual-degrees in the School of Social Work and the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

“My time working for a prestigious Wall Street firm taught me that, fairly or unfairly, being associated with a highly regarded entity often paves the way to greater opportunities,” Woodard adds. “Earning a master’s from UT Austin’s School of Social Work will unlock doors of opportunity that may otherwise not open.”

During her time on the Forty Acres, she focused her studies on advocacy, program development and leadership. In 2012, she and staff members in Services for Students with Disabilities co-founded the Disability Advocate Student Coalition, the university’s first cross-disability advocacy organization that advocates accessibility policy and supports education and awareness across the campus.

Looking back at her career change, she’s happy she returned to her home state to follow her passions.

“More than anything, I wanted to live my values,” says Woodard, who graduated with honors in both of her fields with support from SSD. “I knew then my career would be in public service, advocating for the marginalized, primarily people with disabilities.”

After graduation, she accepted a Paul Marchand Internship at The Arc, the oldest and largest advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Later, she was hired by The Arc as a program associate. Now in a career that is both rewarding and challenging, she is leading communications efforts for The Arc as an assistant to the Senior Executive Officer of Communication, and to the Senior Executive Officer of Individual and Family Support. —Æ

A Twist of Fate

Traumatic brain injury survivor strives to empower others to conquer their limits

by Kevin Almasy

Before experiencing a traumatic brain injury, all Austin Morgan knew about the brain was the fact that he had one. But now, the biology sophomore from Georgetown is planning to change his major to neuroscience.

“Not many people in that field have the background or real experience that I have dealing with a traumatic injury,” Morgan says. “I feel like a unique puzzle piece in that way.”

In 2014, Morgan was riding his dirt bike when he lost control in a technical section of the motocross track. At the time of the accident, a fellow rider had also crashed in a different section of the track, so an ambulance was already on the way. The first rider to approach Austin was a paramedic and together with his mother, who is a nurse, they stabilized his airway until he was life-flighted to the University Medical Center Brackenridge. Without those two twists of fate, Morgan is unsure if he would have survived.

He spent several months at St. David’s Medical Center as he progressed through physical, occupational and speech therapy. He has spasticity, which causes a continuous contraction of his flexor muscles in the right side of his body (forearm, bicep, hamstring and calf) as well as aphasia, which at times causes him trouble in finding the correct words to complete sentences. His memory was also greatly affected.

After surviving a near-death experience, Morgan wants to take full advantage of the many opportunities that come his way. In addition to increasing his coursework load, he is participating in HOPE Austin, a service organization that promotes health awareness and aid to the campus and community. He also teamed up

with a recent graduate to start Empower360, a new organization that will inspire members to fight and conquer their limits.

With assistance from Services for Students with Disabilities, Morgan knows there are no limits on his path to graduation. He receives additional test-taking time and a reduced-distraction environment as well as copies of class notes.

“The staff at SSD are excellent—and they’re more than willing to work with you on anything,” Morgan says.

Morgan, who is a self-admitted hard-headed individual, refuses to accept “no” under any circumstances—even when his doctors warned him against working out his adductor or flexor muscles again. Despite their warnings, he took to the gym and proved them wrong.

Morgan plans to apply a similar outlook as he progresses deeper into the field of neuroscience.

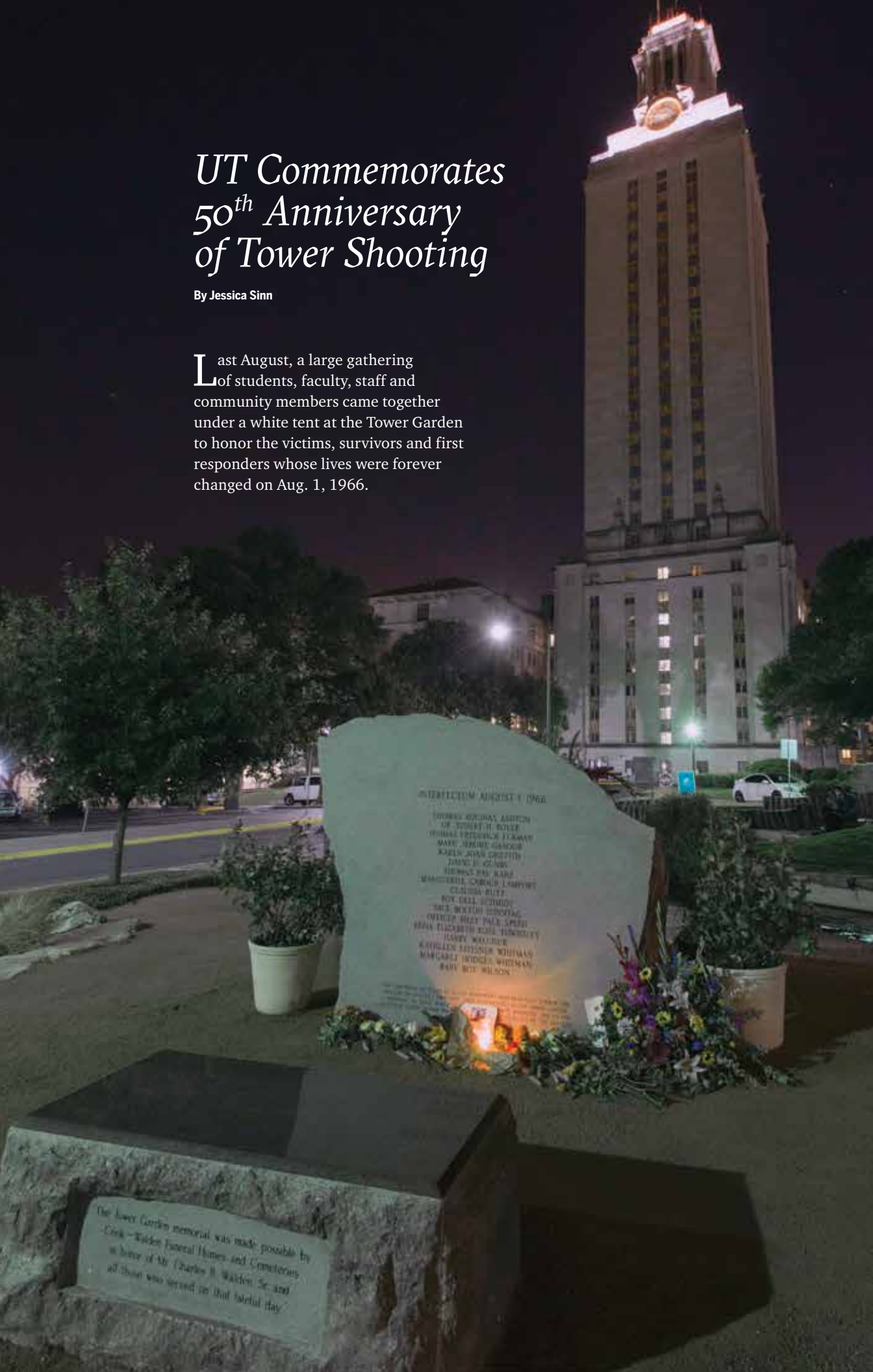
“Although I may never be a surgeon due to my spasticity, I believe I’ll open so many doors as I’ll have both the mental and physical experience in the field of brain science.” —Æ



UT Commemorates 50th Anniversary of Tower Shooting

By Jessica Sinn

Last August, a large gathering of students, faculty, staff and community members came together under a white tent at the Tower Garden to honor the victims, survivors and first responders whose lives were forever changed on Aug. 1, 1966.



INTERFICIUM AUGUST 1 1966

THOMAS ARTHUR ASHTON
DR. THOMAS H. BOYER
HUBERT FREDERICK ECKHART
MARY MERIAM GARGO
KARL JOHN GRIFFIN
JAMES E. HUNRY
HERBERT PAUL KARE
MARGARET CAROL LAMPERT
CELESTA RITZ
ROY DELL SCHMIDT
DR. WALTER HENNING
OVACER HEAT PAUL SPEER
HELEN ELIZABETH KELL HENNING
LARRY WALLACE
KATHLEEN STEVENSON WHITMAN
MARGARET WOODS WHITMAN
RAY RAY WILSON

The Tower Garden memorial was made possible by
Cook-Walden Funeral Homes and Crematories
in honor of Mr. Charles H. Walden Sr. and
all those who served on that fateful day.



“We come together to remember that tragic day in the history of our university,” said President Gregory L. Fenves in his opening remarks at the Tower Memorial ceremony. “We come together to remember the 17 lives lost.”

The rededication ceremony, organized by the DDCE, the Office of the President and members of the Tower Memorial Committee, marked the 50th anniversary of the 1966 Tower shooting. In an unfortunate coincidence, the new state law known as campus carry went into effect on the same day the school mourned the victims of the UT Tower sniper.

Despite the ironic timing of the law, the day remained focused on the shared experiences of former students, faculty and staff, service providers and police officers that fateful day in 1966. Many of those present had not seen each other in many years; others had not returned to campus since the incident.

The moving ceremony began at 11:40 a.m. on the main mall of campus, with the carillon bells tolling. At 11:48—the time the shooting began—the tower clock was stopped for 24 hours. Those gathered proceeded to the Tower Garden where the ceremony continued, including remarks from President Gregory L. Fenves, shooting survivor Clare Wilson James, UT student witness Jim Bryce and Congressman Lloyd Doggett. The tower bells tolled as each of the names of those who died that day were read.

“Let this memorial remain here on this campus and in our minds as a reminder of the power that we have in each moment to become a community of love and reverence for life,” said Claire Wilson James.

Wilson was among a group of survivors who formed the Texas Tower Memorial Committee in August 2014 to propose an updated memorial to the Tower Garden. The committee—comprised of shooting victims, student witnesses, current student leaders and a former member of the Board of Regents—worked alongside senior staff in the DDCE’s Office of Community and External Relations to plan the monument and the university-wide ceremony.

With a generous gift from Cook-Walden Funeral Homes and Cemeteries, they secured a large pink granite stone, engraved with the names of those who lost their lives and a matching bench that honors the brave service men and women who risked their lives to save others. The new structures replace the original stone and bronze plaque in the Tower Garden.

“With the permanence of Texas pink granite, we’ll be saying to generations of Longhorns that there is great courage amidst the violence and the madness,” said U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett, D-Austin, who served as student body president in 1967-68.

Now the DDCE and the Texas Tower Memorial Committee are working with the Office of the President to place a Tower Heroes plaque on the Main Building’s observation deck. The plaque will commemorate law enforcement officials, medical personnel and other citizens who demonstrated acts of heroism on the day of the Tower shooting. The plaque also honors all who were heroes but whose names will never be known.

To provide a final sense of closure, the College of Fine Arts is planning to perform a wind ensemble piece—expressing through music what words cannot verbalize. The performance is set for next spring. —Æ

From left: Students Against Campus Carry co-founder Elyse Aviña (read more about her on page 11) standing alongside a survivor of the Tower shooting. Pictured on the right, President Fenves and Claire Wilson James, who is among a group of survivors who formed the Texas Tower Memorial Committee.

Getting Future Longhorns Hooked on Education

By Jessica Sinn



During his sophomore year at UT Austin, Howard Nirken (B.A., '93, MPAFF, J.D., '97) embarked on an ambitious education outreach program that continues to be a big part of his life.

Back in 1991, he was invited by two key figures in Texas Women's Athletics, Donna Lopiano and Jody Conradt, to serve as a student volunteer coordinator for the Texas-sized Neighborhood Longhorns Program (NLP). Essentially his job was to connect student mentors and tutors with busloads of elementary- and middle-school students. A lofty project, but he was up for the task.

Twenty-five years later, the NLP is still going strong. Each year about 5,000 Title 1 students (grades 2-8) from AISD schools participate in a range of campus activities. The goal is to get economically disadvantaged students into the college-going mindset, and to possibly inspire them to become Longhorns themselves.

In addition to the NLP's many student achievement incentives, the program provides a valuable service to the UT Austin student volunteers who are giving back to their community and serving as proud UT ambassadors.

Nirken, who served as student body president in 1993, attributes much of his success to his many leadership roles on campus. He believes that the students he meets at campus events and fundraiser mixers will say the same about the NLP.

"The university has quietly created one of the most successful educational incentive programs in the country that has changed the lives of current and future generations," says Nirken who is an adjunct professor at the UT School of Law and

a partner at the Austin-based law firm DuBois Bryant & Campbell LLP.

Nirken is often reminded of the program's life-altering impact when he meets with past and present Neighborhood Longhorns at events on the Forty Acres and out in the community.

"They tell me how their lives were truly altered by the care and compassion of a mentor or a tutor who saw the brilliance in them that they at times did not see in themselves," Nirken says.

Through the years, he has met many Neighborhood Longhorns who became the first in their families to earn a college degree. And though inequalities persist in the U.S. education system, Nirken believes the NLP and similar outreach programs will help bridge the education gap.

"I am a true believer that all children, when given opportunities to succeed, can and will excel," Nirken adds. "However, it is naïve to believe that the educational playing field for all kids is equal. It is not; and, if we as a community do not try to level that field, then we not only lose a current generation of kids, we potentially lose multiple generations to come."

The NLP is a partnership with the DDCE's Longhorn Center for School Partnerships, Texas Athletics, and AISD. More information can be found on this website: diversity.utexas.edu/neighborhoodlonghorns. —Æ

Connect with Us!

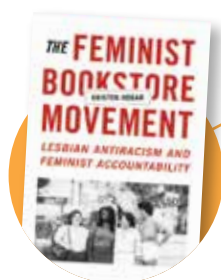
Can't get enough of this issue?

Check us out at diversity.utexas.edu/magazine



More technology. Navigating the bathroom situation on this large campus can be a challenge. Now with Inclusive U, a new app created by the DDCE and UT Libraries, you can find more than 40 gender-inclusive bathrooms that best fit your needs.

More walks down memory lane. Law School alumnus Howard Nirken shares his fondest UT memory, which will undoubtedly tickle your funny bone. Here's a hint: It involves a car covered in birdseed and an important meeting with U.S. Rep. J.J. Pickle.



More research. We sat down with Dr. Kristen Hogan, education coordinator at the GSC, to learn more about her new book "The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability" (Duke University Press, 2016).

More diversity. Thought-provoking questions and conversations are a hallmark of our Inclusive Classrooms Seminars. Designed for faculty and teaching assistants, the seminars focus on consideration of diverse identities and perspectives and course design, planning and processes that create and sustain an inclusive classroom.



Most Popular Fall 2016 Facebook Post



Dr. Gregory J. Vincent's response to the UT Young Conservatives' affirmative action bake sale garnered the most engagement from our Facebook fans. In protest of affirmative action policies, they sold goods to students at varying prices based on race and gender. In the post, Vincent stated: "Such methods are inflammatory and demeaning. Yet focusing our attention on the provocative nature of the YCT's actions ignores a much more important issue: they create an environment of exclusion and disrespect among our students, faculty and staff."

Did You Know?

 The University of Texas at Austin
Campus Climate Response Team

The Campus Climate Response Team keeps track of bias incidents on campus. The team responds to all reports and includes representatives from Student Affairs, the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement and University Operations. Visit diversity.utexas.edu/ccrt/ for more information or to report a bias incident.



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 Division of Diversity and Community Engagement
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 Austin, Texas 78712

DDCE Nears 10-Year Anniversary

2017 marks the official 10-year anniversary of the DDCE. We will be celebrating throughout the year, concluding with an end-of-year celebration at the 2017 Carver Community Leadership Awards. Stay tuned for the spring issue of Access & Excellence, which will spotlight our first big milestone! More details will be available on the DDCE's website in the months to come: diversity.utexas.edu

