

SPRING 2020

the Islander

ISLANDERS STEP UP

*Islanders fight against
COVID-19 by making
face shields for health
care professionals*

TEXAS STINGRAY

*SeaWorld's newest
coaster is an educational
partnership*

SEASON INTERRUPTED

*Islander athletes make history
despite early end to season*

BEST BY THE SEA

*Island location brings
ocean of opportunity*



*President and CEO
Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D.*

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Islanders,

This spring semester has provided unprecedented opportunities for making an Islander Impact. We have turned our handshakes into shakas, transitioned to online learning, and provided resources and expertise to support the entire community. Islanders have led in many positive ways during this challenging time.

A true highlight for the Coastal Bend is our amazing women's basketball team and their incredible work on and off the court. Their determination, persistence, and grit led them to the first Southland regular season title in program history. Even though their postseason opportunities were cut short, they are true champions.

The Islander Spirit can also be found in the Mary & Jeff Bell Library I-Create Makerspace. I-Create staff answered the call from local health providers in need of personal protective equipment. They began making these potentially life-saving masks in early April and continue to explore other innovative ways in which I-Create can contribute to the fight against COVID-19. Our researchers at the Conrad Blucher Institute worked diligently to map the pandemic and assist local health officials to understand its magnitude and how it spreads, while our drones helped support public safety. To support K-12 education, the Antonio E. Garcia Arts and Education Center launched a Facebook literacy program designed to improve reading and comprehension skills. Additionally, researchers across campus provided their expertise in areas like economic impact and recovery, cybersecurity while working remotely, healthcare, and mental health support.

Through it all, Islanders continue to come together to support one another. Faculty and staff gave their all to provide extra hours of academic and moral support for their students. Their flexibility and understanding are perfect examples of what it means to be an Islander. Students, many far away from home and caring for loved ones, continued to work diligently toward academic success. We look forward to the day when our spring 2020 graduates can walk the stage at commencement as we all celebrate their accomplishments.

Some of our stories of resiliency, innovation, compassion, and teamwork are found within this magazine, serving as an inspiration to all. I am more convinced now than ever before that Islanders, in any circumstance, lead the way. I've never been prouder to be an Islander.

Sincerely,

Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D.

Table of CONTENTS

PG. 4 | COMMUNITY

ISLANDERS STEP UP

As communities deal with COVID-19 pandemic, Islanders find ways to assist

PG. 8 | FEATURE

TEXAS STINGRAY

SeaWorld's newest coaster is an educational partnership

PG. 15 | COMMUNITY

CREATING A MUSICAL FOUNDATION

Islander students foster a love for music in local schools

PG. 22 | FEATURE

FILLING THE GAP IN NURSING

READY Program provides resources for future nurses

PG. 28 | TRADITION

LEGACY RING

Alumni Association recognizes outstanding students with special gift

PG. 30 | ATHLETICS

SPORTS WRAP UP

Student-athletes make history despite early end to season

PG. 34 | ALUMNI FEATURE

ALUMNI RETURN TO THE ISLAND

Two alumni reflect on their time on and off the Island

PG. 36 | TRADITION

HOMECOMING 2020

Homecoming 2020 brought class reunions, record crowds, and more

PG. 38 | FEATURE

CLASS NOTES

Exciting updates and announcements from alumni



RIGHT: President and CEO of Driscoll Health System Eric Hamon visits the Island University to view face shields made by the University's I-Create Lab.



ISLANDERS STEP UP

Courage and Resiliency Displayed in Battle Against COVID-19

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Islander administrators, faculty, and staff proved once again that nothing will diminish their commitment to student success and their resolve to be problem solvers for the Coastal Bend community.

As world leaders called for social distancing and an end to large gatherings to help stop the spread of COVID-19, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi made the difficult yet necessary decision to move all classes online through June 2020. In the first days of the transition to online learning, the University established a call center to answer questions and concerns from students and families and maintained a dedicated Islander Help email account for additional assistance.

“Safety is always a priority,” Dr. Kelly M. Miller, President and CEO of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, said. “We were determined to continue providing excellent educational opportunities for our students in the safest way possible, and that required making difficult but important changes to how we operated.”

The decision to move classes online was followed by the announcement that spring commencement was postponed. Graduates of the spring 2020 class were given the choice to walk the stage later in August or December 2020, or even May 2021 if that option was best for them.

“We know how important commencement is for our graduates and their families,” Miller said. “We would never take that moment away from them when they have worked so hard to complete their degrees. Ensuring they had multiple opportunities to walk the stage was a huge priority for us because students are our top priority.”

Savannah Spears '20, senior communication studies major, expressed her appreciation for the options.

“Although it is sad that I will not get to finish my last semester on campus, I have found comfort in looking back

on all the amazing times I had on campus and the overwhelming support I received from my professors during this time,” Spears said. “I want to thank Dr. Miller for allowing Islander students to walk the stage at a later date. I truly appreciate that decision and will forever be grateful.”

When a city-county stay-at-home order was put in place, most Islander staff members also made the transition to working from home, but University officials wanted to ensure that no students fell through the cracks. Critical student support services remained available, including tutoring, health care and mental health services, library access, advising, and access to Izzy's Food Pantry.

“We looked for creative ways to keep students healthy and engaged after classes went fully online,” Dr. Don

Albrecht, Vice President for Student Engagement and Success, said. “Some students were concerned about the transition, the future, their own financial stability, and we continued to offer counseling services – both individual and group sessions – via video or telephone. We also found ways to offer recreational activities in a virtual format.”

In April, a federal grant of \$10 million was announced for A&M-Corpus Christi to address the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak. The funding – courtesy of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund authorized by the CARES Act – directly addressed student needs while also assisting the University with its pandemic response. Qualified Islander students received funding this spring. Funding is expected to stretch through the fall.

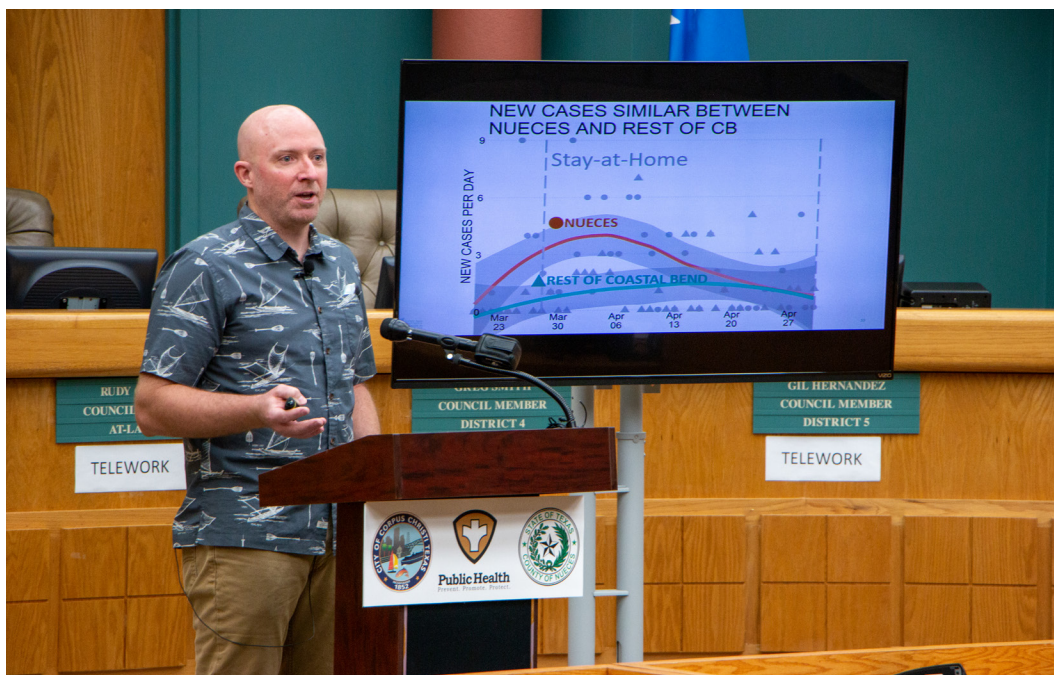
Faculty and staff from across campus



ABOVE: As part of a TAMU System-wide initiative, the Island University donated 100 COVID-19 test kits to the Corpus Christi-Nueces County Health Department.

COVID-19 COVERAGE

FOLLOW @ISLANDCAMPUS
TO KEEP UP WITH THE
ISLANDER COMMUNITY



ABOVE: As part of a joint task force, Dr. Chris Bird, Associate Professor of Biology, presents the latest COVID-19 data at a Corpus Christi City Council meeting.

were continually tapped as subject matter experts by local, regional, and national media on topics such as how to stay healthy during the outbreak, economic impacts of the virus and shutdowns, how the pandemic may reshape the political landscape, techniques for teleworking, and cybersecurity issues during remote work situations. They responded without hesitation.

A joint team from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, the City of Corpus Christi, and Nueces County developed models to predict the number of cases of COVID-19 in the Coastal Bend and the impact on local hospitals, depending on how well mitigation measures – such as social distancing – were followed.

At a Corpus Christi City Council meeting, Dr. Chris Bird, Associate Professor of Biology, discussed the major differences between a scenario without precautions like social distancing and one that follows the orders from the city and county.

“We would be facing hundreds of COVID-19 deaths in the coming few weeks if we were not taking these steps,” Bird said. Typically, he studies molecular genomics to advance understanding of marine species and promote the sustainability of marine ecosystems.

Additionally, the Conrad Blucher Institute created an easy-to-use interactive dashboard that mapped the spread of COVID-19 through Texas and the Coastal Bend. The maps provided relevant and accurate information to the public, including areas of high concentrations of the outbreak and how close certain cities were to COVID-19 hotspots. CBI plans to convert their collected data for public use and scientific research in the future.

During increased closures of parks and beaches over the Easter weekend due to COVID-19, the Lone Star UAS Center of Excellence and Innovation provided its expertise to the region via UAS flights. These flights gathered live and recorded video from locations that are unreachable using ground vehicles. Data was used by city and county officials for enforcement activities.

“Corpus Christi made an investment over six years ago when our University was chosen as one of seven Federal Aviation Administration test sites,” Mike Sanders, Executive Director of the Lone Star UAS Center, said. “Thanks to our community’s support, we are in a position where we can give back. We are happy to be good neighbors.”

Meanwhile, as the Coronavirus

pandemic forced tens of thousands of local children to be home from school, their parents and guardians were challenged to provide continuity of education. In response, the Antonio E. Garcia Arts and Education Center launched a Facebook literacy program designed to improve reading and comprehension skills.

The reading program, targeted at elementary students, utilized the skillsets of Garcia Center tutors, mostly education majors who attend A&M-Corpus Christi or Del Mar College.

As part of a System-wide initiative, the University donated 100 COVID-19 test kits to the Corpus Christi-Nueces County Health Department. Due to new emergency regulations, the kits were split into two, effectively doubling the 100-kit donation to 200 kits. Test kits were used by the City-County Health Department in their COVID-19 drive-through testing area.

Staff in the Mary and Jeff Bell Library utilized the I-Create Makerspace in the library to make face shields for health

care workers at Driscoll Children's Hospital. Staff aimed to produce about 1,000 face shields and pledged to continue the project as long as materials were available, and the need remained. Library staff also launched a COVID-19 archival project, collecting items such as photos, interviews, social media posts, essays, etc. to document the Coastal Bend's collective experience during the pandemic.

"The transition to working at home, wearing masks, conference calling and fearing a trip to the grocery store was rapid and life altering," Lori Atkins, Director of Special Collections and Archives at Bell Library, said. "There is a before time, the battle time we are living through now, and an after time where a new normalcy will gradually be accepted with the terrible truth that this pandemic was real. By contributing to this collection of COVID-19 experiences, participants will be leaving a witness account of this time for future generations to study."

While the future remains uncertain,

Islanders remain resilient, innovative, and courageous. They will continue to find highlights of success in the complex challenges that lie ahead. ♦



ABOVE: In response to online learning shift, the University established a call center to answer questions from students and their families.



Join the Islander Athletic Fund today!

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Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi impacted my life in ways I wouldn't have imagined. It's a place that became a second home for me, and relationships that I created here will last a lifetime.

Joe Kilgore, Class of 2018
Islanders Men's Basketball
2018 NCAA Slam Dunk Champion

*Scholarships
change lives.*

Invest in our student-athletes and
change a life.



TEXAS STINGRAY

*Island University, HRI Partner with SeaWorld to Bring
Gulf of Mexico Awareness to Visitors*

Visitors to SeaWorld in San Antonio, Texas, can now learn about the exciting research happening at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies, located at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, thanks to a partnership that revolves around a new rollercoaster, the Texas Stingray.

Open to visitors in February 2020, the ride mimics the motions of the graceful sea creatures and is billed as the tallest, fastest, and longest wooden rollercoaster in Texas.

As visitors wait in line to ride the coaster, they are greeted by signage that provides detailed facts about the Loop Current, a dominant feature in the Gulf of Mexico that acts like a vast river, transporting nutrients, larvae, sargassum and other organisms important for sustaining ocean life.

This warm, life-giving ocean current is a key area of interest for the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies and it was scientists at HRI who provided the information for the signs.

"This is an exciting opportunity for HRI and the entire A&M-Corpus Christi community," Dr. Kelly M. Miller, University President and CEO, said. "As educators, our goal is to spread information far beyond the walls of a classroom and beyond our island. SeaWorld presents a new avenue for us to provide important scientific information in a unique way. Together, we can work to educate park guests about the need for environmental stewardship and conservation, and we appreciate the chance to partner with SeaWorld in this effort."

HRI worked closely with SeaWorld's Education staff to provide insight and knowledge to integrate various education elements into the ride experience.

"It is very important to us at SeaWorld to partner with research and conservation organizations like HRI to raise awareness of the importance of protecting our oceans," said Byron Surret, San Antonio Park President. "Through Texas Stingray, we can provide guests with both a thrilling and educational experience that inspires them to act in their own lives."

In addition, 5% of select Texas Stingray merchandise sales will be donated to HRI to help further their research and conservation efforts.

"This is an excellent way to engage and to teach people about oceans and why they should care," Dr. Greg Stunz, HRI Endowed Chair for Fisheries and Ocean Health and Professor of Marine Biology, said. "We hope to inspire future generations of students."

The theme of the new coaster reiterates the importance of protecting oceans and being mindful of marine animals, like stingrays, that inhabit coastal areas including the Texas coastline.

"Using interesting animals like rays and sharks helps spark people's interest in learning more about the ocean," Stunz said. He also serves as Director of HRI's Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation (CSSC).

Stunz said the rollercoaster also provides an opportunity to connect with prospective citizen scientists who may be regular visitors to the Coastal Bend and can assist HRI with data collection. One example of this are the many Texas anglers who have helped the Institute tag more than 6,000 sharks for conservation research.

"And when you get off the ride, there's other messaging about why you should

care about the Gulf of Mexico and some take-home points about what you can do to help conserve this wonderful ecosystem," he said. ♦



EVERYTHING IS BIGGER IN TEXAS, AND TEXAS STINGRAY IS NO EXCEPTION. RIDERS FACE:

100 ft
initial drop

55 mph
top speeds

3,379 ft
of track

100 ft
tunnel



ABOVE: Members of the HRI team, including Dr. Daniel Coffey, Postdoctoral Research Associate, and Dr. Greg Stunz, Professor of Marine Biology and Endowed Chair for Fisheries and Ocean Health, join in for the opening celebrations.



BEST BY THE SEA

Island Location Brings Ocean of Opportunity

Marine ecology students waded into a world of research opportunity during the early part of the spring semester. The excitement of collecting specimens from a rich marine environment did not require an airplane ride, car rental, and grueling trip to reach their research location.

Instead, at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, they waded into a research site just minutes away from their classroom at the University perched on its own island at the edge of Corpus Christi Bay.

The benefit of being so close to the water drew national attention in September 2019 when *Best College Reviews* selected the Island University for the top spot on its 50 Best Colleges By The Sea list. *Best College Reviews* ranked 50 seaside U.S. colleges based on their distance to the ocean, recreational opportunities on the water, and marine-based education, degrees, and research facilities.

With the bay at its doorstep, students, faculty, and staff can practice

the ultimate self-care in the form of water-based recreation – fishing, boating, wind-surfing, kayaking, and internationally recognized birding across the Coastal Bend, winter home of the endangered whooping crane.

What sets the University apart most significantly are the research opportunities so close at hand. This spring, marine ecology students depended on that proximity as they participated in a longtime tradition, the Diurnal.

For more than 45 years, researchers in the marine science program have conducted a 24-hour sampling of the organisms that inhabit Oso Bay, which borders the south side of campus. Samples of life in the water and in the sediment below are taken every four hours to represent a full day of activity in the bay. For students, it is a rare opportunity to experience a research process in an environment so rich in life, and so near classrooms and labs.

Students helping with the Diurnal

were able to quickly examine, identify, and return the creatures to the bay unharmed since first-rate lab resources were just minutes away from the water where marine organisms were collected.

“I think that it’s an amazing opportunity for us undergrads,” Joe Kuntz, marine biology student and first-time participant in the Diurnal, said. “Not a lot of classes would be able to give us the experience of doing research like this and being able to work with graduate students, postgraduates, and other professors.”

The Diurnal is also a unique mentoring moment for upper-level students.

“This is a perfect opportunity to get teaching experience and help out with this important research,” Alyssa Outhwaite, doctoral student in the marine biology program, said. “Supporting and showing students these different types of sampling techniques, how to ask the right questions, and how to engage with these environments, are all things that I hope to do with my future students.”

Scientific activities at A&M-Corpus Christi were given a boost last year with the opening of the world-class research facilities in Tidal Hall.

“The grand opening of Tidal Hall



Life Science Research Building is a milestone achievement for not only Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, but the community as whole,” University President and CEO Dr. Kelly M. Miller said at the official opening of the building in April 2019. “The research conducted in Tidal Hall ... will provide data-driven solutions to everyday problems that directly impact the environment of the Coastal Bend and beyond.”

Whether as a conduit for transporting goods via the Intracoastal Waterway or Port of Corpus Christi, or the site of outdoor recreational activities, the bays and Gulf of Mexico have a big impact on the Coastal Bend economy. Last year, Island University experts were instrumental in opening the way for the establishment of oyster farming, which is expected to become a major economic opportunity.

“Faculty research in the College of Science and Engineering (COSE) mirrors our region’s desire for a sustainable coastal lifestyle, balancing resource use with a healthy ecosystem,” COSE Dean Frank Pezold said. “Some faculty are studying natural oyster reef ecosystems and their restoration, while others partner with Texas AgriLife to bring oyster aquaculture to Texas. We have experts on harmful algal blooms in the Center for Coastal Studies and the Harte Research Institute, and researchers on deep-water hydrocarbon deposits and the microbes that feed on them.”

Pezold noted the connection between research and community benefits.

“Interestingly, what they study in the oceans can inform and impact other aspects of our lives as seen

in the COVID-19 modeling being done by researchers from the Conrad Blucher Institute and Genomics Core Lab, partnering with the city, county, business, and health community,” Pezold said.

In addition to partnering with the business community, the University is reaching out to stakeholders who have a common interest in area marine environments. One project being led by Dr. Jeffrey Turner, Assistant Professor of marine biology, involves high school students in nearby Riviera, Texas. The project is examining an algal bloom growing in Baffin Bay, which is an important fishery for the Riviera community.

“The idea is that we are training citizen scientists or what could potentially be the next generation of scientists,” Paxton Bachand, a Ph.D. student working with Turner, said. Students in a high school aquatic science class were trained to sample the waters of a tributary of Baffin Bay, assisting in the research project.

That connection to the water is an important element for researchers on campus as well.

“Your study site is right there,” Bachand said. “You are close to it; you get to work with it. You see it every single day. It puts the research into perspective.”

Recent funding for university projects underlines the importance of the work.

Earlier this year, researchers with the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies and the Center for Water Supply Studies were awarded nearly \$2 million in Texas Coastal Management Program grants to study issues affecting the water quality of Baffin Bay, Texas; to continue the oyster reef restoration, outreach, and citizen science project; and to model the impacts of sea level rise and storm surge on the Texas Coast.

For Bachand, while research can be satisfying because of potential global impact, being able to conduct important research in his own seaside community brings a deeper level of satisfaction.

“I would admit that was the reason I got into the sciences,” Bachand said. “It was a way that I could make a difference. I thought I could fill a role by being a scientist. It’s a way to give back, and if this can help out in some way, shape or form, I think you could say that we have done our job.” ♦

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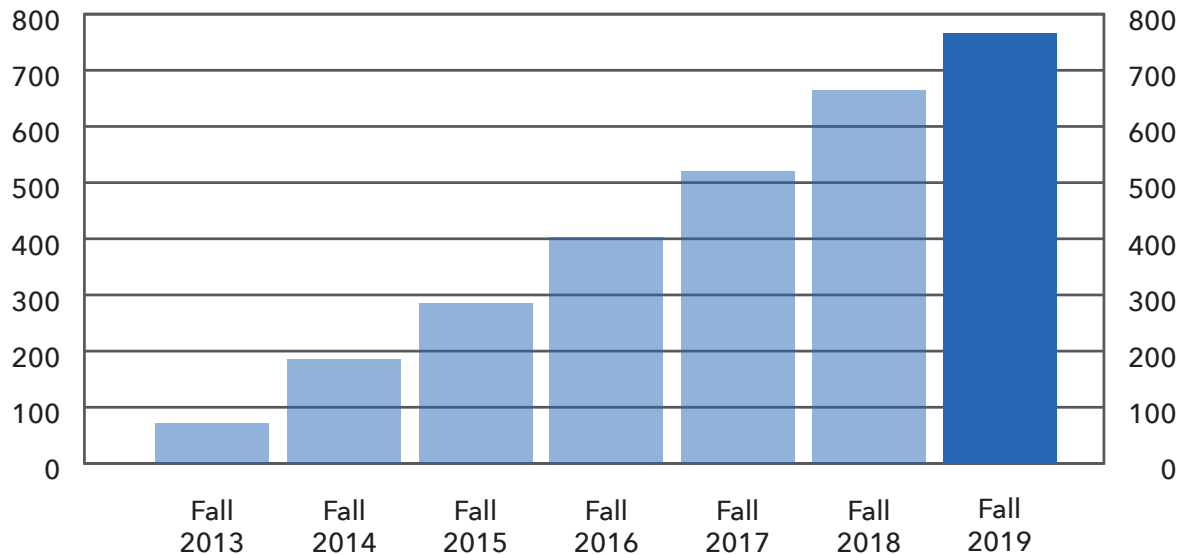
A PATH TO SUCCESS

Online MBA Program Sees Record Enrollment

When Becca Ramos Taylor crossed the stage at the fall 2019 commencement ceremony, she was among a record-setting group receiving master's degrees from the Online Master of Business Administration program at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Her group of graduates was more than 10 times as large as the first graduating class just six years ago.



ONLINE MBA PROGRAM ENROLLMENT HEADCOUNT



Growing from a fledgling program that started with 10 graduates in 2014, the College of Business Online MBA program had mushroomed to 112 graduates by last December. In total, 961 students have completed the program.

“The success of the Online MBA at A&M-Corpus Christi is a result of the combination of our well-known brand, elite accreditation, affordable tuition, and most importantly, the commitment of our faculty to teaching excellence,” Dr. John Gamble, Dean of the College, said. “The College of Business Online MBA faculty have taken a sincere interest in helping students master course concepts and tools needed to advance their careers.”

Enrollment has seen a steady increase, advancing from 72 students in the AACSB-accredited program’s first semester – fall 2013 – to approximately 900 students enrolled in spring 2020. Growth in graduate enrollment has allowed the College of Business to become the largest college at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, based on number of enrolled students.

The flexibility of the program was a big help for Taylor, who served as Marketing & Development Manager for the Harbor Playhouse in Downtown Corpus Christi while attending classes.

“Between my kids doing school activities, sports, and theatre, online

classes gave me the freedom to not miss the ‘moments,’” she said. “I was able to complete my assignments on my own time. With a new job and three kids, I needed to be able to work when I was able to find the time.”

The program offers the opportunity to complete a degree in as little as 12 months and a choice of six start times to fit almost any schedule. Taylor said the knowledge she gained from the program has made a difference in her work.

“I feel more confident when it comes to making managerial decisions and I

look at problems in a whole new light,” she said.

For Callie Byerly, who completed a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting in 2013, several factors drew her to the Online MBA program.

“I chose the program for the flexibility of working full time and taking classes in the evenings,” Byerly said. “It was also very affordable.”

Byerly is now a staff accountant at the San Antonio Food Bank.

Five concentrations are available: Accounting, Data Analytics, Finance,

TOP LOCATIONS FOR FALL 2019 ENROLLMENT



Texas | 631



California | 19



Florida | 15



Arizona | 11

Remaining 12% represented from: Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, FPO/APO, Canada, Ghana



ABOVE: Becca Ramos Taylor '19, at the Harbor Playhouse.

LEFT: S. Michelle Phillips '19 celebrates her graduation from the online MBA program.

FAR LEFT: Callie Byerly '13 is the staff accountant at the San Antonio Food Bank.

Healthcare Administration, and International Business. Ranked the Top One-Year Online Master's Program in 2016 by *The Best Master's Degrees*, the program has the same academic rigor as the on-campus MBA program.

The specialization in Healthcare Administration was a key benefit for graduate S. Michelle Phillips of New Carlisle, Ohio, as well as the ability to fast-track graduation. Phillips '19 says she found the program after researching the web for best-value online MBA programs.

"Unlike other programs that bait and switch about finishing in a defined time, TAMU-CC is true to their word and offers a path to graduation in 12 months or less depending on how hard you are willing to work," Phillips said. "More importantly, the online format is so easy to navigate that even individuals that have never been in an online program will be able to do it. Many of the instructors have videos as well as critical thinking exercises that will step by step guide you through the course content."

While most of the Online MBA

students are from Texas, students last fall were from 33 states, Canada, and as far away as Ghana. ♦

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) Accreditation is the hallmark of excellence in business education and has been earned by less than 5% of the world's business programs. Today, there are 694 business schools in 45 countries and territories that maintain AACSB Accreditation.



FORMATIVE FOUNDATION

Islander Music Scholarship Recipients Train Budding Musicians

In a brightly lit classroom at Hamlin Middle School, music majors Eric Heatherley and Dustin Hernandez worked on instrument fundamentals with sixth grade band students. Years of musical study have prepared Heatherley and Hernandez for this opportunity to share their knowledge with younger students. As scholarship recipients in the Islander Chamber Music Scholarship Program, Heatherley, Hernandez,



ABOVE: The Harmon and Grace Dobson Arts Fund supports 11 Islander music scholarships.
Pictured: Anne Dobson

and fellow music students who perform in the Lichtenstein String Quartet, Islander Brass Quintet +1, and Islander Winds ensembles each receive \$10,000 per academic year. Not only do scholarship recipients have access to world-class training and experiences at the Island campus, they are also required to teach music lessons once a week at a community location, perform throughout the semester for university functions and community events, and maintain academic excellence.

"IT REALLY FEELS GREAT KNOWING THAT PEOPLE WANT TO SEE THE ARTS FLOURISH."

DUSTIN HERNANDEZ, TAMU-CC STUDENT

In the spring semester, members of the Lichtenstein String Quartet taught at Metro Elementary School of Design,

and members from the Islander Brass Quintet +1 and Islander Winds taught underserved students at Hamlin. Both schools are part of the Corpus Christi Independent School District.

"We may be on an island, but our mentality is about taking our work into Corpus Christi and adding to the opportunities area children have to access quality musical experiences at critical stages of their development," Dr. Mary Thornton, Professor of Music and Trumpet, said.

Heatherley is a Corpus Christi native who graduated from Richard King High School in 2017 and transferred to the Island University in 2019 after two years at Del Mar College. He plays the oboe in the Islander Winds.

"The progress we've made is amazing," Heatherley said. He worked with the saxophone and oboe sections at Hamlin. He said the students didn't know how to play on the mouthpiece in the beginning, but later they were playing five notes on the instrument. "That's great progress in only a few months. Being here has helped me develop as a musician because the best way to learn something is to teach it," he said.

A 2017 graduate of Tuloso-Midway High School, Hernandez is a junior music education major who said he enjoyed the opportunity to provide supplemental instruction to novice trumpet players.

"I really want to be an educator to share music with anyone who is looking to understand this wonderful art form," Hernandez said. "It really feels great knowing that people want to see the arts flourish."

Hamlin Band Director Roger Vera said his students looked forward to working with these Islander music scholars.

"When you have 45 students in a class, it's hard to corral that energy," Vera said. When the Islander students came, Vera said he was able to send the trumpets to one room, percussion to another, tubas to another, and so on. "And my students loved it," he said. "And that plants the seed to make them think, 'Hey, I can go to college too.'"

The Lichtenstein String Quartet is funded by the Lichtenstein Foundation and Islander Brass Quintet and Islander Winds are funded by the Harmon A. and Grace W. Dobson Islander Chamber Music Scholarship Program. ♦



ABOVE: Music major Dustin Hernandez '22 demonstrates trumpet fundamentals to novice trumpet students at Hamlin Middle School.

ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP COUNCIL

Creating a scholarship endowment is one way to ensure your contribution will remain in perpetuity to support higher education and to help the University remain competitive in attracting the brightest students.

In recognition of donors making significant contributions or endowed scholarships, the University established the Endowed Scholarship Council.

For more information about the Endowed Scholarship Council or other giving opportunities, contact 361.825.3320.

ISLANDER ALUMNI GIVE BACK

Through New Mentorship Program

From learning how to succeed in class, to finding the perfect organization to join, and building a network of allies and friends, being a college student can be a challenging experience. To help students conquer these goals, the Islander Alumni Association has implemented a new mentorship program.

Established in fall 2019, the Islander Alumni Mentorship Program aids undergraduate students by connecting them with successful alumni who were once in their shoes. The program is currently in a pilot phase with 18 mentors/mentees participating.

“A mentor can share their experiences with students along with their obstacles and accomplishments,” Ed Cantu '81, owner of Ed Cantu Insurance and Financial Services, said. “This can help the mentee to anticipate and avoid

similar obstacles, leading them to accomplish their goals. After all, when one Islander succeeds, then the Island University succeeds.”

Cantu attended A&M-Corpus Christi under its former collegiate name, Corpus Christi State University (CCSU). For him, memories of undergraduate life are ones that continue to inspire.

“At CCSU, I was a 19-year-old junior surrounded by ‘non-traditional’ students. The average student was more than 10 years older than me, so it was not the usual college life you have now,” Cantu said. “I was able to learn real-world points of view from my older classmates; it was like having multiple mentors.”

Maksym Tkachuk '20, also known as Max, is a senior electrical engineering student and Cantu's mentee. For Tkachuk, the move to the Island

University was especially challenging, as he came from thousands of miles away – his hometown in Ukraine. A mentee in the program for only a few months now, Tkachuk has already seen the benefits of having an Islander alumnus as a mentor.

“Every Islander who would like to achieve something in their life should apply for this program,” Tkachuk said. “If you are passionate or active, and want to experience something new, this program is definitely for you.”

Tkachuk is the president of University Council of Student Organizations and Alpha Sigma Phi. He was also voted 2020 Homecoming King – the first international student ever to earn the title.

As his mentor, Cantu has created various off-campus networking opportunities for Tkachuk by inviting him to events including a banquet at the Art Museum of South Texas and a baseball game at Whataburger Field – Tkachuk's first experience with the sport. Through these opportunities, Tkachuk was introduced to prominent figureheads in the community, including city council members, the mayor of Corpus Christi, and Dr. Jack Dugan, longtime University supporter and donor.

“Meeting new people is one of my favorite experiences in the program,” Tkachuk said. “They're so open and excited to converse with a student.”

Cantu says he gets as much out of the program as he gives.

“My greatest experience has been to see things from a young person's perspective. I loved introducing Max to fellow community leaders,” Cantu said. “Each community leader has openly and freely thanked him for choosing Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and has offered their assistance and assurances to Max.”

The Alumni Association anticipates that the mentorship program will grow each year and expand to include alumni mentors in other cities around the state and nation. ♦

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING?

Alumni: visit islanderalumni.org/mentorapplication
Students: email Leslie.Mills@tamucc.edu

**“IF YOU ARE PASSIONATE OR ACTIVE, AND
WANT TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING NEW,
THIS PROGRAM IS DEFINITELY FOR YOU.”**

ED CANTU '81, ALUMNUS



LEFT: Ed Cantu '81 and Max Tkachuk '20 are inaugural participants of the Islander Alumni Mentorship Program.



ABOVE: Dr. Michelle Singh '14 passes out I-Know shirts to attendees of the QEP-sponsored I-Know Block Party.

LEFT: Dr. Cate Rudowsky helps Isabella Ruggiero as she explores the best way to compare two literary works.

Creating Better-Informed Students, Employees, and Citizens BEGINS WITH I-KNOW

In these complex times, navigating through a sea of information requires the sharpest of skills.

Doing so entails an understanding of the challenges created by bots and trolls alike. It also requires the ability to steer through the storm generated by content creators whose material blurs the lines between real and fake news.

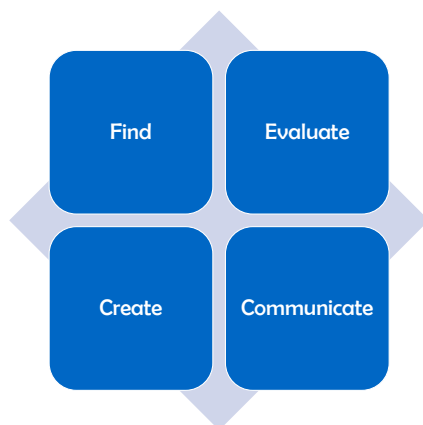
Looking to meet this challenge head on, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has launched a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) focused on digital information literacy called I-Know. A QEP is part of the University's long-term plan to address a critical need and is part of its reaccreditation process.

Digital information literacy – the ability to find, evaluate, create, and communicate knowledge using digital technologies to successfully and responsibly navigate the modern information landscape as global citizens – is a key strategy in helping today's students become astute, marketable, and technology-savvy job candidates, and responsible citizens.

I-Know was developed by a 20-member committee from across all

six academic colleges that is overseen by Drs. Catherine “Cate” Rudowsky and Michelle Singh.

“The goal is to provide students with deeper and broader understandings related to responsible consumption and creation of information,” Rudowsky said, noting that the four concepts are the quadrant of expectations for students.



The committee included the valuable input of student members, including graduate student Isabella Ruggiero.

“This plan will teach students to be lifelong learners,” said Ruggiero, who

is working on a Master of Arts in Communication. “I think my fellow Islanders will be more prepared than students at a lot of other universities because they’ve already been specifically tailored and supported to be evaluators of knowledge, and by extension, will be better writers and presenters of knowledge.”

Ultimately, students who have a critical awareness of information, along with the skills to utilize information technologies efficiently and effectively, will pay dividends for employers.

“We have a responsibility to make sure that our students leave this institution as globally competitive individuals,” Singh said. “I-Know is about making sure our students can process digital information regardless of what medium it comes in and regardless of what avenue they are in – whether it’s academic, professional, or civic.”

Implementation of I-Know will begin in fall 2020 in required First-Year Seminar courses and will be scaffolded throughout the academic careers of undergraduate students, including in capstone/research courses. ♦



ABOVE: Matthew Pickett '16 poses with an Extravehicular Mobility Unit, the current spacesuit used on the International Space Station.

MATTHEW PICKETT '16

Helping Build Next Generation Space Suit for NASA

Matthew Pickett '16 is reaching for the stars. Pickett, a mechanical engineer contracted to work with NASA, is on a team that is building space suits for use on the International Space Station.

Pickett says his degree, a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, was the tool he needed to initially propel his career.

"The engineering shop I had access to was really what made the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi engineering

program special," Pickett, a Corpus Christi native, said. "Not only did I learn the theory and fundamentals of engineering, but I was also able to apply what I learned hands-on in the lab. Having the ability to design, engineer, and then build a part in the shop was an invaluable experience which helped prepare me for my career path."

Less than a month after graduation, Pickett began working at a small, family-owned engineering firm located south of Houston before eventually transitioning to his current position at Jacobs Technology, Inc. as a Space Suit Systems Engineer. It is in this capacity that he works at NASA under his firm's JSC Engineering, Technology, and Science contract.

"I started on this project over a year ago, and even today I am still mind-blown that I am part of something so remarkable," Pickett said. "I remember visiting the Johnson Space Center as a child and was totally amazed by what

NASA had achieved. I never would have imagined that I would be working at NASA one day."

Currently, Pickett is part of the team engineering the xEMU, a next generation space suit that will be used on the International Space Station. The suit will also be used to support the Artemis III mission, which will land the first woman and next man on the moon in 2024. Pickett's role on the team is maintaining project-level technical plans, as well as working closely with other specialized engineer teams.

"It's incredible to work with some of the brightest minds on the planet," Pickett said. "It has been a pleasure to be part of this team, and I have gained an abundance of experience during my time here."

After having such early success in his career, Pickett extends advice to his fellow Islanders.

"Set a goal and push harder and harder each day to meet that goal," Pickett said. "Understand that it's not always going to be easy but stay focused. In order to succeed, you're going to fail sometimes. It's those who learn from their failures who ultimately succeed." ♦

**"I NEVER WOULD
HAVE IMAGINED
THAT I WOULD BE
WORKING AT NASA
ONE DAY..."**

MATTHEW PICKETT '16, ALUMNUS

FROM SERVICE MEMBER TO STUDENT

Expanded Veterans Resources Show Military Matters

Stepping off the line of duty and into the classroom can be a complicated shift for those who so bravely served our nation. The transition from active duty life to life as a student veteran doesn't happen overnight. It can take months or even years to adjust to the rigors of academia, which is demanding, but different than putting duty, honor, and country before self.

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi acknowledges and appreciates its student veterans in many ways and has continued to increase its resources and offerings, thanks to support from the local business community.

In fall 2017, the Island University created the Veterans Resource Center (VRC). Members of the campus community who work regularly with student veterans, along with several student vets, were involved in the planning and development of the center. One of the first programs implemented by the VRC was a student veterans'

orientation to assist with the transition from active duty to student. In 2019, Arthur Montiel was hired as the first full-time Veterans Resource Center Coordinator.

"Many of these men and women come in here not knowing a lot of people, and we want them to know we're here for them, we're here to help, and we're not going to let them fail," Montiel said. Montiel served for six years in the United States Army and is currently working on a master's degree at A&M-Corpus Christi.

"We've also started holding a formal ceremony the week of commencement to recognize student veterans who've made it to the finish line," Montiel said. "The ceremony gives their families, friends, and colleagues a chance to honor them for making it to graduation. We don't want them to think this is any small feat; we want them to know this is a great achievement."

Montiel's office is also a one-stop

shop to help active-duty military and student veterans in need of employment, housing, and mental health resources. His office also stays connected with the local veterans' community and creates connections between different generations of service.

Demonstrating support for Montiel and the Island University's efforts to increase programming support for student veterans, Cheniere Energy, Inc. made a \$30,000 gift toward programming for the VRC in fall 2019. Because of this gift, the VRC has been able to hire a tutor for student veterans, is working to expand its career transition programming, and will support community service projects and additional events to promote engagement and camaraderie among student veterans. Cheniere hopes that their support will help raise awareness in the Coastal Bend of the importance of resources for student veterans.

"Cheniere is humbled by the sacrifices that veterans and military service members have made. For that reason, Cheniere is committed to giving back through program funding supporting student veterans, and we are proud to support TAMU-CC's Veteran's Resource Center," Ari Aziz said. Aziz is Vice President and General Manager of Cheniere's Corpus Christi LNG facility.

Cheniere's effort to raise awareness for veterans' needs mirrors the intentions of the Student Veterans Organization (SVO). One of the most recent SVO projects led to the establishment of designated Purple Heart parking spaces on the Island campus.

"We wanted to take on a project that would not only honor our veterans, but would also help to make their life a little bit easier," SVO President Jackson Gray said. "When we thought about it, we agreed a group that deserved this recognition were Purple Heart Veterans – those who end up sacrificing more than the rest of us."

Two parking spaces are now marked at the University's Turtle Cove and Momentum Soccer Field parking lots for combat wounded veterans, with hopes to designate at least one to two spaces in each parking lot on campus in the future. ♦



Islander Nursing Students READY to fill **CRITICAL WORKFORCE GAP**

Within the next ten years, one million nurses will retire from their jobs, leaving behind a vast shortage within the healthcare system. This exodus will strike just as the baby boomer generation – equaling 71 million – enters retirement, further increasing the demand for nurses. The health needs of the baby boomer generation is only one reason nurses are in demand. The need for additional nurses became even more clear as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe.

"THE PROGRAM TEACHES STUDENTS HOW TO FORM A HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE..."

DR. BUNNY FORGIONE
CONHS INTERIM DEAN

Coupled with this massive need, the nursing field also faces an issue of high turnover – 8-37% nationally – due to job stress, nurse burnout, and other factors. While many states are projected to produce enough nurses to meet the demand in ten years, Texas is forecast to have a deficit of almost 60,000.

As part of an effort to address this anticipated shortage, the College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS) offers incentivized and innovative programs designed to support Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students in college and beyond.

"Our program is one of the top programs in the nation. It's five semesters long and the curriculum is robust," Dr. Bunny Forgione, Interim Dean of CONHS, said. "It's not easy. We have about 1,000 students currently and we're training them to be the best of the best."

Thanks to numerous Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grants, the College has provided millions in scholarships through the RN Empowerment and Advancement

through Diversity (READY) Program and other stipends.

"We are implementing aspects of holistic admissions and we're recruiting a more diverse population," Forgione said.

The READY Program, funded through the HRSA's Nursing Workforce Diversity Program (NWD), is designed to provide opportunities to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds – ultimately helping to create a nursing workforce that better mirrors the community it serves.

"In the end, this will lead to better patient outcomes. Having a nursing workforce that matches our population will help patients feel more comfortable, and I think they'll be more open to healthcare and healthcare education."

Since 2016, the READY Program at the Island University has provided yearly scholarships of up to \$4,000 and stipends of up to \$7,500. The program is the third in a series of HRSA NWD awards, totaling almost \$4 million. While scholarships help students financially, the READY Program also offers academic and peer support, mentoring, and fosters habits that will allow students to thrive and endure in a high-stress nursing field. To date, the READY Program has supported 322 Island BSN students with financial and educational resources.

"The program teaches students how to form a healthy work-life balance so, once they graduate, they have the tools to care for themselves and they don't experience burnout within a year of working as a full-time nurse," said Forgione.

Shanee Brown '19 is a Navy veteran and READY Program participant. She says the program not only helped her succeed in school, but also eased her transition into her career as a BSN trained registered nurse at Corpus



LEFT: Dr. Bunny Forgione steps in to assist Islander nursing students during a morning simulation lab.



Christus Medical Center-Bay Area. As part of the program's ongoing counseling and support, READY students are asked to commit to regularly scheduled meetings with a success coach and project manager while identifying and working toward academic, personal, and professional goals.

"You have success coaching, people to vent to, and there is always someone who will help guide you throughout your time in the nursing program – whether that's

faculty or your fellow students," Brown said. "You really feel a sense of family. They take care of you and we take care of each other. It's no man left behind. You don't need to have three jobs just to survive. You're given every opportunity to be successful."

CONHS will continue applying for HRSA grants to support students in new, innovative ways. In the meantime, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi nursing students already have bright outcomes.

"I think 100% of my graduating class already have jobs lined up and some have already started working," Brown said. "Of course, there's always jobs in big cities, but I'm staying here. I'm not a native of Corpus Christi, but I love all the people and nurses I've interacted with here. I don't see myself moving anytime soon."

Since 2010, CONHS has graduated a total of 2,154 BSN trained nurses into the workforce. ♦

Islander Community Mourns the Loss of **TWO DEDICATED FRIENDS**

The Islander community is saddened by the loss of two long-time friends. Honorary alumnus Bernard Paulson '14 and Rabbi Kenneth Roseman both passed away in May 2020, leaving a void at the University and in the community.

"Both of these gentlemen were unwavering in their generosity, kindness, and dedication to the University and the greater community. Their impact will remain with us forever," Dr. Kelly M. Miller, President and CEO of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, said.

BERNARD PAULSON

Paulson received an honorary doctoral degree in 2014. As a business leader and philanthropist, he also served as a past president for the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Foundation and was instrumental in bringing an engineering program to the Island that would help train the next generation of engineers for the Coastal Bend.

**"...HIS IMPACT WILL
RESONATE WITH US
FOR A LIFETIME."**

PRESIDENT KELLY MILLER

He retired in 1988 as President of Koch Refining Company and Vice President of Koch Industries. He then returned to Corpus Christi and was soon involved in new business and civic endeavors. He headed the task force that led to completion of the Mary Rhodes Pipeline, a project that ensured the city's water supply and, thus, growth for

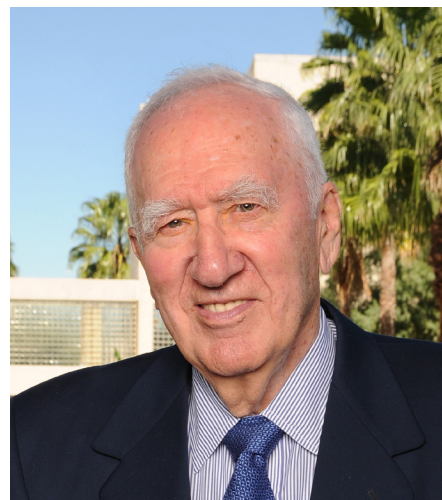
several decades.

As the son of an engineer, and a chemical engineer himself, he advocated for an engineering program at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. In 2009, the Island University began to offer engineering degrees, largely in part to his support.

He contributed generously to the University through the Bernard and Joan Paulson Scholarship Endowment. This scholarship is awarded to students majoring in engineering, and it has helped to expand the College of Science and Engineering and has assisted in the recruitment and retention of the best and brightest engineers of tomorrow. Because of his impact and advocacy on campus and in the community, Paulson was named the 2008 Newsmaker of the Year by the Corpus Christi Caller-Times.

In addition to his work for the University, he was a tireless fundraiser and advocate for Del Mar College, the Art Museum of South Texas, Driscoll Children's Hospital and John Paul II High School. He also served as Port of Corpus Christi Commissioner for 12 years and has served on many boards within the community. He was instrumental in the creation of Fiesta de los Niños, the Distinguished Speaker Series, and countless other galas and fundraising events in Corpus Christi. His beloved "Bernie's Famous Crawfish Boil" fundraiser has generated scholarship funds at Del Mar College for more than a decade.

"It will be impossible to fill the void Bernie has left on this campus," President Miller said. "His generosity, wisdom, and undeniable presence changed our University, and our community, forever and his impact will resonate with us for a lifetime."



ABOVE: Bernard Paulson

RABBI KENNETH ROSEMAN

Rabbi Roseman came to Corpus Christi in 2002 and he planned to stay for just one year at Temple Beth El. Instead, he helped the Jewish community as it merged the Temple with B'nai Israel Synagogue to form Temple Beth El and remained there until 2014.

Prior to coming to Corpus Christi, Roseman served as rabbi in Dallas at Temple Shalom and Madison, Wisconsin, at Temple Beth El. He was ordained at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and later served there as dean for eight years. In addition, he led the Institute for Jewish Life in New York in 1974.

He was an avid historian and author. His works include "Of Tribes and Tribulations" and "Do-it-Yourself Jewish Adventures," an adventure series for young adults. He co-authored "Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas" with Hollace Ava Weiner and co-produced a

YouTube series called “We Saw the Lifted Lamp,” a history of American Jews, with Maya Hiatt.

His love of history led him to the Island University where he taught three classes in the Department of Humanities from 2010-2015. Roseman even developed a course, Issues in Contemporary Religion, along with teaching U.S. History Since 1865 and

History of Religion in the United States. He also served as a guest speaker in History of World Religions.

“Rabbi Roseman was such an important part of our University,” President Miller said. “He had the ability to connect with anyone he met and truly was an example and advocate of lifelong learning. Students and faculty alike were drawn to his kindness, and he will be sorely missed.”

In addition to teaching, he was a lifelong learner who audited classes at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi nearly every semester. He audited courses in politics, religion, history and more, which reflected his desire to keep exploring and striving to learn more. Colleagues and fellow students remember him as a caring, compassionate person who loved to be around students and stay connected to the world around him.

“I was fortunate to be a fellow student in a philosophy of religion class with Kenneth Roseman a few semesters ago,” Harley Mathews said.

“We always stopped to talk to one another. He thought deeply, listened with compassion, and encouraged both of those disciplines in myself. I am grateful for lunches and smiles and class conversations with him.” ♦



ABOVE: Rabbi Kenneth Roseman, Corpus Christi Caller-Times file photo

**"HE THOUGHT
DEEPLY, LISTENED
WITH COMPASSION,
AND ENCOURAGED
BOTH OF THOSE
DISCIPLINES IN
MYSELF."**

HARLEY MATHEWS, TAMU-CC STUDENT



President's Circle at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi directly supports the top priorities and vision of Dr. Kelly M. Miller and the faculty and staff. With the contributions made by members of President's Circle, the University is able to uphold its unparalleled commitment to every student's success by providing funding for the initiatives that have been identified as crucial to the success of Islander students. Funding is additionally used for numerous annual activities and programming implemented throughout the year by the President's Office, further building upon community engagement.

MEMBER BENEFITS

Membership in President's Circle places you among individuals who continually focus their efforts on the vitality of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. You are both an advisor and a friend to the University. Throughout the year, we host many events and activities exclusively for President's Circle members. We greatly appreciate the support of this devoted group.

presidentscircle.tamucc.edu

MEMBER LEVELS: *Gold Circle: \$5,000 | Silver Circle: \$2,500 | Bronze Circle: \$1,000*

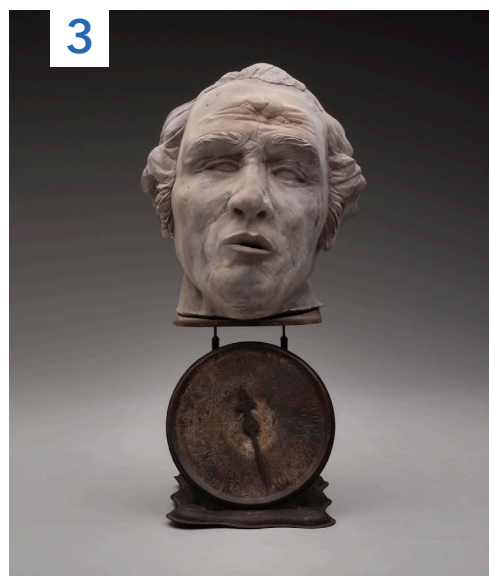
TOP NEWS

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi



DR. SHERDEANA OWENS RECOGNIZED BY A&M SYSTEM FOR IMPACT ON DIVERSITY AND HEALTH CARE

For her efforts in raising diversity awareness and education in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, Dr. Sherdeana Owens, Clinical Assistant Professor and Health Sciences Coordinator, was selected to represent the Island University at the first-ever Chancellor's Summit on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Owens, along with other A&M System campus representatives, facilitated the creation of System-wide programming around the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion.



2 RELLIS CAMPUS SELECTS LONE STAR UAS CENTER TO ASSIST WITH DRONE POLICY, SUPPORT

In January 2020, the Lone Star UAS Center of Excellence & Innovation at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and administration from the RELLIS Campus in Bryan, Texas, signed a memorandum of understanding to collaboratively develop an airspace management plan and a flight operations cell to support aeronautics research at RELLIS. This is the first time a regional university in the A&M System has established a satellite office on the RELLIS Campus for research and innovation.

As one of the nation's seven FAA authorized test sites, Lone Star provides expertise, authorizations, and access to airspace that exceeds the allowances afforded through the FAA's current small UAS rules. These authorizations provide opportunities beyond those currently available to other System universities and agencies. Lone Star personnel plan to work on a Texas A&M System UAS policy, as well as one specific to the RELLIS Campus, with a goal of serving as the UAS supervising authority for planned UAS flight activity.

3 SCULPTURE PROFESSOR RICHARD W. JAMES WINS CHRYSALIS AWARD

Assistant Professor of Art Richard W. James was named the sole 2019 Chrysalis Award recipient for his intricately detailed mixed media sculptures. The award, established in 2016 by the James Renwick Alliance, provides winners with an unrestricted \$5,000 award to be used for future works of art. James is in his second semester in the Department of Art and Design and teaches a Ceramics I course for beginning students and an Anatomical Figure class for senior level art majors.

4 ISLANDERS VOLUNTEER UNIQUE SKILLS DURING NATIONAL HOMELESS COUNT

Showing compassion, empathy, and Islander spirit, Islander students took to emergency shelters, transitional housing, and unsheltered locations in January 2020, volunteering time to collect data from around Nueces County during the Annual Point in Time (PIT) Count. Information gathered during the PIT Count will be used to measure federal and local progress in preventing and ending homelessness.

Organizers of the PIT Count say Islander students were a unique help to the cause, as they excelled in digital literacy and advanced communication skills, ensuring optimal results for this year's count.

5 ISLAND UNIVERSITY RANKED AMONG BEST SCHOOLS IN TEXAS FOR ONLINE EDUCATION

As a result of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi's commitment to quality online education, the Island University ranked No. 23 on Study.com's list of best online colleges and schools in Texas. Ranking decisions were made based on affordability, education quality, and support services.

At the start of the spring 2020 semester, 14% of Island University students were enrolled in online classes full time, while 42% of students were taking at least one online course. Online students access rigorous academic content on a schedule that is conducive to their work/life situation while maintaining meaningful interactions with their professors and classmates.

6 ATHLETIC TRAINING PUSHES INTO THE FUTURE

Texas A&M-Corpus Christi welcomes a Master of Science in Athletic Training (MSAT) degree in summer 2020. The accredited program, which recently transitioned from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree, is designed to prepare health care professionals to collaborate with physicians to optimize patient activity and participation.

Athletic training is a broad field which includes the prevention, diagnosis, and intervention of emergency, acute, and chronic medical conditions. The MSAT program is designed to provide Islander students with an immersive clinical experience with diverse patient populations. Upon completion of the degree program, students will have met all requirements to sit for the national certification exam.

VETERAN, MOTHER, SCHOLAR;

Rebecca Heath Earns Legacy Ring

In spring 2020, five Islander students were given an Islander Legacy Ring, courtesy of the Islander Alumni Association. It's a tradition that honors the profound contributions that students make to the Island campus and beyond.

For Rebecca Heath '20, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi senior economics major and veteran, her Islander Ring is emblematic of her devotion to her studies, peers, and professors.



"It was a huge gift that I wasn't expecting," Heath said. "College has been a huge piece of my life and this has such sentimental value. I almost cried."

Heath came to the Island University after leaving the Air Force where she served for six years as an aerospace ground equipment mechanic. After having a child, she and her husband moved to Corpus Christi to be closer to his family and so Heath could attend school.

"I came from a poor family and it was through military support that I was able to go to college," Heath said. "I wanted to give my son a better situation than I had, and a business degree was the best option. I ended up falling in love with economics. I chose TAMU-CC because of its business accreditation, and because the campus was perfect for me, not too big, a beautiful city, veteran-friendly and a comfortable community with lots of culture."

All students who receive Legacy Rings are nominated by Islander faculty or staff. In Heath's case, it was Dr. Deniz Gevrek, Associate Professor of Economics, who made the nod. Not only was Heath in many of Gevrek's classes, but she also served as Gevrek's teaching assistant (TA).

"COLLEGE HAS BEEN A HUGE PIECE OF MY LIFE AND THIS HAS SUCH SENTIMENTAL VALUE."

REBECCA HEATH, TAMU-CC STUDENT

"I have had many opportunities to witness Rebecca's devotion, attention to detail, and skills both in and out of the classroom," said Gevrek. "She has a commitment to excellence that will carry her far in her career."

Over the course of her degree, Heath found herself being asked by classmates to act as their unofficial tutor and decided that a job as an economics tutor at the Center for Academic Success (CASA) was the next logical step.

A nursing student taking Principles of Economics as an elective was one of



ABOVE: Dr. Deniz Gevrek, Associate Professor of Economics, collaborates with her student Rebecca Heath, Legacy Ring recipient.

Heath's most memorable pupils at CASA. Heath says that while the student was highly skilled in pharmaceuticals, she had no previous economics knowledge.

"We worked hard together, and she ended up getting an 'A' in the class," said Heath. "I was so proud; it was like she was my little economics baby bird that grew into an economics eagle!"

Besides working as a TA and tutor, Heath serves as treasurer for the Student Veteran Organization. She says she appreciates the strong veteran-friendly atmosphere of the University, along with the irreplaceable friendships she's made with fellow vets.

"Everyone has been very accepting and helpful about my veteran status. I was even able to participate in a veteran-only first-year seminar where I got to connect with my veteran community," Heath said.

Ultimately, Heath intends to attend Ohio State University to pursue a Ph.D. in economics. She says she got a leg-up on the admissions process thanks to her professors, as well as the unending support of her husband, Blaine.

"My beautiful husband has supported me since the beginning when we were in the military together," Heath said. "When I made the choice to leave the Air Force, he was instantly in my corner supporting me. Even now, he's willing to go anywhere with me because I have something special with economics, and he wants to see me take it as far as I can."

As she nears her graduation in summer 2020, Heath extends warm regards to her economics professors.

"They've never once given up on any student in class. They've helped me in so many ways from understanding economics in the civilian world to picking schools for my doctoral degree," Heath said. "All the economics professors are my favorite."

Students usually participate in the Ring Ceremony at Lee Plaza where they can toss a sand dollar into the fountain and make a wish before they graduate, but the COVID-19 pandemic put a temporary damper on that tradition. Islanders will receive their rings via mail this summer, and they will be able to participate in future ceremonies. ♦

ADDITIONAL STUDENTS WHO RECEIVED A LEGACY RING IN SPRING 2020 INCLUDE:

Anuja Dhakal '21 | Nursing major

Zach Green '20 | Marketing major

Mia Gonzales '21 | Psychology and Criminal Justice dual major

Maria Maldonado '20 | Finance major/
Islanders Tennis



ABOVE: Men's tennis senior Chad Nguyen delivers a serve during doubles play at the Thomas J Henry Tennis Complex.

SEASON INTERRUPTED

Student-Athletes make History in Spite of Pandemic

As news of the COVID-19 outbreak spread globally, Islanders Athletics learned their seasons would be cut short. In March, the NCAA and the Southland Conference announced that winter championships and all spring competition would be canceled. The NCAA granted spring sport seniors an extra year of eligibility.

A historic championship season for Islanders Women's Basketball came to an abrupt halt. The announcement came

during a practice session in preparation for the Southland Tournament. The team won the program's first Southland regular season title, an outright championship that slotted the Islanders as the No. 1 seed in the conference tournament with a school record 17 SLC victories. Senior Alexes Bryant was named the Southland Defensive Player of the Year and Royce Chadwick garnered conference Coach of the Year honors.

A month into the season, Islanders Baseball had picked up wins over Kansas State, Missouri, and UTSA among others. In the first Southland series of the year, A&M-Corpus Christi took two wins over UIW and were primed for a run toward a strong seed in the Southland Tournament, which was slated to be held at Corpus Christi's Whataburger Field in May.

Beach Volleyball was riding a five-match winning streak before the halt in play including a victory over nationally ranked Tulane University. The program was primed to host the Southland Conference's first championship tournament in April

at The Water's Edge in downtown Corpus Christi.

With three top-10 finishes to begin the spring season, Islanders Golf was looking to make a push forward at the Southland Championships under second year head coach Joni Stephens. With three tournaments still on their schedule, the team had carded 173 total birdies, ranking sixth in program history and approaching the school record of 251 set in 2019-20.

Islanders Softball began its first season under new head coach Kristen Zaleski. Within the first month of her first season, the Islanders picked up wins over UAB, Louisiana-Monroe, South Dakota State, Texas Southern, Syracuse and Southeastern Louisiana.

Islanders Track & Field had seven All-Southland performances at the 2020 Indoor Championships. Colton Cohea won the men's Heptathlon and Valentina Campos earned All-Southland honors in the 3,000m, 5,000m and the distance medley relay.

With 22 Southland titles, Islanders Tennis was gearing up for another run at a conference title. The men had yet to start Southland play but had already won 12 matches and Ryuya Ata had been named Player of the Week four times. The women won 13 matches during the spring, going 7-1 at home and 3-1 in Southland play.

After the completion of winter sports, Islanders Athletics sat in a tie for third place in the Southland Conference Commissioner's Cup, an all-time best. The Islanders were poised for success across the board, and all teams are now looking to build upon their success next season. ♦



ABOVE: Women's golf student-athletes (L to R) Maria Beltran, Kelli Ann Dugan and Aimee Aleman walk the fairway at the Corpus Christi Country Club.

Islander Student-Athletes Prioritize **COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Islanders student-athletes were making waves on the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi campus and throughout the community during the 2019-20 academic year.

At the beginning of September, Islanders hit the streets for Conquer the Coast, an annual cycling ride around Corpus Christi Bay. Student-athletes helped the riders make it to the finish line by providing water and snacks at hydration stations throughout the course. Later in the month, several students assisted with the Suicide Awareness Ruck March on campus by making route signs and assisting in event setup and breakdown.

"We loved being able to give back to the community. Being involved with Conquer the Coast personally for four years now has been a lot of fun," said Kandace Johnson, senior softball student-athlete. "It is a time where families come together to get active and get outdoors, and I love being able to serve them water and make sure they have everything they need to have a successful ride."

Student-athletes from several teams, including soccer, softball, beach volleyball, men's and women's track & field and cross country, made visits to local schools in October for Red Ribbon Week. The Islanders spoke to students

at Kaffie Middle School and St. Pius X Catholic School about the importance of making good choices and living a healthy lifestyle.

"When I heard there was an opportunity to visit my middle school (Kaffie) as a Division I student-athlete, there was no way I would miss it," said Sergio Alcorta, junior men's track and field jumper. "I was once exactly where they were, and I wanted to be able to show them with hard work, dedication in the classroom and the formation of good habits at a young age, it's possible to do and be anything they want."

Halloween was full of spooky fun as baseball continued working with the USS Lexington Haunted House. The Islanders also provided alcohol and drug awareness education to their fellow students at the I-TEAM's Escape Room. Student-athletes capped off the festivities as they dressed up and took part in the Ronald McDonald House Halloween Celebration for the second consecutive year, playing games and handing out candy to the children in the house.

Despite the semester winding down, the student-athletes ramped up their outreach, first participating in the annual Paws on the Island event hosted by the University Counseling Center. The student-athletes helped their fellow Islanders relieve stress by playing games

and doing arts and crafts. To cap off the semester, student-athletes from nearly every team lent their time to the Harbor Lights Festival, spreading joy and the holiday spirit to the Corpus Christi community.

"Being a part of something so wonderful like Harbor Lights makes it easy to serve the community," said Marissa Martinez, sophomore cross country and track and field student-athlete. "I feel that it is important to get involved so that we show the community we care and so we also have something to look forward to each year."

In February, more than 90 student-athletes took part in a cleanup on North Beach to kick off their Southland Conference Week of Service as they gathered to help beautify one of Corpus Christi's favorite beaches. They spent nearly two hours picking up litter, compiling numerous bags of trash. The group left with a sense of pride knowing fellow beachgoers could now enjoy their time in the sand.

"We strive to represent the Corpus Christi community with pride, and we want to create an environment for everyone to enjoy," said sophomore track and field student-athlete Ke'Tavion Humber. "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is a waste."

The Islanders' next stop was the Coastal Bend Food Bank, also in February. Several student-athletes worked shifts each day inspecting, sorting and boxing donated food items. The Islanders chose the food bank as their annual Student-Athlete Advisory Committee service initiative and have been volunteering there since September 2019.

"Volunteering at the Coastal Bend Food Bank is an amazing experience because you get to participate and see firsthand how individuals are striving to help others and the surrounding communities," said Carissa Barnes, women's volleyball freshman. "While sorting, packing and inspecting food, I became inspired to engage in more volunteer work because the smallest act of kindness can affect so many people, including yourself." ♦



LEFT: Islander student-athletes participated in the North Beach Cleanup on Saturday, Feb. 8.





UNFORGETTABLE

Championship Journey for Islanders Women's Basketball

In fall 2019, Islanders Women's Basketball entered their season on a mission. They were coming off a thrilling run the previous March, which culminated in a gut-wrenching one-point loss to Abilene Christian in the Southland Conference tournament championship final game. The group entered the season with a singular focus: return to that same title game and dictate an entirely different outcome – an outcome that would bring a tournament championship trophy back to the Island and send the women to the first NCAA tournament appearance in program history.

With eight seniors returning and several talented newcomers, the Islanders authored a season of firsts. The program's first ever appearance in the preseason Women's National Invitation Tournament provided valuable early season experience against high-level competition. Coach Royce Chadwick's squad hit their stride in conference play, winning 14 out of their last 15 games and delighting rapidly growing and raucous student crowds at the Dugan Wellness Center. A late season road win over Sam Houston State gave the Islanders a leg up in a tightly contested four-team race for the top spot in the conference. In front of a frenzied Senior Day crowd at the American Bank Center on March 7, the Islanders defeated Houston Baptist to clinch the first Southland Conference regular season championship in program history. They also clinched a coveted double bye into the semifinals of the

Southland Conference Tournament in Katy, Texas. Having won seven straight games and clicking on all cylinders, the Islanders were just two wins away from the goal they had set out to achieve: an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament.

On March 12, the Islanders were wrapping up their practice and preparing for the bus ride to Katy. As a result of the rapidly evolving public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Southland Conference announced suddenly that its basketball tournament was canceled. Later that day, the NCAA announced that its men's and women's basketball tournaments – along with all spring sport championships – were canceled. While the NCAA announced that spring sport student-athletes would receive an additional year of eligibility, that was not offered for winter sport student-athletes including basketball. For Islanders Women's Basketball, a historic season ended abruptly with unfinished business. For the seniors, it was an unexpectedly sudden end to their college careers.

Despite their heartbreak and disappointment, the members of the 2020 Islanders Women's Basketball program can take great pride in their tremendous accomplishments:

- A school record 17 conference wins and a best-ever 13-1 record at home
- The first conference championship in program history
- And a season in which they captured the hearts of Islanders fans with their talent and fierce determination

While the script was left unfinished, the 2019-20 Islanders Women's Basketball season was an unforgettable championship journey. ♦



OPPOSITE: Emma Coleman-O'Bryan lines up a three-pointer in front of the Islanders student section, the Deep End, at the Dugan Wellness Center.

LEFT: Freshman and Corpus Christi native Hayle Campbell drives past a defender from UTRGV.

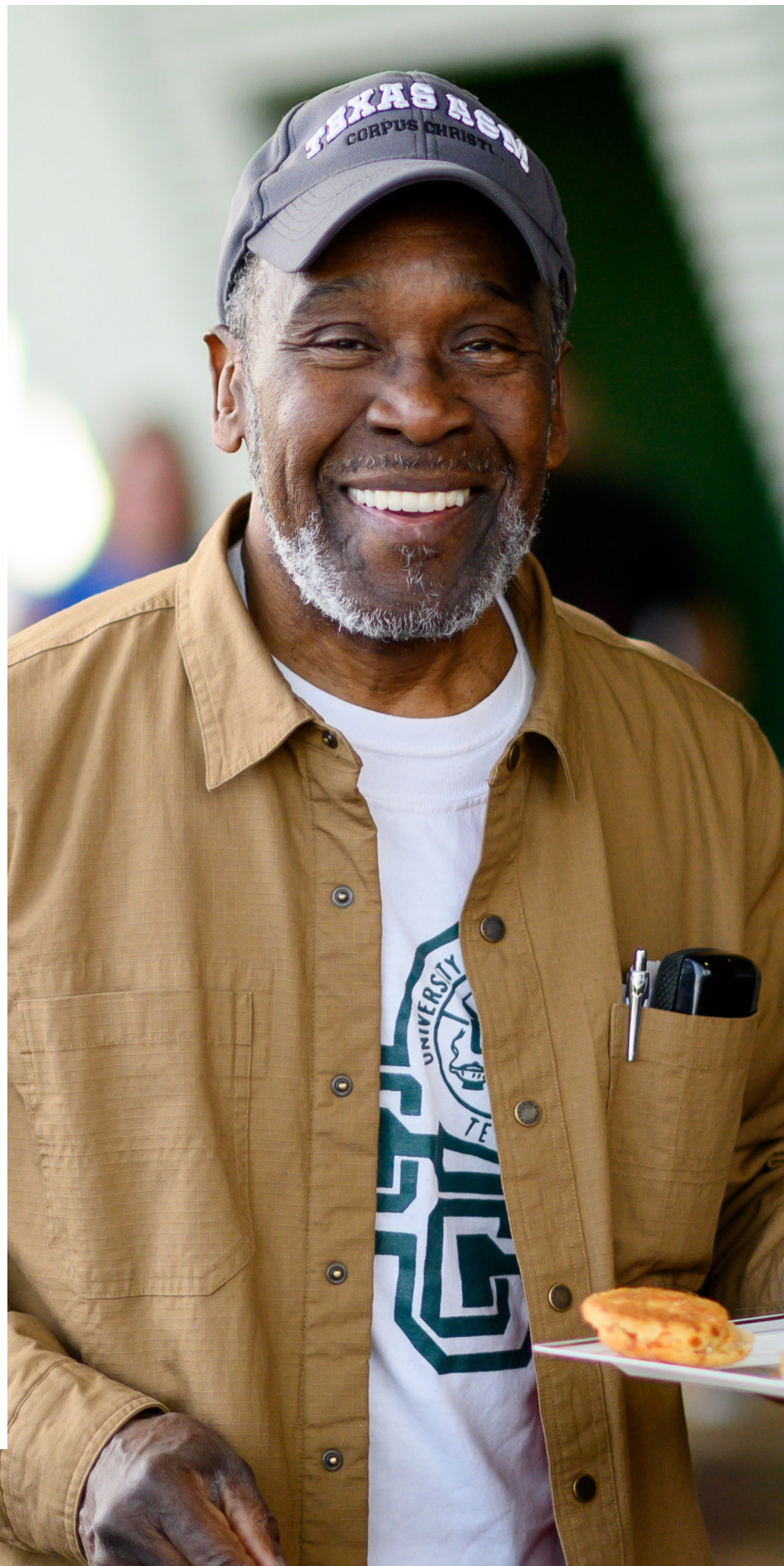
ISLANDER ALUMNI

Share Memories, Celebrate Homecoming 2020

From Tarpons to Islanders, each alumnus is a line in the storied past of our University's history. Since 1947, the Island University has undergone multiple name changes, mascot changes, and a major reconstruction following the wrath of Hurricane Celia. Through all these changes, generations of Islanders have come and gone with each alumnus holding one sentiment true – the Island is home. This year, as in years past, alumni far and wide made the trip back to their beloved Island and alma mater for Homecoming 2020, to recount the days of university life and traditions.

As a member of the class of 1970, a time when the campus was known as University of Corpus Christi (UCC), alumnus Terry Burrowes made the journey from New Jersey to Corpus Christi to celebrate the approaching 50-year anniversary of his graduation. Burrowes is retired after being an international educator, Head of School, Spanish educator, and educational administrator. He also operated his own theatre company for more than 10 years after falling in love with the stage while attending UCC.

"I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Speech and Theatre, and it was through this University that I got the opportunity to be on stage and audition for a play at the Little Theatre – now the Harbor Playhouse," Burrowes said. "My professor, Dr. Wilson, encouraged me to audition there and because of that experience, when I graduated UCC, I went on to start my own theatre company, Clinton Hill Repertory Company in Brooklyn, New York City!"



At Homecoming 2020, Burrowes recounted his years at UCC with his involvement in the social fraternity, Kappa Sigma Kappa, and the UCC Cheerleading Squad.

"IT MAKES ME FEEL HONORED TO SHARE MY STORIES - TO SHOW THESE YOUNG PEOPLE HOW THE TARPONS STARTED IT ALL."

TERRY BURROWES '70, ALUMNUS

"UCC exposed me to new opportunities. It was here that I ran the language lab where we taught students Spanish. Technology was just starting and there were no computers back then," Burrowes recalled. "Also, I was a deejay on our University's radio station, KUCC. The station was only heard on campus, but it was special for us. As captain of our cheerleading squad, we cheered for our basketball team, which included the legendary Roy Ford, all the way to the championship in Kansas City."

Unlike generations of students before his class, Burrowes and the class of 1970 were unable to 'walk' the stage for graduation, as Hurricane Celia ravaged the Corpus Christi community on August 3, 1970, destroying much of Ward Island in its wake. According to University archives, the storm left behind more than \$1 million in damage to the Island campus.

"As a young man, I had worked so hard and was ready to graduate, my family was ready to see me walk that stage, had made plans to travel and were so excited," Burrowes said. "But then we had a hurricane, so it was canceled – they never got to see their son graduate. So now being here, seeing how this University has grown, it feels like such an honor."

Making a shorter, yet just as meaningful trip back to A&M-Corpus Christi for Homecoming 2020, was two-time alumna Lauren Young '05, '07.

"Since I was kid, I dreamed of studying marine biology, and when my mom

and I visited the campus I fell in love so much I decided to get both of my biology degrees here," Young said. "I'm a little envious but extremely happy to see how the Island University has continued to grow and expand since my time here."

Now living in Austin, Young shared her excitement of spreading "Islander Forever" spirit as president of the Austin Islander Alumni Association chapter.

"As one of my newest adventures as the president of the Austin chapter, it's been great to bring some blue and green to a city that's completely 'burnt orange,'" Young said. "It was exciting to be here and cross paths with people from different classes and different majors that I otherwise might not have met. It was my first time coming to Homecoming as a part of the extended alumni family."

Throughout the weekend of Homecoming 2020, both Burrowes and Young attended numerous alumni events from a brunch and campus tour, to the popular Alumni and Friends Tailgate. Sparking a new alumni tradition, graduates of the class of '95 and UCC graduates from classes '48-'73, were invited to attend an inaugural Class Reunion Luncheon held in downtown Corpus Christi.

"Looking around I got emotional – my eyes teared up – because I'm seeing people that I hadn't seen for a long time," Burrowes said. "I realize as I talk with old friends, there are a number of us who are no longer with us, and that makes an event like this that much more important. It makes me feel honored to share my stories – to show these young

people how the Tarpons started it all."

Reflecting the same alumni pride, Young expressed the importance of celebrating as one big Islander family.

"When I look at this Homecoming celebration, and I see not just students and alumni, but community members too, coming out to support the University, it is amazing," Young said. "This visit for me was more than just Homecoming. It was a family reunion and I'm already looking forward to next year." ♦



TOP: Lauren Young '05, '07, and Peggy Lara '98, '01, '12, Alumni Association President-Elect, enjoy brunch and a tour of campus during Homecoming Week.

ABOVE: Terry Burrowes '70, meets University President Kelly M. Miller during the Alumni and Friends Tailgate Party.



ABOVE: Celebrating Islander and Tarpon Spirit, UCC graduates and class of 1995 grads reunite during the Inaugural Alumni Reunion Lunch.

ISLANDER HOCO

Students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members celebrated Islander spirit during Homecoming 2020. We hope you will join us for Homecoming 2021! Stay tuned for dates and a full schedule of events.



HOMECOMING BANQUET HONOREES FROM LEFT:

Christine Salch '84: Outstanding Alumnus

Larry Mills '77: Distinguished Alumnus

Brianna Brink '15, '17: Hall of Honor, Volleyball All-American

Mayra Viviana Zamora '10, '14 : Young Alumnus



ABOVE: Jake Hoot, Season 17 Champion of NBC's "The Voice," performs at the 2020 Islander Homecoming Block Party.





CLASS NOTES

1950s

Gene Coppin '59 is a proud grandfather and great-grandfather to his eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

1960s

Steve Gershenoff '68 is retired and living in a Del Webb Community in Central Florida.

1970s

Paul Simone '70 currently works at the Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas.

1980s

Susan Holley Trevino '85 and husband Rene are on the third year of their retirement business, Enjoy Corpus Christi Tours, a sightseeing and historical company of beautiful Corpus Christi.

1990s

Mike Akeroyd '90 has been promoted to Senior Vice President of Private Club Operations with Arnold Palmer Golf Management after his 15-year anniversary this year.

Linda Landreth '95, '99 and husband Gordon took a six-week road trip. Stops included the California coast; Seattle, Washington; Idaho; and Yellowstone.

2000s

Dr. Doze Y. Butler '00 is the new Dean and Director in the School of Agriculture, Fisheries and Human Sciences at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. She previously worked at Southern University (Louisiana) and Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

Angela Leal '01 has been named Resident Services Manager for the Corpus Christi Housing Authority. Leal, who is a passionate advocate for clean beaches and the Coastal Bend, is celebrating her 10th year as a volunteer Media Coordinator for Texas Adopt-A-Beach.

Sylvia Carrillo-Trevino '02, '04 was recently appointed City Administrator of the City of Sunset Valley, Texas, in September of 2019.

Crystal Rau '06 is a certified financial planner located in Midland, Texas, who launched Beyond Balanced Financial Planning, a free financial planning and investment management firm focused on young professionals in the oil and gas industry.

Entrepreneur **Monique Wellesley '08** established a new Pet Sitting Business called Good Life Pet Sitting. Monique and her husband Loyd provide hospice care and pet massage among other pet care services in San Antonio and surrounding areas.

Robert Navarro '09 and Sarah (Pace) Navarro '08 welcomed daughter Penelope on January 1, 2020. Born 25 seconds after midnight, Penelope was San Antonio's first baby of 2020.

2010s

Gabriel Fernandez '10 is currently employed at TT Electronics.

After meeting at the Corpus Christi Country Club, **Damla Eytemiz '12** and David Gibson, a Corpus Christi native, recently became engaged on August 10, 2019, in Fredericksburg, Texas. Their wedding will occur on June 13, 2020, in Damla's hometown, Izmir Turkey.

Jeanette Scardale '12 and Allen Hoyer '12 met on campus in 2009 and were married in San Antonio, Texas, on March 21, 2020.

Christina Martinez '13 started her own full-service agency, Christina Martinez Consulting, in Houston, Texas.

2010s Continued

Ann (Alaniz) Zastrzyny '14, '18 and Rick Zastrzyny '15, married on December 14, 2019, in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Alexis Arriaga '15 is in her fourth year of teaching first grade in an inner city school district in San Antonio. She's currently continuing her education at Grand Canyon University to earn a MEd in Reading.

Christina Boothe '15 co-founded Story Amplify, an Austin-based marketing agency. In 2019, her team was acquired by Realized, a promising real estate startup. Additionally, Christina recently joined the University of Texas at Austin's MBA class of 2022. She is grateful for the Island University and everyone there who invested in her.

Latisha Hull '15 recently married fellow alumnus, **Chukwudimma Ogbunamiri '18** on February 20, 2020. They have recently moved to Pearland, Texas.

Tiffany Alcalá '16 married Joshua Hector on March 9, 2020, in Cedar Creek, Texas.

Ramiro Ramirez III '17 is going into his second successful year as CEO and co-owner of The Riddle Room Escape Rooms. The company is committed to providing a premier escape room attraction, and corporate team building events in the Coastal Bend. Ramiro partners with organizations like Mission 911 to improve homelessness in Corpus Christi.

Sophia Zaner '17 became the Compliance and Outreach Coordinator for the College of Graduate Studies at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

Garrett Brundage '18 has been appointed as the Battalion Adjutant for 2nd Supply Battalion (United States Marine Corps) and is providing administrative support to 700+ Marines and Sailors aboard Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Alyssa Uresti '18 has accepted a new position as a Case Manager II for Coastal Plains MHMR (My Health My Resources) in Taft, Texas. Alyssa also has been accepted into the Graduate Program for emphasis in Clinical Mental Health Counseling.

Abigail Silva '19 accepted a full-time position in May 2019 as a Communications Assistant at KCS Public Relations in Corpus Christi, Texas.

After meeting on campus, **Elizabeth Cummins '19 and Gus Ladwig '17** were recently married on February 15, 2020, in Cedar Park, Texas.

After completing her TESOL certification, **Lei Vincent '19** has been invited to join the Peace Corps and will head to Indonesia in fall 2020.



HAVE YOU RECENTLY EARNED AN EXCITING PROMOTION? PERHAPS YOU WELCOMED A NEW CHILD, OR MAYBE EVEN WON AN AWARD? IF YOU HAVE EXCITING NEWS, WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT!

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