Paint Against Prison
UTSA students mentor at-risk youth
Dancers perform at the Annual Asian Festival at the Institute of Texan Cultures. Showcasing the unique culture and traditions of different Asian communities, the festival draws about 10,000 visitors per year.

Photo by Ann Helms, Institute of Texan Cultures.
Dear Friends,

We are pleased to share this second issue of Community Connect, a magazine providing a snapshot of UTSA’s multifaceted involvement with our community.

At UTSA, community engagement is an integral part of who we are; it is part of our DNA. Through mutually beneficial relationships, UTSA strives to improve the quality of life for individuals and the community at large. Our dedicated and talented faculty, staff and students foster research, lifelong learning, economic development, cultural enrichment and contributions to the common good with the ultimate goal to improve the quality of life for individuals and the community.

Some of our community engagement efforts can be expressed in concrete facts and figures. For example, the UTSA Institute for Economic Development recorded $1.6 billion in direct economic impact during fiscal year 2013—an all-time high, which helped to create and retain thousands of jobs (Read the story on page 9).

Other initiatives are harder to quantify but equally as important, such as the university’s much-praised support and mentoring system for foster youth, which seeks to change their underrepresentation in higher education (page 12).

Complementing our ongoing endeavors as a top-tier university, a UTSA task force has been charged with applying for the prestigious Community Engagement Classification by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The elective Carnegie Classification will reaffirm UTSA’s substantial commitment to the community and its people.

We hope you enjoy reading Community Connect. Please visit the magazine’s website, utsa.edu/communityconnect, for additional content including videos and slideshows. Your feedback and story ideas are always welcome at communityconnect@utsa.edu.

Ricardo Romo, Ph.D.
President

Jude Valdez, Ph.D.
Vice President for Community Services
ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK
Volunteering over Vacationing

When mathematics student Jared Gonzales, 23, heard about the Alternative Spring Break (ASB) program, coordinated by the UTSA student-run Volunteer Organization Involving Community Education and Service (VOICES) and the Student Center for Community Engagement and Inclusion, he talked to fellow students who had taken part in former ASB trips. “They all said it was a life-changing experience, as I signed up myself,” he said.

In 2013, a group of UTSA students volunteered in San Antonio as camp assistants with the Children’s Museum. They set up educational activities, hosted a youth science camp and threw a well-received water day with the Good Samaritan Center. Two different ASB groups traveled to Atlanta. One of the groups volunteered with three different local nonprofits, as the students’ involvement ranged from maintaining a public park and feeding the homeless, to working for the Atlanta Community Toolbank.

Gonzales was part of a group in Atlanta that spent time with a local community center, the Boys & Girls Club and a safe house, where he and his peers helped with landscaping, painting and serving food to people in need. Instead of staying at a hotel, the students slept at a homeless shelter on makeshift foam mattresses in Biloxi, Miss., and San Antonio. Going to Reynosa, Mexico, for the Plunge—a UTSA day of service now called United to Serve—was an amazing and very rewarding experience,” Gonzales added.

The UTSA 2014 Alternative Spring Break students again divided into three groups, volunteered in St. Louis, Mo., Biloxi, Miss., and San Antonio. Going forward, VOICES and the Student Center for Community Engagement and Inclusion are hoping to further expand the ASB program to incorporate an international destination as well.

COLLEGE OF PUBLIC POLICY
UTSA Helps SA2020 with Voter Turnout and Local Leadership

The UTSA College of Public Policy is continuing its vital work as the lead partner of the SA2020 “Government Accountability and Civic Engagement” focus area, assisting Mayor Julián Castro to transform San Antonio into a world-class city. Currently, two work groups are tackling the area of civic engagement from different angles. One group aims to improve city-wide voter turnout by 2 percent every two years, with a special focus on low-turnout precincts. Fueled by the success at a past Campus Vote Challenge, where UTSA ranked 2nd in the nation for registering more than 2,000 voters, the group is using its proven expertise to build momentum.

The second team, “Citizens’ Academy work groups,” concentrates on creating informed, engaged leaders capable of representing and advocating for their communities. Based on the model of leadership academies with a targeted recruitment of participants, the group provides access to the academy for community members who otherwise would not have an opportunity of this nature. The College of Public Policy seeks to collaborate with other universities on this effort, allowing the academy to rotate among institutions, thereby enhancing the sustainability of the program.

300 UTSA students embarked to Reynosa, Mexico, for the first Alternative Spring Break, and VOICES introduced The Plunge—a UTSA day of service now called United to Serve.

University Life Awards “Most Outstanding Service Activity” Award Recipient

270 students participate in campus beautification project “Extreme Makeover”

2005 VOICES hosts the 4th Annual Southern Regional Conference on Student Community Service

2013 VOICES celebrates 20 years and founder Manny Longoria commits to a $55,000 endowment to service and leadership programs

20 Years of Service

VOICES celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2013. As UTSA strives toward Tier One status, VOICES serves as a catalyst for students to become global citizens.

VOICES celebrates 20 years and founder Manny Longoria commits to a $55,000 endowment to service and leadership programs

1300 Young Scientists and Engineers

More than 1,300 middle and high school students in 2013 attended the PreFreshman Engineering Program (PREP). A UTSA-led collaboration of local school districts, colleges and universities, PREP encourages junior high and high school students to go through a rigorous eight weeks of mathematics-based learning and field trips to businesses and research labs, preparing them for careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) while targeting underrepresented population groups in particular.

PREP’s institutional partners offered college scholarships totaling more than $1.5 million to third- and fourth-year graduates with averages of 90 percent or better.

In addition to San Antonio PREP, which provides one high school elective credit for successful completion of each session, 46 students participated in University PREP at UTSA, where students can earn college credits through the College of Sciences, and participate in internships and research projects.

utsa.edu/communityconnect
STEM INITIATIVES

$1.4 Million Grant Helps Community College Students Become Math and Science Teachers

A $1.4 million grant from the National Science Foundation will assist community college students to pursue teaching degrees in mathematics and science. The funding helps support the UTSA Generating Educational Excellence in Math & Science teaching program, which prepares students to become highly qualified science and mathematics teachers in San Antonio and underserved school districts in the region. Through the program, students take an enriched instructional curriculum in four years and earn a math or science degree along with their teaching credentials. Nearly 100 percent of its graduates find teaching employment in the San Antonio area. Under the new grant, community college students transferring to UTSA will be eligible to receive up to $20,000 in scholarships if they agree to teach at least four years at a high-needs school district in the San Antonio area.

Aaron Cassill, UTSA director of STEM initiatives and principal investigator, said, “Normally, we recruit students in their freshman year and give them actual classroom experience so they can decide if they want to pursue a career in teaching. The community college students were missing out on this experience, so with this new grant we will offer introductory classes at the community colleges to help smooth the transition.”

The UTSA College of Sciences has enlisted the expertise of the Academy for Teacher Excellence at UTSA, which since 2003 has received more than $17 million in funding and was nationally recognized in 2013 as an Example of Excellence finalist for preparing teachers to teach in culturally diverse settings.

CAREER PATHS

Degrees for Early Childhood Educators

Awarded with a grant from the City of San Antonio, the Bank of America Child and Adolescent Policy Research Institute at UTSA (CAPRI) works closely with preschool teachers, assistants and other early childhood educators, providing them with professional development. Through Summer Institutes, participants earn a total of nine college credits, paving the way for associate or bachelor’s degrees. Nine participants graduated last year and 190 educators are currently enrolled in the Early Childhood Teacher Initiative.

Honors College

Remembering the Holocaust

Students in the UTSA Honors College organized a Holocaust and Genocide Remembrance Week in November, free and open to the public. Events were designed to remember the victims of genocide around the world and to remind fellow students and the community of what can happen to civilized people when bigotry, hatred and indifference reign. Kolleen Fox, associate professor in the Department of History, oversaw the project. “The students put together all activities including inviting guest lecturers and creating an educational exhibit,” she said.

AP Summer Institute grows

The UTSA Advanced Placement Summer Institute (APSI), offered by the Office of Extended Education in partnership with the College Board, continues to grow at a rapid pace. The 2013 APSI welcomed 582 participating middle and high school teachers from around the world – marking an increase of more than 27 percent compared to the previous year. Eighteen workshops were offered, with pre-AP as well as AP and math and science courses taught at the Main Campus, while humanities workshops were at the Downtown Campus. The UTSA APSI provides teachers with the support and training needed to teach pre-AP and AP courses, and to utilize newly updated teaching strategies.

High school advanced placement students can earn college credit in math, sciences, languages, arts and other disciplines.

Honors College

National Award for Student Documentary

With an estimated 25 percent of the nation’s sex trafficking victims hailing from Texas, graduate students from the Department of Social Work in the College of Public Policy decided to address the issue through a documentary focusing on local sex trafficking of minors. Responsible for all aspects of the production, the students outlined the nature and scope of the problem, identified survivors willing to share their story, interviewed experts and organized a public showing. After the film was chosen by the Council on Social Work Education as one of nine official selections in its 2013 Virtual Film Festival, the online community voted the UTSA contribution “Behind Closed Doors: Voices from the Inside” as the overall winner.

College of Public Policy

Institute of Economic Development

$1.6 Billion—UTSA’s IED Records All-Time High in Direct Economic Impact

The UTSA Institute for Economic Development (IED) continues to contribute strongly toward building a top-tier UTSA and a top-tier San Antonio region. During fiscal year 2013, the IED generated $1.6 billion in direct economic impact—an all-time high—including $1.26 billion in increased sales, contracts and exports, and $350 million in new capital. It’s the second consecutive year the institute’s professional business advising, training, research and strategic planning services to entrepreneurs, business owners and community leaders have exceeded the $1 billion threshold.

“Small businesses add up to big growth, and UTSA is committed to providing advising, training and research with high impact results,” said Robert McKinley, UTSA associate vice president for economic development. The IED served 36,115 students outlined the nature and scope of the problem, identified survivors willing to share their story, interviewed experts and organized a public showing. After the film was chosen by the Council on Social Work Education as one of nine official selections in its 2013 Virtual Film Festival, the online community voted the UTSA contribution “Behind Closed Doors: Voices from the Inside” as the overall winner.

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“Small businesses add up to big growth, and UTSA is committed to providing advising, training and research with high impact results,” said Robert McKinley, UTSA associate vice president for economic development. The IED served 36,115 business and community clients, assisted with 8,328 consulting cases, helped launch 523 businesses and supported 519 existing businesses to expand, thereby creating 4,176 new jobs and preserving 5,528 jobs. Primarily serving San Antonio and the Texas-Mexico border area as well as national and international stakeholders, the IED, through its variety of centers and programs, fosters economic development in support of the university’s community engagement efforts.

Inside UTSA
P-20 Initiatives

Ready for UTSA

Assessment and preparation program focuses on math and reading skills, allows participants to earn university credit hours

by Jean Luc Mette

Bryan O’Tani, 18, doesn’t get to sleep in on Saturdays. Instead, he works on his math skills. Joined by other ambitious high school seniors from across San Antonio, O’Tani attends academic enrichment seminars at UTSA every Saturday at 8 a.m.

“I want to go to UTSA, and this helps me to be prepared for it,” he says.

O’Tani is part of UTSA Ready, an early assessment and academic preparation program conducted in collaboration with six San Antonio school districts and a total of 23 participating campuses. The goal of this unprecedented partnership is to ensure that high school students have the English and mathematics college readiness skills required by UTSA.

“It’s not an easy transition from high school to an aspiring four-year university such as UTSA,” explains Joseph Kulhanek, interim assistant vice president of P-20 initiatives. “For most students, mathematics is the main challenge. But, we also have kids that are brilliant in math, while their English is not college-ready, because it’s their second language. In both cases, UTSA Ready can prove invaluable. It is hard work though. The program is very rigorous.”

Each year approximately 120 UTSA Ready candidates, high school seniors ranking in the top 25 percent of their graduating class, submit their SAT or ACT scores to UTSA and apply for admission before taking a diagnostic test to determine their skill level. The program is designed as a hybrid, consisting of an online component allowing students to work on their own, and face-to-face tutoring with UTSA faculty. Instructors Sean Beatty, a lecturer in the UTSA Department of Mathematics, and Dixie Shaw-Tillmon, an instructor at the UTSA writing program, assist students with their individually tailored learning paths and lead the academic enrichment seminars on Saturdays. “I like that it’s very different,” Bryan O’Tani says. “And there is a lot of one-on-one tutoring, which helps to learn quicker.”

At the end of the program, which differs in length for each student depending on the initial skill level and personal learning curve, participants can reward themselves for their extra work by taking a test that, if passed, grants three UTSA credit hours. The test is optional and the only cost-based component of UTSA Ready. “But the fee of $125 is significantly lower than a university course, which costs roughly $1,300 on average,” Kulhanek points out.

Brandi Fuentes, 19, went through UTSA Ready in 2013. Now a freshman at UTSA, she recalls, “I did both math and reading and it made a huge difference for me. Also, the study modules that we were given helped us avoid expensive remedial classes. I would really recommend UTSA Ready to anyone that wants to go to college.”

VISIT WEBSITE
p20.utsa.edu

There is a lot of one-on-one tutoring.
—Bryan O’Tani
High school senior, current UTSA Ready student

The study modules helped us avoid expensive remedial classes.
—Brandi Fuentes
UTSA junior, former UTSA Ready student
born to a drug-addicted mother and a father who was rarely around, Kristia Ramirez was taken into child protective custody as a two-year-old toddler. Her seven younger siblings took the same path one after another. The four youngest were adopted, while Kristia and two of her brothers embarked on an epic journey through countless care facilities. At age 13, she had lived in more than 50 foster homes across Texas, Illinois and Minnesota. “One of the biggest challenges of a life like that is education,” she says. “For every move, we fall six to eight months behind in school,” making an on-schedule high school graduation wildly diverging numbers, UTSA set out on a mission to help more foster youth make the transition to college. Sophia Ortiz, assistant director of the Bank of America Child and Adolescent Policy Research Institute at UTSA (CAPRI) recalls, “We established relationships with local agencies and applied for a grant to help us help these youths. Then, we were able to interview former and current foster youth to really understand their situation.”

Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), CAPRI facilitated educational workshops, provided financial aid assistance, hosted campus tours for foster youth, and arranged field trips including a Roadrunners football game. Under the direction of Harriett Romo, sociology professor at UTSA, director of CAPRI and principal investigator of the grant, the ACCESS Centre Lab was created. It focuses on providing resources for foster youth who are considering college or job training. In addition, Miles Tapia, assistant professor in the UTSA Department of Criminal Justice, worked with CAPRI to obtain a grant from the Texas Bar Association to enlist UTSA graduate students and interns to mentor foster youth, help them with college applications, and other challenges of life.

After the HUD funding ended in 2013, UTSA was awarded a new grant, this time taking on a different role. “We will evaluate programs and data collection related to foster youth and also provide models for universities and colleges that want to establish support systems similar to those we established at UTSA,” Ortiz explains. In order to identify and help students from foster care backgrounds, CAPRI works closely with UTSA Student Enrollment Services and Fiscal Services. “Starting college is one thing, but finishing it is a completely different challenge,” says Christopher Goldsberry, assistant director of Student Enrollment Services. “These youths have seen things most adults couldn’t handle, and they often lack very basic life skills, for example buying groceries or managing their time and money. So, they quit college, even in dead-end jobs or, even worse, on the street.”

To prevent that, CAPRI offers specifically tailored courses for foster youth, equipping them with hands-on knowledge essential to succeed in college. CAPRI also hosts a yearly “Independence Day” for approximately 300 foster youth in collaboration with agencies serving foster youth transitioning out of care. The event is designed to educate and empower the participants.

It is safe to say, by now, UTSA is one of the most foster youth-friendly universities in the state, if not the nation.” Goldsberry says.

The support goes so far that UTSA Campus Housing allows foster youth from other institutions to stay at UTSA housing. By providing housing year-round, including during academic breaks, UTSA ensures that foster youth don’t end up living in shelters, cars or under bridges, as these students usually don’t have a family to go home to. Romo says, “Many foster youth have the desire and ability to complete a college degree. They just need information about how to do college and a support system to provide encouragement and help when they need it.”

“The bottom line is that we’d like to help as many foster youth as we can,” Ortiz says, and Goldsberry adds, “It is safe to say, by now, UTSA is one of the most foster youth-friendly universities in the state, if not the nation.”

Romo’s success story is a rare exception, which she strives to make more common. Already a Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP), she aspires to run her own nonprofit organization one day. “I was abused in foster homes, both verbally and physically,” she says, “But I know that so many kids out there have it way harder than I did. I want them to be heard the same way that I’m being heard today.”

“We try to convince them that higher education is a smart choice, without pushing them towards UTSA. We look at each person individually, and if they can achieve their goals by attending community college or joining the army, we are happy for them.”

Approximately 50 students formerly in foster care are currently enrolled at UTSA. Kristia Ramirez is one of them, despite her unfathomable odyssey through care facilities. She finished high school with honors and 33 college credits—more than any other student at her school. She earned her bachelor’s in criminal justice at UTSA in 2012, joining the “two-percenters club” of foster youth obtaining a four-year degree (although it took her only two years to graduate). Simultaneously, Ramirez has lobbied for the rights of foster youth in Austin and Washington, D.C.; she has served on several committees and is the youngest appointee on the Governor’s Family and Protective Services Council. Now 23, she is on her way to a second bachelor’s in public administration, possibly followed by a doctorate at UTSA.

“How did she beat the odds?” The last foster family I stayed with was incredible. They helped me more than I could have ever imagined, although they had to take care of twelve kids. I consider them as my parents,” she says. “And UTSA played a huge part, too. This university does so much more than accepting tuition waivers. Faculty and staff here are like family. UTSA is my home.”

Ramirez’s success story is a rare exception, which she strives to make more common. Already a Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP), she aspires to run her own nonprofit organization one day. “I was abused in foster homes, both verbally and physically,” she says, “But I know that so many kids out there have it way harder than I did. I want them to be heard the same way that I’m being heard today.”

Right now, UTSA is something like a role model in terms of supporting foster youth. I don’t know of any other university that provides assistance to this extent.

—Nadine Terry, Supervisor, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)
Hope and Stability through Service Dogs

In 2013 alone, the UTSA Small Business Development Center, part of the Institute for Economic Development, served more than 28,000 businesses. One of them is Service Dog Express, which specializes in training service dogs for wounded veterans and civilians suffering from PTSD and other disabilities.
across the United States. She and her husband Joey also serve on the Board of Directors for a nonprofit called "In Dog We Trust." The nonprofit is the only one in Texas focused on treating service dogs that have been evaluated for temperament and trainability, before directly going to Service Dog Express. The goal is to be paired with clients in need of service dogs.

As a survivor of sexual assaults, PTSD, and anxiety, Gawelko knows first-hand the power a service dog can have in one’s life. Her service dog, Bonnie, has been with her for two years and their bond is remarkable. Because of these past experiences, Gawelko feels she is better able to empathize with her clients, treating them without judgment.

At Service Dog Express, Gawelko and her highly trained staff of nine believe that the animal-human bond is an absolutely indispensable part of psychological, spiritual and physical healing. The more each trainer knows about their clients’ backgrounds, the better they can train service dogs to meet these specific needs. Service Dog Express seeks to make this healing available to everyone possible, regardless of financial or other challenges that might discourage them from seeking this invaluable service.

Andrew Doyle served in the military for almost a decade and deployed several times to Iraq and Afghanistan, where he experienced panic in the home, IED blasts and witnessed the loss of several close friends. Upon returning to his hometown, Andrew had problems with loud noises and crowds. Since meeting Gawelko, he says his life has changed in a lot of ways.

"It started with Laurie hooking me up with the perfect dog for me, Río. We instantly bonded, so I took him home the first night we met so he would not have to go back to the kennel." With Río at his side, Andrew says that service dogs can be a lifeline.

Troy’s wife says she picked Katie, but Troy had the “final say” as it was his dog. She knew Katie was the one when they first arrived. While holding the puppy up, she could see that Troy and Katie had the same color eyes. “It was just meant to be,” she said. Katie has the unique ability to detect when Troy is going to have a seizure and alerts him in enough time to take necessary steps to prevent the seizure or decrease its severity. She helps support him by putting pressure on his leash when he is trying to move around without his wheelchair. Troy said it was “not something I thought I’d be doing, or even something she does naturally.”

Service Dog Express believes in giving people and dogs a second chance. They encourage new clients looking for a service dog to choose assessed dogs from local shelters and rescue organizations. Once dogs are trained, they are able to dramatically reduce the cost of services and saved lives that may have otherwise been euthanized.

Wounded warrior James Rizzo’s service dog Otto was rescued from the pound. Otto had acid was poured down his back. The scars are still visible to this day. James said “the moment I saw him, I knew I needed to get him. I felt like no one would want him because of his scars.” James and Otto have been together for a little over a month and are still in training. Once dogs are identified as possible service dogs, they go through extensive training and situational and behavioral tests. The service dogs are taught to sense when clients are experiencing panic in or out of the home, and they alert the client to this change in mood.

Terry is a decorated Army combat veteran who spent over 16.5 years in the Airborne Infantry, Ranger Regiment, and Special Forces units. After several deployments abroad, Terry was medically discharged from the Army. The Army life was all that Terry knew and upon being discharged, he found it very difficult to adjust to civilian life. He was homeless, wandering the streets for more than two years before an old army friend found him and offered him a job.

Terry has had many struggles in his life, but has found the strength and courage to carry on. His service dog Nacho has been with him for seven years. He says that service dogs can give you the friendship and the companionship that a human cannot offer. “Service Dogs, like any dog, can talk. They just do it in dog talk. Once you understand dog talk, you will too become one, and that is a beautiful thing! Nacho is my best friend, child and my lifeline,” Terry says.

Nacho and Terry now visit patients, wounded warriors mostly, at the San Antonio Military Center. He shares his experiences and life challenges with those in need, and service dog Nacho helps break down barriers for other wounded veterans. While helping these brave men and women, Terry says he is actually “helping himself, the veterans and their families.”

Gawelko and her husband Joey first came to the UTSA Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in July 2011 with the idea to provide service dog training for wounded warriors in the San Antonio area. Realizing they had the service expertise needed but not the business knowledge required, they took one of the many training courses offered by the SBDC to make sure they were on the right track.

The couple worked closely with SBDC’s regional economic development manager Mark Ahrens, who assisted in developing a business oriented plan focusing on a strong web presence. Terry said, “Service Dog Express LLC could not have succeeded without the help of the SBDC, and especially with the guidance of Mark Ahrens and David Baenzer,” said Gawelko.

The couple has been the catalyst for our inception and growth and have always been there to meet with us and address any issues regarding business concerns. Because of UTSA SBDC, hundreds of wounded warriors and civilians in the community have been paired with service dogs and receiving life-changing experiences so that they can become fully-functioning, purposeful community members.”

Andrew Doyle with Rio
It’s a gray November morning on the edge of downtown San Antonio with temperatures lingering around 30 degrees. The cool breeze keeps finding its way inside the makeshift art studio on San Pedro Avenue, creeping in under the heavy metal entry door. The atmosphere in this former warehouse, however, is anything but cold. A group of teenagers, UTSA students and professionals from the community is getting ready to add the finishing touches to an impressive 20-by-8-foot mural. While they are unpacking paintbrushes, stirring wheat paste and bantering with one another, a 16-year-old starts to beatbox, producing drum sounds with his mouth. Quiet at first, his volume rises until his are the only sounds left in the room. He stops abruptly, realizing that all eyes are set on him, pulls up his pants and smiles self-consciously. “That’s amazing. How do you do that?” someone asks.

Not all of the youths are here by choice, despite the setting suggesting otherwise. Some are first-time class-C misdemeanor and status offenders at risk of taking recurring roles in the juvenile justice system. Coming here on Saturdays is counting toward reducing their court-ordered community service hours. Others are part of a Job Corps program designed to provide them with skills they need to succeed in life.

“This is not just about painting,” says Robert Ambrosino, senior lecturer in the UTSA Department of Social Work. “Many of these youths lack a positive role model in their life. As we paint together, we engage them in informal conversations about the importance of staying in school, obeying rules at home and hanging on to their hopes and dreams.” Ambrosino is joined in this pedagogical effort by UTSA graduate students from his Advanced Communities class, program staff from two local agencies (P.E.A.C.E. Initiative and Chrysalis Ministries) and an accomplished artist with deep roots in the San Antonio community.

It started out with five non-descript plywood panels and the task to capture traumatic life experiences on them using permanent markers. At the end of the day, rather abstract themes such as “fear” or “low self-esteem” had been scribbled next to concrete personal experiences such as drug abuse, sexual assault, and even the witnessing of a murder.

Over the course of several Satur-
At first, many of the kids weren't really into it. But that changed a lot, up to the point where they would go ahead and take the lead during the painting process.

- Lynsey Tucker

days, the dark words were covered with bright, colorful acrylic paint. Cut-out paper symbols depicting positive messages were then glued and layers of wheat paste were applied to add dimension. Finally, several coats of a clear sealant were brushed on to make the mural weather-resistant.

A couple of weeks later, despite the threat of freezing rain, well over 100 individuals from the community gathered at the UTSA Downtown Campus for an indoor unveiling of the mural. Some of the youths brought family members to the occasion, others came alone. Three guest speakers gave inspiring speeches about their own struggles in life, growing up under challenging circumstances not unlike those the young artists are facing. They describe how, with the supportive guidance of an adult role model, they completed high school, attended college and established themselves as successful business people and respected community members. Some of the teenagers share how the art project has changed their lives, earning them a well-deserved round of applause from the audience. The mural, now permanently installed on an exterior wall of the Chrysalis Ministries building at 503 San Pedro Ave., has undergone quite a butterfly-like metamorphosis from unremarkable plywood panels to a luscious, eye-popping piece of art. While it is difficult to predict what the future holds for the participating youths, the collaborative effort of this heterogeneous group appeared to have had a tangible impact. UTSA social work graduate student Lynsey Tucker says, "At first, many of the kids weren't really into it. But, that changed a lot, up to the point where they would go ahead and take the lead during the painting process. They also really opened up to us and shared their fears and worries about growing up, and their hopes and dreams for the future. We mentored them subtly, trying to reduce negative feelings and encourage them to believe in themselves."

Elijah, 16, the beatboxer, is one of the teenagers whose opinion of the mural project went from "nah, not interested" to "actually, it's a whole lot better than picking up trash," as he recalls. Although he had never touched a crayon, colored pencil or paintbrush in his entire life, Elijah enjoyed the new experience and the visible change he was capable of creating with his own hands. In fact, he enjoyed it so much that now as the mural project is finished he's looking into similar art-related ways to work off his remaining community service hours.
High School students’ art complements Smithsonian traveling exhibit on skate culture

by James Benavides
e’re the opening act,” Brett Zettner said, as he walked through an Institute of Texan Cultures gallery with classmate Rye Beres and MacArthur High School skateboarding club sponsor, Reagan Beres, Rye’s mom.

The museum challenged the San Antonio high school’s skate club to contribute to an exhibit offering a Texas perspective on skateboarding, a piece statement that could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Smithsonian’s traveling exhibit, “Ramp it Up: Skate Culture in Native America.” “Ramp it Up” and the student response, “Ramp it Up: Texas Style,” opened Nov. 2, 2013.

The Smithsonian skateboarding exhibit included 20 skate decks, featuring examples from Native American artists and companies. To get into the Smithsonian exhibit, the public passed through a gallery where 15 boards designed and painted by the MacArthur club hung, only steps away from one of Tony Hawk’s early boards and another one from skate culture godfather Tony Alva.

Zettner pointed out two skateboards he had painted, tributes to the “Shut Up and Skate” motto of Texas-based Zorlac skate company, and one of Dallas pro skater Craig Johnson, known for his dreadlocks sticking out from under his helmet.

Zettner took artistic liberties, adding Johnson’s locks to a painting of Hank Hill, a character from the Texas-based “King of the Hill” animated series. “Ramp it Up: Texas Style” captured defining elements of Texas skate culture through skate deck art depicting the people, places and events that helped shape the Texas skate scene. Zorloc; Austin’s “Banana Farm” backyard ramp; the Goodtimes Skate Shop; “Texas Legends” Todd Prince, Jeff Phillips, Ken Fillion and John Gibson; and Michael Sieben, the recently named managing editor of Thrasher magazine, which has documented skate culture since 1981.

An opening statement from the club hanging at the gallery entrance, reads: “Being a skateboarder in Texas has never been easy, but Texas skaters have created a community that is like no other skate scene. We have had to be louder, faster and more aggressive... You will find us in underground full pipes, backyard minis or on the streets downtown. This ain’t California... This is Texas. Shut Up and Skate.”

Next to the club’s manifesto, action shots by Rye Beres and his classmates showed the MacArthur skaters in action, each shot paired with reflections from skate club members on how the sport has influenced them. A common theme woven through every statement is a sense of determination and self-improvement common to every skater.

“Skateboarding is a never-ending...
hobby,” club member Dylan Vergara said. “There are always new things to learn and never a limit of progression.”

Club sponsor Reagan Beres expressed similar sentiments, but her perspective takes skateboarding beyond the ramp and into the real world. She explained how the club has visited with skate company professionals, artists, journalists and other business people who make a living in the industry.

Rye embraced this lesson and applied it like an old pro. He produced a “Ramp it Up: Texas Style” video showing in the exhibit. He shot and edited a video documenting a skate club road trip across Texas. He captured members riding the streets, rails and ramps of San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, Austin, San Marcos and Waco, showing their skills with the board.

Few teenagers can say their work has been shown in a museum. Fewer still can say their work has stood alongside something produced by the Smithsonian. Working with the MacArthur skate club is an example of the museum’s continued efforts to reach out to students and schools and engage in challenging, in-depth learning opportunities. This approach is an extension of UTSA’s community outreach initiatives.

“It’s our job to teach visitors about the cultures that define Texas,” said McKenzie. “Student work provides an insight into lives that are shaping our future. Showcasing student work at the ITC gives a voice to young Texans. It makes them a part of the conversation about who we are. We challenge them to examine what defines Texas culture today and express that in a way that will inform and inspire anyone who comes through our doors – Texan and visitor alike.”

**SK8 FZX = Skate Physics**

With hours of skateboarding footage available from MacArthur High School students, the Institute of Texan Cultures looked for an option to add more depth to the “Ramp it Up: Texas Style” exhibit and expand its lessons into the STEM fields – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. What museum educators conceived was “SK8 FZX” – four educational yet entertaining videos investigating the physics of skating.

“In a heartbeat, these skaters apply complex laws of physics in ways that Newton never imagined,” the SK8 FZX host says in the video. Physical forces in play during a skate session offer great source material for slow-motion analysis members of the UTSA math department were glad to provide.

The first SK8 FZX video shows the concept of force in action, using a skater’s “Ollie,” a trick that pops the board up into a jump to illustrate the concept. A skater applies a quick force down on the tail of the board with his foot, while the other foot slides back on the deck. The force, plus a change in the board’s fulcrum – a rotation point - propels the board into the air. As a teaser, producers tacked on a few additional minutes to the “Force” lesson. Entitled “Gravity,” the short video shows the inevitable effects of gravity on hapless skaters who have either misjudged the terrain or their own skills. The painful compilation reminds viewers of the importance of wearing protective equipment when skateboarding.

**WATCH VIDEO** utsa.edu/communityconnect
A City Between Real and Ideal

Architecture students conveyed their own understanding of San Antonio in a multimedia exhibit, inviting the public to participate

by Jean Luc Mette

I n early 2013, Antonio Petrov and his graduate students set out to understand their ever-changing urban environment: San Antonio, a city in the midst of redefining its own identity. Their ambitious goal was to depict the fabric of San Antonio, and to illustrate what they labeled as the “real” city and its “ideal” counterpart. The result was a powerful multimedia, intersensory exhibit that invited visitors to gain new perspectives, share their own and realize how every person constantly contributes to the shaping of their environment.

The students participating in this community engagement project started by looking at San Antonio’s 10 council districts. "That was our initial matrix," said Petrov, an assistant professor in the UTSA College of Architecture. "However, we quickly realized that that’s not what the city is. Throughout their history, architecture has unsuccessfully attempted to make connections between places and people. Large-scale modern infrastructural frameworks, including the San Antonio highways, paradoxically disengage people in an effort to connect them." Petrov and his students saw an opportunity to intervene and to examine different intersecting and sometimes conflicting notions of place and people, with the aim to find the real San Antonio, ”And not the stereotypical San Antonio somewhere between sprawl and the Texan landscape, or the beige tones in the Northwest as they affluently the neighborhood. And I say that without any judgment. There is nothing wrong with the rather grey and beige tones in the Northwest as they blend into the Texan landscape, or the vivid colors on the West Side. These peculiarities make a city.”

As a result, the project team redrew the city’s seeming chaos to form a new, ideal representation. It involved asking students to participate by drawing sketches or personal stories related to San Antonio. "They returned with powerful images that not only determined how diverse San Antonio is, but we also found that a wide array of colors, changing from neighborhood to neighborhood, represented the amazing cultural diversity of San Antonio," Petrov said. It reminded him of cities in Mexico, Argentina and the recent transformation of the Albanian capital, Tirana. "After the Soviet regime, Tirana was a very dull, rather unattractive city," Petrov explained. "But in 2000, they elected Edi Rama, a former artist, as their mayor. And he led an initiative to transform not only the city, but also people’s perception of it by empowering them to paint the façades in bright colors." Today, Tirana is a very vibrant, colorful city with a growing population. "If you can change your mindset, you can change your city," said Petrov, who was born in Macedonia before growing up in Europe and the United States, receiving his doctorate from Harvard University.

"While the context is very different, we saw a relationship between color and the fabric – social, cultural and economical – in San Antonio as well," Petrov said. "To give an example, the more subtle the colors, the more affluent the neighborhood. And I say that without any judgment. There is nothing wrong with the rather grey and beige tones in the Northwest as they blend into the Texan landscape, or the vivid colors on the West Side. These peculiarities make a city.”

Further elements included iPods that were hanging from the ceiling and showing videos about the San Antonio neighborhood they were floating above, copies of the students’ sketchbooks arranged in an illusory cloud, a dance performance, monitors loopimg films and images of the student’s work in progress, and mirrored posters that promoted the exhibition in more than 400 San Antonio buses.

"A general assumption is that a city defines itself through its collective cultural achievements. But culture is more than landmarks and stereotypes," said Petrov. "We concluded that it is our own memories of neighborhood streets, schools, favorite parks, the first kiss and coffee shops around the corner that make our city. That’s why our project was about empowering the citizens. We wanted them to co-author the identity of their city and to realize that their city is not a myth – it’s a beautiful reality."

A City Between Real and Ideal” was part of a collaboration between the UTSA College of Architecture, the City of San Antonio’s Department of Culture and Creative Development, and VIA Metropolitan Transit. Funded by a “Our Town” grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), several community engagement events focused on the integration of public art and public transit were organized around San Antonio’s new Tobin Center for the Performing Arts.

WEB EXTRA utsa.edu/communityconnect
A quote attributed to Victor Hugo says, “He who opens a school door closes a prison.” Looking at the disproportionate number of school dropouts among America’s inmates, the French writer’s words seem as relevant as ever, even 130 years after his passing.

The so-called “school to prison pipeline,” examined by several studies, sees a direct link between school dropout rates and incarceration. The nonprofit Texas Appleseed, for instance, reported that every third youth in a Texas lock-down facility has already dropped out of school. More than 80 percent of Texas adult prison inmates are school dropouts. Yet, each year thousands and thousands of high school students face disciplinary charges increasing their likelihood of future detention. According to a growing number of experts, many of these charges could be prevented.

“Schools are mirroring the punitive, zero tolerance policies of our justice system,” says Robert Rico, a lecturer in the Department of Criminal Justice in the UTSA College of Public Policy. “But the mere fact that our country has the highest incarceration rate in the world proves that our system is failing.”

Rico knows what he’s talking about. Growing up in a rough neighborhood on San Antonio’s West Side, he successfully wrestled his way through high school and went on to become a police officer. During his many years in law enforcement, however, he frequently found himself questioning his own path, contemplating ways to help more people.

In 2001, when Rico started his master’s in public administration at UTSA, he was inspired by the work of UTSA faculty members John Byrd and Michael Gilbert, who were spearheading the fairly young movement of “restorative justice” in San Antonio. This prevention-oriented approach fosters consensus-based decisions to resolve conflicts – conversing instead of penalizing. Rico was hooked and started a restorative justice program with the Boone Police Department.

“Instead of just punishing the offender, restorative justice puts emphasis on the victim,” he explains. “It’s about repairing the harms created by getting all parties involved and starting a dialogue.”

When John Byrd died in 2008 after a brief and severe illness, Rico joined forces with Gilbert to continue Byrd’s pioneering work. Gilbert, a criminal justice professor at UTSA, serves as executive director of the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice and director of the Office of Community and Restorative Justice within the UTSA Policy Studies Center.

Rico retired from law enforcement to pursue a career in academia. In 2012, he initiated a pilot project at San Antonio’s Edward H. White Middle School based on restorative discipline which applies restorative justice principles in a school setting. Aiming to reduce Ed White’s discipline rates, which are among the highest in the district, sixth-grade teachers were trained during the summer before putting restorative discipline methods into practice for the 2012-2013 school year. The first results are dramatic: In addition to an 84 percent drop in off-campus suspensions (whereby a student is prohibited from being on the premises for a specified length of time), total suspensions declined by 44 percent.

The new approach does not eliminate student conflict; it helps them work through it with their teachers, who now respond to student misbehavior in a different way. Marilyn Armour, a professor at the UT Austin School of Social Work and director of the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue, oversees the three-year research project at Ed White. She explains, “When a student misbehaves, instead of saying ‘go to the office,’ it’s about stopping and engaging with that student in a meaningful way. It’s time-consuming, but it’s about investing in the creation of a different kind of climate that pays dividends when times get tough.”

One key method teachers are implementing at Ed White is restorative circles led by an adult facilitator. These circles search for a consensus-based solution, creating a setting for conflicting students that puts emphasis on mutual respect and deep listening. If agreed upon, the solution is then written in a binding document that all circle participants sign and promise to uphold.

“The truth of the matter is that children want to be heard,” says Rico. “Traditional disciplinary measures aren’t conducive to that. Restorative circles give children the chance to feel equal and express themselves to their peers and teachers. In turn, teachers can deepen or restore the teacher-student relationship into a level of mutual respect and understanding.”

While a high turnover in teaching staff and some teacher resistance to the new approach contributed toward inconsistencies, Rico noted that even with these challenges Ed White Middle School made “sturdy and noteworthy progress in its first year, and the lessons learned will be invaluable when we extend the program.”

Seventh- and eighth-grade teachers are up next in the training schedule with the goal of having all teachers trained by 2014-2015, the final year of the project.

“It’s a no-brainer, if you think about it,” says Rico. “Restorative discipline shows the highest rates of victim satisfaction and offender accountability, making it a very efficient way to lower dropout rates.” Or, in other words: He who keeps a student in school, closes a prison door.

**VISIT WEBSITE** irjrd.org
By the Numbers

UTSA engages and reaches out to individuals and organizations, from kindergarteners through graduates, alumni, businesses, families and others in our community. Each year, UTSA provides direct services and enrichment activities to far more than half a million people in our region.
Empowering Communities

Alexandria “Allie” Deal and Jade Heverly-Campbell founded UTSA chapters of Global Brigades, a student-led nonprofit network focused on health and development in underserved communities. Using their own funds, Allie and Jade led a group of 34 students and two doctors to Honduras.

Q What motivated you to start the UTSA Global Brigades? Allie: I joined UT Austin’s chapter in 2012 on their trip to Honduras and fell in love with the cause. The local people were so happy, it made me speechless. When I came back, I thought to myself: We can do this at UTSA, too. So I started the UTSA Dental Brigade, and Jade the Medical Brigade.

Q The first all-UTSA trip was last August. How did it go? Allie: It was great. Thirty-six students and two doctors came with us. The three little Honduran communities we served all were in desperate need of medical and dental care, so we would get up early in the morning, drive to a village, turn the local school into a makeshift hospital, and then treat the people all day. Many of them walked without shoes for hours just to get there. Even if they had to wait, they never complained. They were just all smiles and grateful that someone was helping.

Jade: An incredible, humbling experience that makes you reflect about the things we complain about.

Q What did you raise all that money, in addition to the flights? Allie: The supplies were donated by doctors and dentists. But the costs of roughly $1,500 per student are an issue. The experience pays for itself, but it’s hard to convince people to spend this much just for the flight there.

Jade: Volunteers can reach out to friends and family, but also to dentists or doctors to be sponsored. And each volunteer has a personal “empowered page” where people can make official donations online. Others ask for donations in lieu of birthday or Christmas gifts.

Q What were the major needs of the locals? Jade: The health problems were diverse, from treating stomach parasites to extracting teeth. But it started with the basics, like teaching kids how to use a toothbrush, or talking to women about sexual health and hygiene, even how to clean yourself after using the restroom. All treatments were overseen by doctors, who also explained to the students what they were doing and why. Allie: We brought about $8,000 worth of medication and supplies with us.

Q What happens to the communities after the volunteers leave? Jade: There’s a term called “voluntourism,” which means people go somewhere, help for a week and feel good about themselves. But as soon as they leave, it’s as if they were never there. Global Brigades, however, are completely focused on sustainable, community-based development. They only offer trips to four countries because they want to make it continuous and ongoing. Groups go there every three months and continue the previous work. There is staff in the countries, and locals are trained to keep up with basic screenings during the absence of volunteers. It’s really about empowering communities and not just giving aid. Allie: Fixing teeth is one thing. But if people still use dirty, polluted water, it’s just a band aid, not a fix. Global Brigades has a holistic approach. Besides medical and dental, there are groups that focus on things like water, public health, law, architecture and business. For example, at the end of our trip, we helped with a water pipeline that a previous water brigade had been working on. The ultimate goal is always to help the entire community to a point where it can help itself.

Q What are your plans for 2014? Allie: We’re looking at a trip in August 2014 to either Ghana or Honduras. And one of the students who went with us last year is starting a UTSA Water Brigade, so we’ll be three teams. Jade: We’re also trying to tie the trip to an accredited academic internship, including the possibility to receive financial aid. Thankam Sunil, a professor in the Department of Sociology, is really trying to make this work.

Learn more or support the cause by sending an email to gbutsa@gmail.com