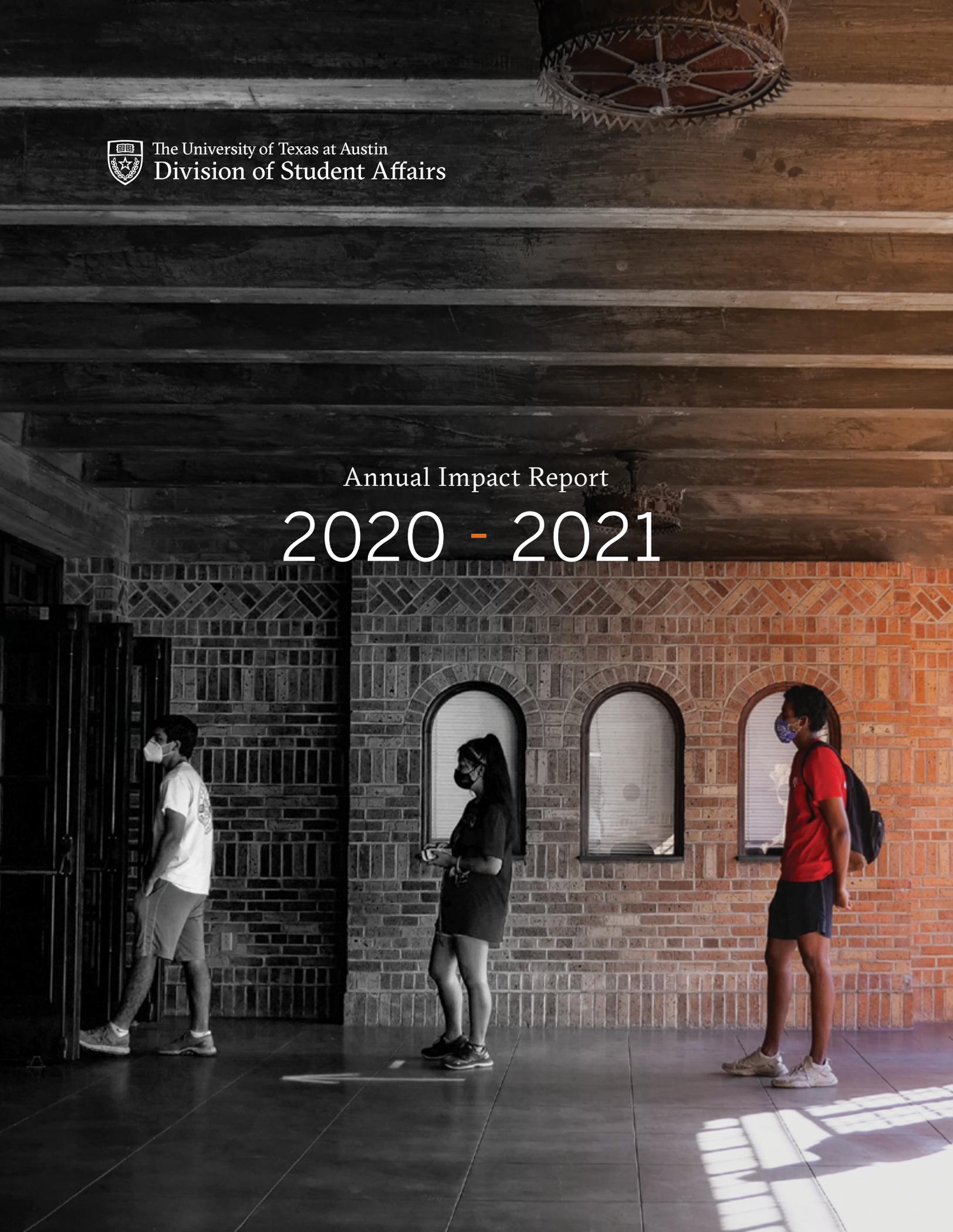
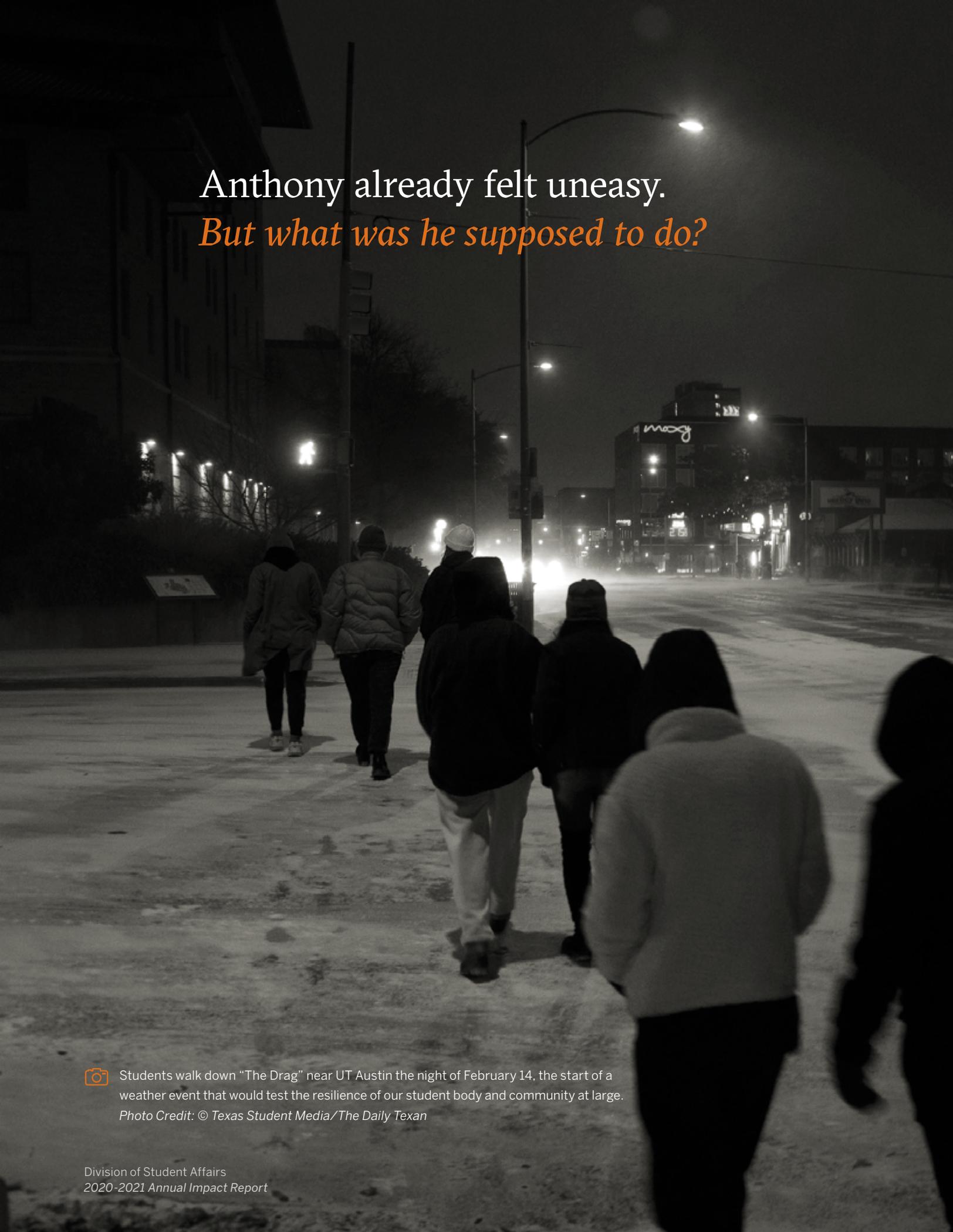




The University of Texas at Austin
Division of Student Affairs

Annual Impact Report
2020 - 2021





Anthony already felt uneasy.
But what was he supposed to do?

 Students walk down “The Drag” near UT Austin the night of February 14, the start of a weather event that would test the resilience of our student body and community at large.
Photo Credit: © Texas Student Media/The Daily Texan



The email he'd received an hour ago made it clear: campus was going to shut down tonight due to a big storm. A batch of vaccines was going to go to waste unless they went into arms soon. First come, first served.

But Anthony didn't feel like it was his turn, yet. He understood that as a resident assistant at Jester West he was one of the thousands of UT Austin employees who'd be offered a vaccine at some point. But wasn't this too soon? It was mid-February, and Anthony was a healthy, 19-year-old math major. Surely there were more deserving folks. Besides, he was gearing up for an on-call resident assistant shift while Texas experienced a deep freeze of epic proportions.

But there were only a few dozen shots available, and campus was clearing out in anticipation of the weather. So, he followed the email's instructions and made his way downstairs. A half-hour later, he was in line. That's when he heard a conversation a few feet away.

Three people—a man and two women, all obviously UT Austin staffers in their tan work shirts—were asking the doctor in charge what to do. Anthony listened as one of the women translated the man's Spanish for the doctor.

"He says he wanted to get his vaccine shot," the woman explained. The doctor was sympathetic. He encouraged the man to get into line.

"But do you have enough?" the woman asked. "I have already had my first shot, and so has my friend here. We can wait for our second shot later. But this man hasn't gotten his first one yet, and the school is about to be shut down for this storm." If there were enough doses, the doctor pointed out, the man would absolutely get one today. But it looked unlikely; the line was already probably too long. He'd have to come back later, after campus reopened and other people's appointments had been rescheduled.

Anthony leaned in and said, "He can have my spot." Then, he made his way back to his residence hall rounds. There was a storm coming. It seemed like the entire year had been a series of storms—one after another after another. Anthony's residents needed him to be there to help them get through this one, too. ■

**Thank you for
social distancing.**



Stay at least 6 feet apart.



The University of Texas at Austin

 Vinyl markers, installed on the ground throughout campus, instilled the importance of responsible distancing in public and shared spaces.

The Year that Was



When the 2020-2021 academic year started—in the summer of 2020, when freshman orientations began taking place—the global pandemic known as COVID-19 was already in full thrush. Millions had been infected; hundreds of thousands had died; and the effects on the world’s institutions were still rippling outward. The situation seemed to evolve daily.

For us, the Division of Student Affairs, the arrival of the disease in Austin proved how lucky we are to be an enormous university. With thousands of employees on our roster and 130+ years of momentum, we were able to react quickly and boldly. We marshaled our people and we *responded*—day in, day out, for more than 500 days as of this printing.

In the following pages, we will try to tell the story of the last year. But we will surely come up short because there is no singular story. Our campus is bigger than the population of Charleston, West Virginia, after all. So telling the story of this strange, unpredictable, inspiring, daunting, anxiety-laden and ultimately rewarding year means finding symbols—i.e., people and stories who are stand-ins for our big vibrant campus and the spirit they demonstrated time and again.

You’ll read about grit, inventiveness and some sorrow. You’ll meet a handful of people who each represent dozens and dozens of *other* people who constitute the Division of Student Affairs at The University of Texas Austin.

Remember: As you burrow into the stories that follow, you’re looking through a jeweler’s loupe. You’re seeing a microcosm of something larger, more brilliant, and more invaluable than any sports win, academic ranking or alumni newsletter. You’re reading about the *college experience* of 51,000+ students whose year—and future—was upended by Mother Nature, but who carried on and who carry on.





 With precaution a university priority, some university medical staff donned full personal protective equipment in order to care for students.



Heart SOUL

How we spent the year protecting the health and well-being of our students.

“It is rare for people to be asked the question which puts them squarely in front of themselves.”

— Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*

I. Heart

Dr. David Vander Straten is wearing a face mask on a Zoom call. This has been the norm for some time.

After a year of virtual meetings, we’re used to seeing our fellow staffers in their home offices—maskless, cats prowling the background, kids yelling from the living room, coffee mugs in hand. But David hasn’t enjoyed that luxury because he’s spent nearly every day for more than a year at University Health Services, testing and treating students for COVID-19.

“I’m awaiting some test results for a student. I hope you understand if I have to step away for a few minutes in the middle of our conversation,” David politely asks. Of course, we understand; there are things more important than this interview. But then, for the next (uninterrupted) hour, David unravels the story of the last year.

He tells us how, by the time the fall semester began, he and his colleagues at University Health Services were already in a regular daily groove. It’d been nearly six months since COVID-19 arrived in Texas. In those early days, David and his colleagues rushed to establish an on-campus COVID-19 headquarters. They named it the Designated

Respiratory Clinic, and its purpose was as simple as it was daunting: diagnose students and help them get through it.

“We got creative,” David reminisces. “We used the ticket booth in the parking garage behind UHS. We converted it into an outdoor testing center. Our staffers would stand inside the booth, hand out self-testing kits to students, explain to them how to swab their noses, then collect the samples for lab testing.”

When we hear stories of quiet innovation such as this (and we hear them nearly every day)—it’s easy to lose sight of an astounding fact: University Health Services exists to protect the health of 51,000+ students. That is a profound mandate, and yet, UHS continues to find ways to meet it. When COVID-19 was first reported in the international press, UHS began carefully tracking its spread westward to America. And when the pandemic made its inevitable way to Austin, the Designated Respiratory Clinic was up and running.

The clinic’s success in developing, instituting and maintaining high-



Dr. David Vander Straten, Dept. Chief for Urgent Care and Sports Medicine

level protocols continues to astound even the doctor. “I’m not aware of any staff-to-staff transmissions of COVID-19 at the clinic,” he says. It’s because of these heroic efforts that the UHS team has come to be known around the university as the “COVID Crushers.”

We ask him what, from this unprecedented year, he will take with him into the future. He turns his head to the left. For a long moment, we think he must be listening to someone who’s stepped into his office—maybe those test results are in. But then we realize he’s collecting himself. After another moment, he speaks in a tight voice: “I feel so proud, so thankful, to be part of this team.” His voice catches. After nearly 18 months of enduring the daily stresses that COVID-19 presented to University Health Services, he’s still struck by the depth of his feelings. “Our students persevere,” he says.



II. Soul

Meanwhile, in her office a few floors above the respiratory clinic, Senior Associate Director of Clinical Services Marla Craig is tending to a different, less visible type of healthcare. Now entering her 15th year at the Counseling and Mental Health Center, Marla has developed a keen sense of the myriad mental health challenges students face. So, when we ask why she's spent so much of her career at the counseling center—and how she remains so passionate about the work—her answer brims with excitement.

“Simply put, I care about these students,” she explains. “And here, my team and I have the freedom to develop new ways to support their mental health.”

Her experience and leadership aside, this year has put Marla and the 60+ mental health professionals she oversees to the ultimate test. The psychological effects of the pandemic—and the long-term impacts—are still being identified. It may be years before we develop a complete understanding of how COVID-19 has altered this generation of students.

“Remember, college was psychologically taxing *before* the pandemic,” she points out. “But then the pandemic hit, and we've seen students struggling with isolation and loneliness and depression in increased numbers. They're tackling their emotional health, trying to pursue their education, and answering big life questions.”

The Vaccines Have Come

UT Austin has played an integral part in the development of multiple COVID-19 vaccines with researchers right on campus having designed the version of the virus's spike protein that is found in all the vaccines being distributed in the U.S. The College of Natural Sciences' Jason McLellan led a team of university and National Institutes of Health researchers on the design and developed a 3D atomic-scale map of the spike protein.

Once the vaccines arrived at the beginning of 2021, thousands of other faculty, students, staff and community members were able to get their shot at Recreational Sports' Gregory Gym blocks away from McLellan's lab. University Health Services, Dell Medical School, UT Health Austin, School of Nursing and College of Pharmacy mobilized a large-scale vaccination hub site that administered 120,000+ vaccines until mid-May 2021. Vaccine delivery then shifted to UT Health Austin's clinical spaces at the Health Transformation Building.



 Vaccine distribution at Gregory Gym



Marla Craig, Senior Associate Director of Clinical Services

It's a lot to address, and the counseling center has 51,000+ potential clients. But Marla believes this generation may be uniquely situated to manage the pandemic's psychological challenges.

"This generation is more comfortable talking about mental health," she notes. "The stigma around seeking help has decreased. Many students arrive on campus having already been in some form of counseling or therapy." On the surface, this would seem to make her work—and the work of her staff—easier. "But we all want solutions immediately—a quick fix," she points out. "There is no quick fix when talking about mental health counseling."

In the early days of COVID-19, Marla carefully traced the pandemic's movement toward Texas. She warned that they could probably expect to go "full virtual" at some point, but she took comfort in one big truth while fretting about one big challenge.

The big truth: the infrastructure to take the bulk of the Counseling and Mental Health Center virtual was already in place.

Nine months before COVID-19 landed in Austin, Marla and her team launched a pilot program for delivering personal, one-on-one therapy via video chat. It's called telehealth, and the advantages are enormous. It provides an alternative way for students to access counseling. Students may be more likely to seek counseling if they can do it virtually via their smart phone or laptop. It is also more convenient for some

students who do not have transportation or who have very busy schedules that make visiting the counseling center more difficult.

The pilot version of telehealth was showing early signs of tremendous potential when it became clear it would need to become the norm—at least for a while. Nobody knew how long COVID-19 would keep us indoors, but telehealth was a solution-in-waiting that could bridge the gap between now and then.

The big challenge: Marla had more than 60 mental health professionals who worked with students, but to do it via the telehealth video-chat platform, they each needed to attain certification. "The state doesn't require certification for telehealth specifically," Marla emphasizes. "But it's our professional standard. Delivering high-quality mental health services via video is different from doing it face-to-face, and we wanted to ensure our counselors understood those nuances."

Once all counselors got certified, their schedules started filling up quickly. To nobody's surprise, the impact of COVID-19 was far deeper than its physical effects; the pandemic was putting immense strain on an already-strained, already-stressed, already-unsure student population. "We will see the impacts of this time long after the pandemic has settled down, and we're back to normal life," Marla predicts. "Already, we've seen countless cases of severe loneliness, depression and anxiety."

Despite the trials and tribulations of the last year, Marla remains ever hopeful. When we ask her what "lessons" from this year she will take with her into the future, she pauses and thinks. (She never gives a half-hearted response to any question.) After a moment, she offers this: "Resilience."

After another moment, letting the word hang in the air, she continues: "Our counselors have sometimes been *exhausted*, yet they continue to serve. We asked them to do things they've never done before, and they continue to show up. For our students." ■



 Grace Bova and Arianna McArdle (Office of the Dean of Students staff) volunteer at Gregory Gym.

Volunteers Step Up

The “COVID Crushers” comprise plenty of full-time University Health Services staff, including doctors and nurses. But quite a few students and staff decided to lend their time, energy and expertise to helping keep the pandemic from overwhelming campus.

Sherron Thomas is one such student. A junior studying biochemistry (and with plans to attend med school), Sherron decided that the virus required an all-hands-on-deck spirit. And as a member of the Student Health Advisory Committee, he knew just how to help. Starting in January 2021, Sherron began helping nearly 400 students per day get tested for COVID-19 by volunteering two shifts at the Proactive Community Testing sites.

“Sure, I’m looking forward to things returning to normal soon,” Sherron explains. “But it’s been an honor to serve my fellow students. I think that’s one of the things I like most about UT: even in a big campus, there’s a real sense of community and friendliness.”



Protect Texas Together

Protect Texas Together is the definitive source of information about how UT Austin is responding to the coronavirus. The campaign website—launched in the early weeks of the pandemic—keeps students, parents and the world updated on everything the university is doing to combat the virus while keeping students learning. The site is updated as the situation evolves and that can be several times a day, and it includes information on academics, operations, campus life, student, faculty and staff resources and much more. Learn the latest by visiting protect.utexas.edu.



Proactive Community Testing Program

One of the most important things University Health Services did—and continues to do—to prevent COVID-19 from overwhelming the student body was rapid, free, accurate testing.

As early as March 2020, any student who suspected they might have the virus could go to UHS, get tested, and learn their results online within a day or two. Over 100,000 tests administered over the last year, UHS has provided the data and contact tracing necessary to limit the pandemic’s impact on the Longhorn family.



 Campus experienced a rare week of sub-zero weather and inches of snow blanketed the Austin region.

Photo credit: © Texas Student Media/The Daily Texan



ONE COLD WEEK

un•prec•ed•en•ted. /uhn-pres-i-den-tid/ **adj.**

1. without previous instance; never before known or experienced

2. unexampled or unparalleled;

an unprecedented event



Texas Student Media/The Daily Texan



As she made her way—slowly, steadily—across the icy sidewalk toward the Texas Union, Claudette Campbell couldn't help but appreciate how appropriate this moment was. After spending more than two decades as a fundraiser in the McCombs School of Business, in 2008 she moved to a role in facilities management because she wanted to work more closely with students. She suspected—and the weather reports were confirming—that the next few days would be spent working very closely with students.

But Claudette remained confident that, whatever Mother Nature threw their way, her staff, student volunteers, and the entire Longhorn family would find their way through.

“Our first concern that Monday was warmth,” Claudette recalls. She shares with her colleagues across the Division of Student Affairs a certain ... go-get-it-ness. She's happy to plan and strategize, but in the end, Claudette wants to make things happen. “We expected the power to fail at some point, so

we had to set up a 'warming station' on campus. We had thousands of kids on and around campus who might not have anywhere else to go.”

As she walks us through her memory of that week—from the first announcement that campus would be closed through the power outages and then recommendations to boil water and eventual thawing of the ice and snow—Claudette doesn't seem to miss a nuance. “Resident assistants from the residence halls came over and volunteered countless hours sanitizing the entire building and helping people stay masked and socially distanced.

The 2021 Winter Storm by the Numbers

6: Number of days in which the record low temperature in Austin was beat.

6,500: Number of students who passed through the Texas Union's warming station that week.

100: Approximate number of students who slept overnight at the Texas Union because they had no power or water at their residence.



Texas Student Media/The Daily Texan

University Housing and Dining brought over their giant coffeemaker, and I didn't stop making coffee for the next 12 hours."

The details she continues to recount are astounding:

- Kendra Scott, the luxury jewelry company headquartered in Austin, donated food—tacos for lunch, pizza for dinner.
- Once students heard about those donations, some of them purchased food from the few open restaurants and dropped it off at the Texas Union.
- Campus Safety and Security delivered 300 cases of bottled water. Some students slept in the Union, with a peak of 100 spending the night on Thursday when the storm was its bleakest.
- Nearly 100 volunteers, most of them resident assistants, worked round-the-clock shifts making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and handing out waters.

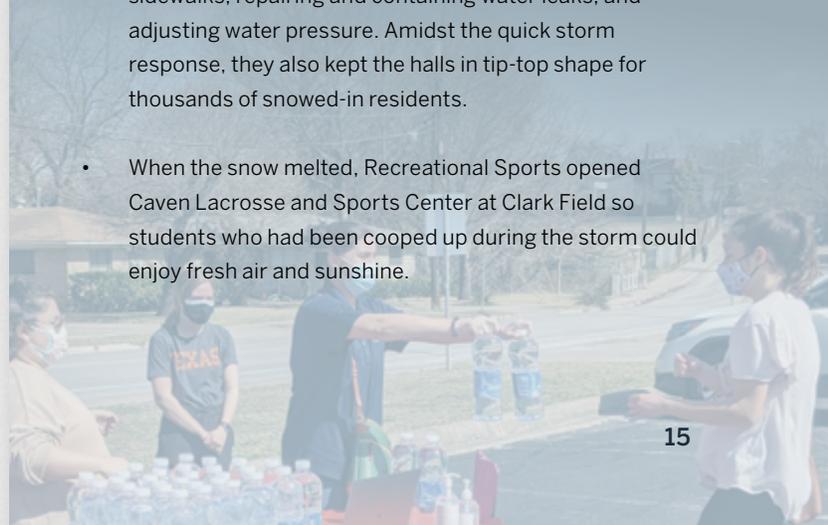
It's clear that Claudette has told the story of the winter storm many times since it happened. When we speak to her, just two months after it occurred, she's got her facts down pat. "A lot of people have asked me how we got through it," Claudette admits. "I've told this story many times because it was unlike anything we've done before. But we learned so much."

We ask Claudette what she learned that she'll take with her into the future. She doesn't hesitate to respond with a brainstorm list of practical ideas, but then moves quickly to the more inspirational lessons: "This time of scarcity could've been a time that brought out the worst in people, but it brought out the best in people, the best of human nature." ■

STORIES OF SHELTER FROM THE STORM

The Texas Union wasn't the only place the Division of Student Affairs turned into a safe haven during the winter storm.

- Seven Recreational Sports student employees who could safely walk to campus staffed the 24/7 Gregory Gym warming center. They de-iced sidewalks, shoveled snow, helped students find outlets to charge devices and monitored the building as people slept overnight.
- San Jacinto Residence Hall staff supervised a warming center open from 8 a.m. to midnight. The team there set up tables with charging outlets and gave out bottled water.
- New Student Services teamed up with the Vice President for Student Affairs programming staff to quickly set up bottled water distribution stations north, south and east of campus. Staff from the Office of the Dean of Students helped invite 13,000 students living in those Austin areas. Julie Wier, Student Services Building manager, traveled to campus to unlock doors at the building so staff could retrieve supplies and the University Housing and Dining operations team delivered 4,000+ bottles of water.
- The Texas Parents' office fielded calls from countless families concerned about their kids in Austin. Texas Parents explained where the warming centers were located and where they could pick up bottled water. They shared the university's official updates and emergency website. And when parents asked where their child could get a warm meal, they pointed them to University Housing and Dining, who was offering free meals to students in need.
- Don Ates, University Housing and Dining director of residential facilities, dispatched his maintenance and building services troops. They were busy de-icing sidewalks, repairing and containing water leaks, and adjusting water pressure. Amidst the quick storm response, they also kept the halls in tip-top shape for thousands of snowed-in residents.
- When the snow melted, Recreational Sports opened Caven Lacrosse and Sports Center at Clark Field so students who had been cooped up during the storm could enjoy fresh air and sunshine.





LISTEN UP

The Forty Acres weren't empty this year. There were students in residence halls, researchers in labs, and hundreds of staff keeping things safe, clean and operational. But it was surely the quietest year on campus that we've experienced in generations. With students learning remotely, we found new ways to connect with them and ask, "How's life? What's new? How can we help?" And then listen.

We invented new ways to engage with students and keep them looked after, even from afar. But it wasn't the same. Nothing replaces the richness of campus life.

The timing of our shared isolation was especially difficult as racial unrest across our country appeared in the headlines. Just when we most needed to be with our students—face to face, in the same room—to talk through these issues, the virus was keeping us apart. Students still spoke out and organized themselves, mostly online, but it became clear that more was needed.

Enter Brianna McBride.



Brianna McBride

A master's candidate in the LBJ School of Public Affairs, Brianna has spent the majority of her time as a Longhorn—including four years as an undergrad—creating connections and sparking conversations. She was a mentor with Communities in Schools, a volunteer registrar for Travis County, the executive chair of the Big XII Council on Black Student Government, co-director of UT's Black Presidents Leadership Council and served as a valued member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

Brianna's keen sense of fairness and passion for community-building made her the ideal person to fill a new graduate assistant role in the Vice President for Student Affairs office. The position is tasked with reaching out to students who are traditionally marginalized or underrepresented—listening to their needs, connecting them with resources, and reporting their concerns directly to the leadership.

"We can't address what students of color experience if we don't ask them what they experience," she explains. "So, I do. I ask them, regularly and directly. 'What is your experience here at UT like?' I want to understand, as best I can, their day-to-day concerns. Then we can improve our existing programs and design ways to fill the gaps that still exist."

During her two-year stint in this role, Brianna will give us an ear to the ground—a direct line between students of color and the Division of Student Affairs. She'll help us understand, in concrete and specific ways, how we can make life better for every Longhorn. And then, we'll work to make it so. ■

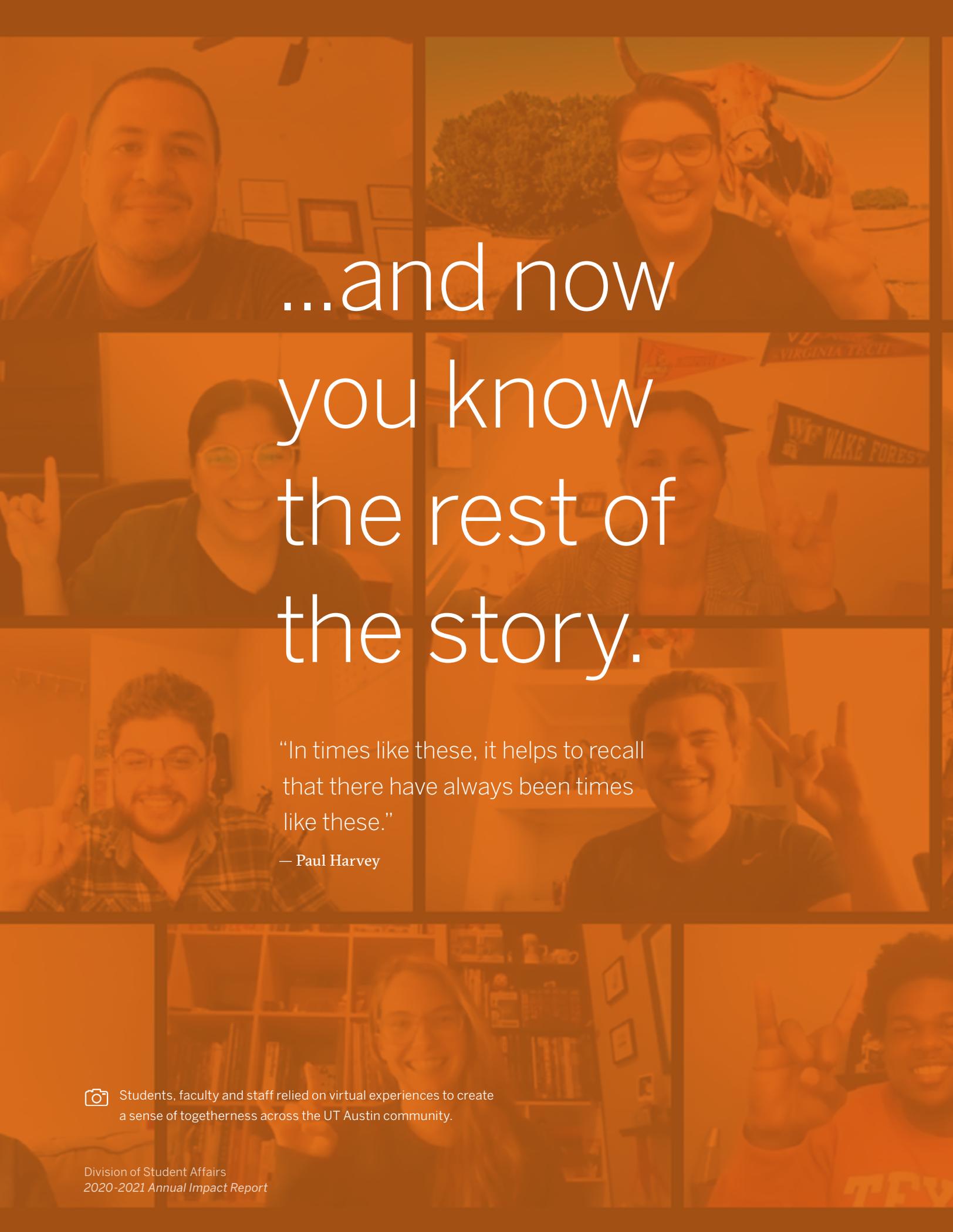
Division Awards, Recognitions and Scholarships

The Vice President for Student Affairs and the Division of Student Affairs' nine departments honor students and staff in a variety of ways. Below is a list of our awards, recognitions and scholarships.

1999 Bonfire Unity Endowed Presidential Scholarship
Abigail "Abz" Zeitler Memorial Fund
Acacia Fraternity Endowed Scholarship
Alys Jones Bodoin Centennial Endowed Scholarship
Arno Nowotny Medal
Betty A. Thompson Endowment for Recreational Sports
Bill Frisbie Endowed Scholarship
Bill Patman Endowed Scholarship
Brian L. Harlan Memorial Endowment
C. Thomas Behrman/Tejas Scholarship
Carol Weikman Farnsworth & James Walter Farnsworth Endowment for Students in Recovery
Charles and Carolyn Spence, James and Kathryn (Spence) Nance, and William (Spence) and Edith Nance Endowed Scholarship honoring Michael Monsoor
Cristi Biggs Orientation Leadership Fund
Cullen Trust for Higher Education Endowed Fund for Students in Recovery
Dawn & Greg Crouch Endowed Excellence Fund for Students in Recovery
Dean Byron Fullerton/Tejas Scholarship
DeDe and Joe Bill Watkins Endowed Scholarship
Delta Gamma Foundation Endowed Lecture Fund in Values and Ethics
Delta Tau Delta Endowed Scholarship
Donna Stockton-Hicks & R. Steven Hicks Endowed Excellence Fund for the Center for Students in Recovery
Erin Elizabeth Spurgin Endowed Excellence Fund for the Center for Students in Recovery
Eyes of Texas Student Government Academic Endeavor Fund
Fleming Fellowship Scholarship
Fleming/Tejas Scholarship
Floyd B. Hoelting Quality of Residence Life Award
Foyt Family Endowment for Student Affairs
George Kinsolving Endowed Memorial Student Services Fund
Gerald E. Hawxhurst & Susan St. Denis Endowed Presidential Scholarship

Glenn Maloney Memorial Scholarship
GRants for Active Student Participants (GRASP) Endowment
Gregory E. Lucia/Tejas Scholarship
Harrison Brown Endowed Excellence Fund
Haruka Weiser Endowed Excellence Fund for Campus and Student Safety
Ingram Lee Endowed Scholarship
Intramural Endowment
James W. Vick Academic Bridge Fund Endowment
Jean Perkins Foundation Combat Veteran Scholarship
Jennifer and Paul E. Heath Endowed Scholarship
Jessica Michelle Fertitta Excellence Fund for Student Advocacy & Civic Engagement
Jim Fenner Fund
John M. Childs Scholarship for Intramural Referees
Judge Harley Clark/Tejas Scholarship
Judge Royce C. Lamberth/Tejas Scholarship
Judge Zeke Zbranek/Tejas Scholarship
Kenneth Ford Family Endowed Scholarship
Lubbock Endowed Excellence Fund for Handball in Honor of Pete Tyson
Maralyn S. Heimlich Scholarship
Margaret Alexander Steiner Endowed Scholarship Fund
Marion B. Buescher Memorial Scholarship
Mark L. Hart, Jr. Endowed Scholarship
Max, Gene Alice and Lynn Sherman The Center for Students in Recovery (CSR) Endowment
Merryman/Revell Excellence Endowment
National Residence Hall Honorary "Of the Month" Awards
National Residence Hall Honorary Induction
Nelson Puett, Jr. Endowment for Recreational Sports
NOW Fund – Endowment for Immediate Student Support
Office of the Dean of Students Dean's Dozen
Office of the Dean of Students Pillars of the Forty Acres Recognition Program
Office of the Dean of Students Sorority and Fraternity Life Awards

Office of the Dean of Students Swing Out Awards
Office of the Dean of Students Transforming Texas Greeks
Office of the Dean of Students Veteran Academic Leadership Award
Orange Jackets Endowment for Voices Against Violence
Parents' Association Student Services Endowment Fund
Phi Gamma Delta Endowed Scholarship
Play Golf America University Endowment in Recreational Sports
Rebecca H. Carreon Scholarship Fund
Recreational Sports Divisional Endowment
Recreational Sports Endowed Scholarship
Richard B. Dyke Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Communications
Robert G. Childress Endowed Scholarship
Robert L. Dewar Golf Scholarship
Scott B. Styles Endowed Excellence Fund for Lacrosse
Sean N. Bourgeois Memorial Endowed Scholarship
Senate of College Councils Endowed Scholarship Fund
Senate of College Councils' William Powers Jr. Endowed Scholarship
Sgt. Tyrell Seth Williams, U.S. Marine Corps Endowed (USMC) Scholarship
Sharon H. Justice Leadership Scholarship Endowment
Shawn and Kara Wells Endowment for Horns Helping Horns
Soncia Reagins-Lilly Award for Administrative Excellence
Student Emergency Fund
Student Government Endowed Excellence Fund
Student Organization Development Fund
Susan and Mark Baletka Endowed Scholarship
Sylvie and Gary Crum Endowed Scholarship
Tany Norwood Staff Appreciation Award Endowment
Texas Blazers Endowed Excellence Fund
Texas Cowboys Endowment for UT Students
Texas Men's Lacrosse Endowment
Texas Parents Mike Wacker Award
Texas Parents Outstanding Student Awards
Texas Parents Staff Merit Awards
Texas Taekwondo Alumni Association Endowed Excellence Fund
Texas Union Building Fund
Texas Union Permanent Art Collection Endowment
Texas Union Student Awards Endowment
Texas Union Student Programs Endowment
Texas Union-University Co-Operative Society Presidential Medallion Endowment
The Bryant and Shari T. Truitt Veterans Scholarship
The Center for Students in Recovery Alumni Endowment
The Center for Students in Recovery Fund
The Center for Students in Recovery Scholarships
The David L. Shull Memorial Scholarship
Theodore Henry Strauss Student Award for Exemplary University Service
Thomas W. Dison Endowed Scholarship
Tom and Bitsey Hail Endowed Presidential Scholarship
Transforming Texas Greeks Endowment
University Health Services Healthy Student Organization Program Awards
University Housing and Dining Residence Life Leadership Awards
University Unions C.C. "Jitter" Nolen Spirit Award
University Unions J.J. "Jake" Pickle Citizenship Award
University Unions Margaret C. Berry Student Activities Fund
University Unions Pal—Make A Difference Award
University Unions Shirley Bird Perry Leadership Award
University Unions Student Activity Center Program Endowment
University Unions Student Endowed Centennial Lectureship
University Unions Texas Cowboys Centennial Lectureship
University Unions William Andrew Smith, Jr. GRASP Award
W. Ralph Canada, Jr. Endowment for Horns Helping Horns



...and now
you know
the rest of
the story.

“In times like these, it helps to recall
that there have always been times
like these.”

— Paul Harvey

 Students, faculty and staff relied on virtual experiences to create
a sense of togetherness across the UT Austin community.

As you read this—perhaps in the fall of 2021 when we first publish it or a few hundred years from now as part of an “*Archive of the COVID-19 Era in Texas*” exhibition at the (now fully holographic) Harry Ransom Center—let us assure you: we’re still figuring out how COVID-19 is changing our beloved university.



The physical effects of the pandemic were measurable. Testing, contact tracing, social distancing—these concrete tactics reduced cases and let us keep a clear count of the virus’ toll on the student body. But the Division of Student Affairs tends to the *whole* student. We’re here to ensure that the “college years” are as fun and fulfilling as they are safe and sound.

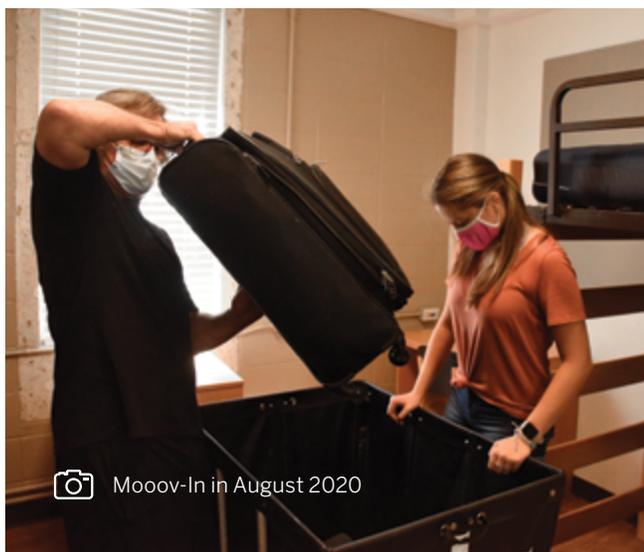
So, we’d be remiss not to tell the other half of this year’s story—the half that involved thousands of staff members and student employees working in tireless tandem to prevent COVID-19 from turning this into a lost year. We recognized early that we’d have to invent new ways of making the Forty Acres feel like home, and week after week, we did just that.

Along the way, we plumbed new depths of personal fortitude and discovered new ways of fulfilling our mission. Here’s a sampling of the ways in which the Division of Student Affairs ensured that the “COVID year” would be remembered as something genuinely special.

Freshman Class

Can you *even imagine*? You probably have vivid memories of your first days as a college freshman: signing up for classes at orientation, moving into your residence hall room, meeting your roommate, saying goodbye to your tearful parents as they drove away, walking to your first college class ever, your first party, your first overnight study session. You were as excited as you were intimidated.

So can you even imagine what it was like for freshmen entering college in the fall of 2020? Long before the fall semester began, these 10,000+ incoming students—most of whom had been accepted to



Moov-In in August 2020

Texas Student Media/The Daily Texan

UT Austin before the pandemic struck—knew they were in for an especially challenging first year.

Luckily, they had the New Student Services staff working to make the transition as smooth as possible.

“Our goal with orientation each year is to ensure incoming students have the information they need to feel prepared for success during their time at UT Austin, and 2020 was no different,” explained New Student Services Executive Director Celena Mondie-Milner. “Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our team had to work quickly to pivot orientation programming to a virtual setting, and I am proud to say we rose to the challenge.”

One of those team members is Kyle St. Nicholas. As an assistant director in New Student Services since 2016, he has helped plan dozens of sessions of freshman orientation that introduced tens of thousands of new students to UT Austin. But no sessions would be quite like those of the summer of 2020.

“We’ve offered one ‘virtual’ orientation each summer for the last few years for international students or others who couldn’t make it to Austin,” Kyle says. “So making the switch to 100% virtual this year wasn’t a complete surprise. But we still had so many unknowns—like, would Zoom work for such large numbers, would students want to attend, how much information was too much?”

Along with Celena and his colleagues in New Student Services, Kyle took on the challenge to design fully-online orientations the moment it became clear that COVID-19 was going to make the traditional trip to the Forty Acres impossible. The first question the team asked themselves was: how do we recreate the feeling of orientation?

“We knew we didn’t want to simply try to replicate every in-person aspect of orientation on the Internet. It would be too much and it wouldn’t be much fun,” he notes. “So instead, we focused on two things. First, how do we get students the most essential info they need, which is mostly how to register for classes? And second, how do we begin connecting freshmen with one another? Once

we had our marching orders, we moved very quickly into the implementation phase.”

The answer to the first question was a mix of tactics. New Student Services would create web videos to explain the class registration process. Freshmen could watch the video at their convenience. “One of the key words this year was ‘self-paced,’” Kyle explains. “But we had live events too.” Thanks to some meticulous resource allocation, the team ensured that each of the 10,000+ students who went through orientation this year had a one-on-one meeting with both an academic advisor and peer advisor.

As for the non-academic part of orientation? That took a bit more ingenuity. The NSS team brainstormed countless ways to offer incoming freshmen a chance to get a feel for the university and their new classmates. Because one size doesn’t fit all, the range of these “social” online events was wide.

“Our orientation advisors, most of whom are current students, led virtual tours by ‘walking’ students across campus, sharing history and answering questions as they went,” Kyle remembers. “Then we had a pet show, where students could show off their dogs and cats. We had a talent show. We just really tried to find any reasonable excuse to get our freshmen talking, laughing and excited about coming to school—even if they weren’t coming to campus yet.”



Students enjoy Destination Spring Break in March 2021.

Though Kyle takes the responsibility of welcoming new Longhorns seriously, he's quick to share the credit for this year's orientations with his colleagues. "One fundamental truth I learned this year was that our orientations simply couldn't happen without our orientation advisors," he explains. "They're important every year, of course, but this year, they showed so much resilience and caring. They wanted students to feel as if this was their new home."

Welcome home, indeed. And thanks to the lessons learned this year, future orientations will be even more special. In summer 2021, the team was able to offer a "hybrid" model as campus health guidance changed with some programs and events on campus, some online.

The Rites of Spring (Break)

When the spring semester began, we saw an opportunity. Vaccines were coming, and with them, hope for an eventual return to normalcy. With many travel restrictions still in place, we opted to transform campus into popular spring break destinations—Austin, New Orleans and Miami—and bring the fun to the students.

We named the week "Destination Spring Break," and we scheduled six straight days of events that would balance safety protocols (such as social distancing) with plenty of excuses to bring students together—in some cases for the first time in a year. The week was designed with community and connection in mind, as far too many students—especially those still living on and around campus—were feeling a tinge of loneliness and stress.

The week started on Sunday, March 14 with Sunday Funday—free brunch, games and the announcement of the Longhorn Men's Basketball team's seeding in the NCAA Tournament.

- On Monday night, students filled the South Mall (six-feet apart from one another, of course) to eat BBQ, listen to live music and watch the just-released film *Tenet* on the big screen for Dinner and a Show and a Movie.
- Wednesday took students to New Orleans via the Texas Union, as the patio was turned into an



old-fashioned shrimp boil, complete with a zydeco band, tarot card reader and Mardi Gras mask making.

- Friday found students in Havana, as the William C. Powers, Jr. Student Activity Center east lawn became a DJ-led dance party with catered Latin food, cool classic cars and interactive photo booth opportunities.

Atop these signature events, we planned non-stop recurring events every day of the week. The South Mall featured live music, yoga classes and crafting booths. The Texas Union featured jazz music, an arcade and karaoke. The William C. Powers, Jr. Student Activity Center and Gregory Gym became an art installation, pool party and dance club. And wherever students turned there was, of course, food.

The week was a serious logistical challenge, but we relished the opportunity to find as many ways as possible to invite as many students as possible back together again. After a year of attending classes on Zoom and spending Friday nights on the couch with Netflix, students demonstrated that they were eager to, once again, feel like a Longhorn family.



 New student during RecSports back to school programming

Sweating Out the Stress

Recreational Sports is one of UT Austin's most cherished institutions. For decades, it's been on the leading edge of engaging students in an ever-growing list of activities and adventures. Every year the department seems to add a chunk of new programs, initiatives and opportunities. So perhaps it's no surprise that they hardly missed a beat when deciding how to work around—and through—the challenges of the pandemic.

Over the Spring/Summer 2020, RecSports put together an internal reopening committee, which focused on developing protocols and operational procedures following university and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance. Thanks to this foresight and planning, the department was able to bring educational programming and activities virtually for people still at home, while begin to reopen gradually. They also conducted their first post-pandemic outing when they led a paddleboarding trip on Lady Bird

Lake in October. Like every department in the Division of Student Affairs, RecSports manages to roll with the punches and remain laser-focused on what our students need and want.

Jasmine Lara, a student employee of RecSports since her freshman year, attests to that grit. "I've worked in several roles for RecSports since my freshman year," she explains. "But this year taught me the power of empathy. You never know what someone you're training is going through."

Jasmine is, in many respects, the quintessential success story for RecSports, which is one of the largest employers of students on campus. She came on as a facilities supervisor, tending to critical daily tasks such as opening and closing Gregory Gym, preparing the facility for daily activities, and cleaning and maintaining spaces. But eventually, her lifelong commitment to sports and fitness led her to become a fitness instructor.

"Teaching exercise classes over Zoom," Jasmine explains when describing how RecSports pivoted in 2020, "wasn't easy at first. But soon we moved to outdoor classes. But teaching while wearing a face mask isn't much fun either," she recalls with a smile, "because it muffles your voice." And yet Jasmine persisted, teaching dozens of classes over the course of her senior year.

The experience of teaching fitness during a pandemic year merely served to confirm Jasmine's future plans. "I'm going to become a personal trainer and eventually open a fitness studio of my own," she explains. "I love working with beginners, especially women, because I know I can help them find a way through their obstacles."

"Find a way through their obstacles..." Well put, Jasmine. ■



 Freshman Orientation in June 2021

And Now, a Word About University Housing and Dining...



📷 Student at Destination Spring Break
in March 2021

Housing and Dining could be considered the cornerstone of the Division of Student Affairs. Every day, this department houses thousands of students, and feeds them as well as hundreds of faculty and staff. But despite their daily duties, Housing and Dining innovates just as much as their counterparts in University Health Services, RecSports and so on.

Just ask Brandon Jones. As the associate director of student learning and development in Housing and Dining, Jones says his job is to “make sure that if Housing and Dining is in the news, it’s for cool things.” But he’s quick to clarify what that means: “Our team isn’t meant to be ‘seen’ by students, but simply to ensure they feel supported.”

In pursuit of that mission, Brandon spends a lot of his time moving around campus—attending student organization meetings, popping into the residence halls to talk to the residents, asking a student studying on the South Mall what they need to succeed.

“We’re a ‘curricular’ institution. That means that learning should always be an option, not just inside the classroom,” Brandon explains. That philosophy took on a new meaning this year, of course, when the halls were mostly empty and the South Mall was a ghost town. “Fortunately,” Brandon describes, “leadership within the Division was forward thinking. Dean Lilly inspired all of us to come up with ideas and supported implementing them.”

That’s why this year saw an endless series of events and activities launched by Brandon and the Division of Student Affairs Programming Council—including a celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month in September, the Forty Acres Fair to recreate the Texas State Fair on campus in October, the Longhorn Harvest in November, which brought hundreds of students together to eat and enjoy live music. And a team effort for Destination Spring Break. The events never stopped. And if Brandon has anything to say about it, they never will.

“If the challenges of this year have proved anything to me, it’s something I already believed,” he says. “We are capable of creating a community here where every student can find a way to fit into the larger Longhorn family.” ■

From the Vice President

Dear friends,

We've been here before. Sort of.

In 1918, the Spanish Flu pandemic came to the Forty Acres. Local news stories from the time are limited, but one truth is clear: our beloved university was hit hard. World War I was already well underway, and UT Austin had been “mobilized” to prepare soldiers for deployment overseas. Then the pandemic showed up.

As our alumni magazine, *The Alcalde*, shared: “Student barracks were converted into hospital wards ... classes were aired out for 10 minutes between lessons ... students were obliged to take their temperature each morning.” There were no football games. University leaders advised students to avoid movie theaters until the risk of contracting influenza passed.

It did pass, eventually. But it left its mark. Several times over the last year, I've found myself wondering what it was like for them. It's hard to picture a time when news traveled so slowly, when medical know-how was still mostly guesswork, and when there wasn't the buffet of resources and programs that the Division of Student Affairs offers today. How did they cope? How was it harder for them? How was it easier? What did faculty administrators think about the work they did every day?

Thinking about that time—more than a century ago!—gives me an additional dose of strength. If they could manage, so can we. And each day when I see acts of grit from the Division of Student Affairs team, I feel honored to help lead them forward. I'm looking forward to what's ahead.

If you're reading this, it's because you care about the university and our Longhorn students. You know that no matter how times change, or challenges evolve, there is something about UT students that is true and unassailable and as steady as a forest stream: we will continue, always. We're glad to have you with us as we embark on our university's next chapter.

Thank you for the support you have given, and for all the support you continue to give.

Hook 'em,

Soncia Reagins-Lilly
Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students





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Division of Student Affairs Departments

Center for Students in Recovery

recovery.utexas.edu
(512) 475-6778

Counseling and Mental Health Center

cmhc.utexas.edu
(512) 471-3515

New Student Services

orientation.utexas.edu
(512) 471-3304

Office of the Dean of Students

deanofstudents.utexas.edu
(512) 471-5017

Recreational Sports

utrecsports.org
(512) 471-1155

Texas Parents

texasparents.org
(512) 471-2353

University Health Services

healthyhorns.utexas.edu
(512) 471-4955

University Housing and Dining

housing.utexas.edu
(512) 471-3136

University Unions

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