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COVER PHOTO: Citizen scientists Morgan Luke, Kelvin Elgar, and Braylon Keys analyze the microplastics that the honors volunteer group collected along Galveston Beach.
By Meghan Rapp
HSA Peer Mentor Bond Leads to Mobile Clinics in Peru

Undeterred by the pandemic, the student org MedLife forged ahead to make an impact at Lamar University and abroad.

A true Reaud Honors College success story, MedLife got its start when Amber Maredia reached out to her HSA Peer Mentor Mackenzie Savage in Fall 2019 about the idea of starting a chapter at Lamar University.

Two years later, MedLife earned LU’s Student Organization of the Year Award, but the road to this exciting moment was a bumpy one. MedLife held its first chapter meeting in February 2020, a month before LU switched to online instruction to mitigate risks of the global pandemic.

“When COVID-19 began, we relied heavily on social media and GroupMe to keep members engaged from home, something that was a challenge for us because we were a brand-new organization that had just gotten started on campus,” Maredia said.

LU’s MedLife chapter was founded by five Reaud Honors students—President Maredia, Vice President Savage, Treasurer Bethany Edwards, Fundraising Officer Sindi Castillo, Volunteer Officer Deidre Dages—and now also includes Public Relations Officer Annabelle Broussard.

MedLife is best described as a college student peace corps focusing on medical and community support in impoverished places around the world.

Faced with the global pandemic, LU’s chapter reinvented itself at the very beginning. Rather than limit their contributions to helping underserved areas outside the U.S., MedLife students also looked at their own rural Southeast Texas community.

The students gave back to the local community in numerous ways, including hosting healthcare career panels; making care packages for nurses in the COVID-19 unit at Baptist Hospital; educating others on medical terminology at a Medical Loteria game night on LU’s campus, cohosted by LUHS, another Reaud Honors student-formed student organization, which had been named “Best New Student Organization” the previous year.

When MedLife won its award in Spring 2022, two of its founding members, Savage and Edwards, were about to graduate. They had been part of a productive final year, as the chapter volunteered at Beaumont’s Hope Clinic pregnancy resource center, raised more than $1,000 for Power Hour (a MedLife fundraiser), and handmade blankets they donated to a women’s shelter. By the time they graduated in May, the chapter had successfully raised enough funds in its “Moving Mountains” fundraiser to participate in its first service-learning trip—to Lima, Peru.

“The founding members of Lamar MedLife are amazing individuals who genuinely care about their mission. Their passion is why I joined the organization,” said Broussard, a Chemical Engineering junior. “As soon as I heard about the service-

“Entering the medical field as a biomedical engineer is something I have been looking into lately, after I met one of the engineers who helped develop the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.”
Students volunteered in free mobile medical clinics at various sites in Lima, assisting local doctors in treating up to 90 patients a day. Students set up various health stations that ranged from providing hygiene care to pharmacy treatments. They also worked on a community development project to help prevent landslides caused by earthquakes.

One of the crew’s fun excursions included traveling through the Huacachina desert to the top of South America’s biggest dunes, where they slid down the dunes, face-first, on sandboards.

LU’s MedLife President Amber Maredia is being filmed while sharing a behind-the-scenes look of the crew’s efforts in Peru with donors who helped fund their campaign.

Learning trip opportunity, I knew it was something I needed to do. Entering the medical field as a biomedical engineer is something I have been looking into lately, after I met one of the engineers who helped develop the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

On May 20, a dream was realized for the MedLife chapter when 11 LU students and 1 Texas State University student traveled from Houston to El Salvador to Panama and landed in Lima, Peru, to serve at MedLife’s international headquarters and clinics.

Six of them were Reaud Honors students: Maredia, Savage, Broussard, and Edwards, along with David Matherne and Conner Montgomery.

The crew volunteered in free mobile medical clinics, where local doctors saw up to 90 patients a day. In each clinic, the students set up several stations, including some providing hygiene, education, general medicine, OB-GYN, and pharmacy treatments.

Maredia found her Spanish minor helpful while volunteering in the Education station, where patients were given routine exams, such as pap smears, and provided health information ranging from nutrition to domestic violence resources. She talked to patients in Spanish about common health issues faced in the U.S., and she enjoyed conversations with Spanish-speaking students from Puerto Rico who she volunteered with in the clinics.

“I learned a lot about how one’s culture affects their perception of medical treatments and procedures,” Maredia said. “I also worked on a development project that will help the community build a wall around their property to prevent landslides caused by earthquakes that often strike these areas. This will eventually let them own their land and receive benefits from the government such as public water and electricity.”

The walls being built to surround the highland mountain community will cost one million soles (around $260,000). Savage recalled speaking with community leaders about the cyclic conditions of poverty: “Water is much more expensive in the highlands due to the need for street taxis to come and deliver the clean water tanks—around 20 to 40 soles (about $5 to $10) every week. Then, for the adults of the household, it’s around 15 soles (about $4) a day to get in and out of the city where they work in the more populated areas of Lima or Miraflores. On a good day, these people will earn 50 soles (about $13) after working 12-15 hours. Take away the amount they must spend on clean water, transportation, and groceries, most families do not have much left.... Many of the healthcare problems I was able to assist in treating were due to overworked bodies and underfed bellies.”

Many of the healthcare problems I was able to assist in treating were due to overworked bodies and underfed bellies: gastritis from improper nutrition, early arthritis from strenuous work up and down the mountains, and cancers from minimal access to preventative care.

In Union Santa Fe, the students visited a community center MedLife built from donations raised by chapters like LU MedLife’s, where families had “access to gas and electricity for cooking food and baking bread—called the olla común or ‘common pot,’” Maredia said.

At the end of mobile clinic days, students filled up heartily on traditional Peruvian cuisine—picarones, pollo a la brasa, lomo saltado, lúcuma dessert—with some chicha morada juice. Lima boasts it is the unofficial gastronomical capital of South America.

Explorations of Lima included up-close views of Diego de la Puente’s 17th-century painting “The Last Supper” in the Basilica and Convent of San Francisco. Peruvians chuckle at the guinea pig on the plate in the middle of the table, a typical Peruvian dish called cuy chactado. Descending farther
While visiting the MedLife headquarters in Union Santa Fe (above and inset), students saw the olla común, or “common pot” (below), that provides the community with access to gas and electricity for cooking food and baking bread. The construction of this building was made possible by donations to MedLife.

“This week has been eye opening in too many ways to count. I really feel moved to give anything we can to the communities we have worked in.”

into the Baroque church built in 1657 are exposed human remains, stacked in circular stone pits, in the catacombs. They visited Love Park, set high on the cliffs of Chorrillos overlooking the Pacific Ocean, home to a statue of lovers embracing in a kiss that is inscribed with quotes about hopeless romantics. They saw Pesimo’s brightly colored mural, painted for last year’s Urban Art Festival, transform a drab office building—an incredible contrast to the brown sandy overcast that colors Lima’s shanty towns when viewed from miles away.

They held baby chicks in the palms of their hands and fed llamas. They hiked toward giant boulders along the circular Ruta de los Lagares Rupestres. A dune buggy took them through the Huacachina desert to the top of South America’s biggest dunes, where they laid down on sandboards and slid down the dunes, face-first, at breathtaking and thrilling speeds—like a rollercoaster had become part of their bones!

They laughed at the “Save Water, Shower Together” sign, appreciating how humor can pull people together in a place where water is usually no laughing matter. Sea lions and birds got up close and personal while students explored islands near Paracas, dubbed the “Peruvian Galapagos.”

Every glimpse of Peru, whether on fun excursions through the only sea-facing capital in South America or during meaningful interactions with Lima’s mountain residents, settled in the students’ souls.

By the end of their week in Peru, the student crew began another “Moving Mountains” fundraiser. The villagers they were treating had told them that each family group could be fed for multiple days on 24 pieces of bread that cost 4 soles (about $1). The students wanted to share this opportunity to help with their greater MedLife community.

“This week has been eye opening in too many ways to count,” Savage said. “I really feel moved to give anything we can to the communities we have worked in. The cycle of poverty is truly a crisis here, and the communities have been nothing but hardworking families who are gracious toward us for our help.”
From the beginning of the search for LU’s 16th president through President Jaime Taylor’s first year, numerous Reaud Honors student leaders have been fortunate to work closely with Taylor to foster a friendly and supportive campus environment for all students.

“My first impression of him was that he was a little goofy, but in a good way, and that he was very much academic,” David Williams said. “He came to one of our orientation sessions, and he was just going around, meeting everybody, talking to everybody. He was really personable.”

As a member of the Presidential Search Committee, Tiffany Tran questioned Taylor about his views on student engagement. She said his response showed her that “his leadership approach is genuine, and he truly cares for everything and anything LU.”

LU Ambassador Shelbie Williams also views Taylor as a leader who cares, saying, “He is very down to earth and wants students’ input on what will make the college a more enjoyable experience and place for not only students, but everyone who comes to campus.”

As SGA President and Vice-President respectively, Tran and Williams felt supported by Taylor. “With every interaction I had with him, I could tell his sincerity in making sure that student voices are heard,” Tran said.

Major student-centered projects SGA implemented during Taylor’s first year included: free COVID-19 tests, creating a student engagement hour that will start Fall 2022, increasing the student minimum wage, adding an interfaith space on campus, improving campus safety, and organizing free self-defense classes.

“Throughout the year, President Taylor made sure to always listen to the student body and especially to the concerns that we introduced,” said Stephanie Barron, SGA Senator for the College of Arts and Sciences. “He was always very communicative with us and kept his mind open to any suggestions. He even attended one of our joint sessions as a guest speaker and allowed students to ask him questions or voice their opinions on Lamar.”

Tran predicts Taylor will leave a lasting impact on Lamar University. “His positive energy and drive to make LU the best institution in our state and beyond will lead him to make wise decisions that will benefit our university and the SETX Community,” she said. “I can recognize how his involvement with the student body has slowly improved our campus culture for the better...the future of Lamar is extremely bright!”

President’s Circle: Spring 2022

ALUM spotlight
Kristeen Reynolds
(Class of 2016)

ALUM spotlight
Jena (Verrill) Still and Brandan Still
(Class of 2006)
Navigating a path from the social sciences and healthcare to reach his goals.

Joshua Davis, of Beaumont, is a lifetime learner at Lamar University. Earning his bachelor’s in Sociology and Criminal Justice in 2011, a Healthcare Administration and Entrepreneurship MBA in 2015, and an MPH in 2019, Davis also plans to earn a CFRE, Certified Fund Raising Executive.

Davis said he began his academic career with his sights set on a path toward working in healthcare. After a semester or two, however, he realized his passion to help people and a natural gift with numbers could be combined, and he began to pave a way toward achieving his goals through the social sciences.

“I enjoyed the research aspects of it,” he said. “It was the data and the numbers that interested me.”

Davis graduated with a degree in Sociology and went to work in nonprofits. In 2016, an opportunity came to work in the East Region in Beaumont.

“Something that interested me was that there was a need,” said Davis. “I enjoyed the research aspects of it,” he said. “I got involved because I thought that opportunity that involved combining my love of research with my willingness to work with numbers could be a combination of my passions.”

After a year in the East Region, Davis said he began to see the opportunity to combine his passions in and out of college.

“I went from operations back into fundraising, so now I am in development doing fundraising and grant management,” he said. “I am involved in the Greater Golden Triangle Relay for Life. I am alive because of that event. When I chaired it in 2009, I got dared to shave my head. I shaved it wherever we reached a goal. About three weeks later, I received a malignant melanoma diagnosis. If it wouldn’t have been for raising the money through that involvement, I wouldn’t be here today.”

Davis said his passion for getting involved comes, in part, from a love for community he calls home.

“I am one of those people who never thought about leaving Beaumont—I enjoy it,” he said. “There’s lots of potential, lots of opportunity, lots of growth that we can do, so I am investing back into that.”

In addition to fundraising, Davis also volunteers at Lamar University. He is a mentor in the Reaud Honors College’s Alumni Mentor Program (AMP) and serves on the alumni council, director for the university’s alumni advisory board, and is helping lead efforts to build an LGBTQ alumni network.

“I think I am more involved as an alum than I was as a student,” Davis said. “It’s funny, looking back on those opportunities, the growth that’s happened, and what Lamar has taught me, I’ve come back three times, and each time, I’ve had opportunities to grow.”

“I always tell people, if you’re always comfortable in life, then you’re not growing. You have to step outside of your comfort zone, be uncomfortable, and that is when you really start to blossom.”

Davis said he owes his willingness to try new things to his interactions with his LU professors and to his time spent in the honors program.

“(Getting involved) was hard for me when I was an undergrad. In the beginning, I didn’t want to venture out,” he said. “I was introverted. But (being an honors student) pulled me out of my shell. I got involved. It helped me to step outside of my comfort zone. I learned to have a voice. And I learned how to engage and be a part of the community.”

“I’ve come back to LU three times, and each time, I’ve had opportunities to grow.”

“I really found myself once I got to Lamar to where now, I am comfortable in my shoes, I am more outgoing, and I am not afraid to get out in front of groups to talk about what there is to do and what is needed.”

Among his many memories at LU, Davis said his most important was being a McNair Scholar.

“Being involved in McNair and as a Gill Scholar helped Davis hone his soft skills to be successful professionally.”

“McNair helped with my public speaking skills, getting up in front of a group of people and being able to present and answer questions,” he said. “I went to the conference that Jack Gill directed. That was another opportunity where I learned some of those skills that you aren’t necessarily taught in the classroom. Like the networking, how to work a crowd, how to mingle and connect with people and build those relationships. Both presenting and networking are critical for my success.”

Davis said his path toward success has been both welcomed and unexpected.

“Am I doing what I thought I was going to be doing when I went to Lamar? No. I didn’t think I’d be in nonprofits as a career. Do I love what I do? Absolutely,” he said. “Life sometimes takes you on journeys that are not always planned. And that’s the beauty of life—sometimes you end up in a place where you never really thought you’d be.”
Honors students across all disciplines are invited to explore the fine arts in classes that include Dr. Golden Wright’s Honors Dance Appreciation. Among them is honors nursing sophomore Patricia Castañon, who Dr. Wright twirls during his class lesson on salsa. Photo by Meghan Rapp; Golden Wright headshot courtesy Department of Theatre & Dance

“Honors students tend to have an appreciation—a certain drive. It’s about appreciating dance and not being a historian.”

By Kalan Bonnette, Reaud Honors College Student

Faculty Profile | Dr. Golden Wright

Leadership in the Arts

“I think that’s checkmate,” he added.

At his teaching style and demeanor, some for his dedication and hard work, some for his teaching style and demeanor, some respect and admiration, some for his teaching style and demeanor, some for his dancing ability.

You might presume Wright has danced from an early age, but he began at 16, filling in when his sister’s performance was short a dancer. He danced more and more throughout his high school career. After graduating, he sought a degree in dance and office operations before deciding to pursue dance full time.

“I drove something like 3,500 miles to do 11 auditions in 12 days,” he said.

Those auditions were largely successful; he danced with several companies, most notably Ballet Austin.

After a rigorous dance career, he pursued his Master of Fine Arts and then his Doctorate. This was a somewhat interesting choice because an MFA is a terminal degree, but he believed research in his field was important. Did he ever feel odd as a dancer in the world of higher education? “I wrote my dissertation on artists in leadership positions in Higher Ed,” he said. “It’s not as different as you might think.”

Wright’s leadership mindset is “success as you envision it.” He encourages a program that allows students to discuss what they would like to do with their degrees so they can design a curriculum of courses to make their vision a reality.

This same passion was recognized by the Reaud Honors College, which appointed Wright the opportunity to design a curriculum of courses to make their vision a reality.

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This same passion was recognized by the Reaud Honors College, which invited him to teach Honors Dance Appreciation. Whether honors students are dancing as a dragon for the Chinese New Year or analyzing the beating heart of plays, they immediately pick up on Wright’s positive demeanor.

“Honors students tend to have an appreciation—a certain drive. It’s about appreciating dance and not being a historian,” he said.

Wright enjoys his interactions with honors students. Speaking about his Dance Appreciation class, he said, “I’ve taught ballroom 14 out of the 16 years we’ve offered it, and it’s because I enjoy the class. When you meet someone special, and you want to express that to them, going to the movies just isn’t going to cut it.”

This hints at something deeper—Wright’s love for his wife of more than 25 years. He brings her up often and speaks of her fondly. Wright’s passion for his wife is mirrored by his passion for dance, which further extends past his performances and onto his students.

Does he ever miss the energy of the stage? “Watching the students grants me the same high as performing,” he said. “But I do still get to perform.”

Of all his performances throughout his teaching career, his favorite is one he performed with a student. For a scholarship dinner, the pair performed an aerial silks routine in the Montagne Center.

“There is a level of trust there. When you’re 20 feet in the air, and the only thing keeping your partner from hitting the ground is you. There’s a special trust,” he said.

Being in education has also granted Wright the opportunity to take two groups of students to Taiwan. The language barrier did not pose a problem, Wright said, as the “language of dance is universal.”

“I think that’s checkmate,” he added.

Indeed. With a swipe of his brush, Wright has beaten me in our game of chess.

“Well, you were asking questions and writing the whole time. You’ll be at salsa?”

A great conclusion segue that sums up Wright. He is multitalented, but not the type to flaunt his skills. Yet whatever the interaction may involve, it initiates as important as dance.
Save OUR BEACHES FROM PLASTIC POLLUTION

Honors students conduct citizen science while learning about the adverse effects of microplastics.

By Britney Brevell, Reaud Honors College Student

Honors students conduct citizen science while learning about the adverse effects of microplastics.

Digging in the sargassum seaweed pushed away from the shoreline, as cheers erupt from rollercoaster riders at Pleasure Pier, Reaud Honors Psychology junior Kaylee Goodspeed begins her journey as a global citizen scientist helping to save the lives of marine organisms in the Gulf of Mexico. When animals mistake microplastics for food, they can starve to death.

All photos by Meghan Rapp
Three hundred cigarettes and three pounds of trash. This was the sad discovery made by a group of Honors students across a quarter mile stretch of beach on Galveston Island.

Reaud Honors College students from Lamar University’s Honors Student Association, LU Women in STEM, and Society of Asian Scientists and Engineers gathered at Galveston Beach to participate in a day of beach cleanup in conjunction with the Turtle Island Restoration Network (TIRN). An environmental organization, TIRN aims to promote cleaner water and beaches across the world, including the Gulf of Mexico.

Under the guidance of coordinator Kimber De Salvo Anderson, 11 LU students volunteered to help TIRN during Spring Break. Throughout the day, the students conducted citizen science while learning about turtles native to the Gulf of Mexico, the adverse effects of microplastics, and how everyday people—kids to adults—can positively impact ocean life.

“The amount and variety of sea turtles that occupy the Gulf Coast was very surprising,” said Coby Vidrine, a Chemical Engineering junior. He and his peers learned that the Gulf of Mexico is home to five species of turtles, all serving an important purpose in their respective habitats. However, the diversity of these beautiful sea creatures is declining, as humans pose a risk to them through pollution, litter, and microplastics.

Texas is the nation’s number one producer of oil and gas, but it also has many estuaries that feed into the Gulf of Mexico. The main issue with these nurdles is that they often end up along beaches. Nurdles are beads of plastic, each as small as a pea and difficult to see, even when you’re looking for them. Surrounding the towering wood posts of Galveston’s piers, little trenches hold water and trash. These low areas of sand are hotspots for microplastics. As part of the beach cleanup, students performed a Nurdle Patrol by searching for and collecting nurdles along the beach. With gloved hands, they meticulously dug their fingers in seaweed and sand. Some areas had none; others revealed a jackpot of life-taking detriments.

Microplastics plague the Gulf of Mexico, especially since they are a hard-to-spot contaminant. Anderson helped the honors students perform an experiment to demonstrate the problematic nature of microplastics. They gathered sand and placed it in a large separator to filter the debris for analysis. The amalgamation of trash and sand contained debris varying in size. The larger trash pieces that had been buried in the sand were now weathered away to dull, unnoticeable colors. “The result was rather surprising: seeing all the plastic pellets and other small pieces of trash that are not usually seen by the naked eye while casually walking through the beach sand,” Vidrine said.

Microplastics are not a new topic of discussion at Lamar University. Biochemistry student Morgan Luke and Biology students Zaid Mohammed, Amber Maredia, and Britney Brevell are honors students involved in a project with Dr. Ian Lian, an associate professor of Biology, studying how microplastics affect human health. Many products used
today contain these microplastics. These range from shampoo to plastic bottles of water. “Since the lab does cancer research, [they] have been interested in the effect on a cellular level,” Mohammed said.

Project researchers have been studying the impact that microplastics have on wound healing. They are working to see how this changes the rate at which cells regrow. Dr. Lian and his research students are currently in the preliminary phases of their experiment and will continue to work with various cell lines and tissues. As the problem has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, research of this type is crucial in determining how these microplastics also affect human health.

Besides microscopic debris, other trash items cover the coastline, as any frequent beachgoer in the Gulf knows. Laying among the grass of the sand dunes, brightly colored litter appeared as little flecks of color along a solid blue sky backdrop. Many items were buried under sand with only a little dot of color sticking out for us to see.

During a 45-minute search along a small stretch of land, the students collected three pounds of trash and 300 cigarettes. Each cigarette has enough toxic chemicals to make enough toxic chemicals to make 300 cigarettes. Each cigarette has enough toxic chemicals to make approximately two gallons of sea water lethal for marine life. In this short trip, the students made a positive impact on ocean life by helping keep 600 gallons of water clean.

Community service is an important component of the Reaud Honors College, which promotes excellence among students in areas other than strictly academics. It encourages students to extend learning beyond the classroom setting. Morgan Luke, a member of the Honors Student Association, believes that community outreach is important for students, saying it is “an excellent way to learn more about events going on in the world, especially when they are not taught in school.”

For the average citizen hoping to get involved in the fight against pollution on our beaches, change begins on a personal level. “Making sure you responsibly discard trash is the first step to making this world a cleaner place,” Mechanical Engineering freshman Luke Sodolak said.

“Anywhere from using reusable water bottles...to using reusable grocery bags to cut down on [single-use plastic] are great ways that each one of us can contribute,” Vidrine said.

Any contribution, no matter how small, can minimize damage to the marine ecosystem. The next time you take a vacation to your local beach, save a turtle and scan the beach to collect and discard any trash that you see—especially those super small nurdles.

As you can imagine, finding microplastics in sand can be quite the challenge! Kimber de Salvo Anderson examines a pellet found by Braylon Keys and Coby Vidrine to determine if it is one of the plastic fragments that can get buried deep in the sand where sea turtles lay their eggs. This habitat pollution could begin to affect the hatching success and even the ratio of male and female turtles, as eggs incubated in warmer conditions are often females.

As Kaylee Goodspeed looks on, Kelvin Elgar and Luke Sodolak get a feel for microplastics found on the beach so they understand better what to seek while digging for the plastic pellets.
Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) students from the ethnic group in the United States. Asian Americans are the fastest growing accordance with the national trend, as of 2021. Lamar University has around 600 students with great cultural diversity. Lamar it has five major regions that abound comprised of more than 40 countries, Asia. The world's largest continent, By Zaid Mohammed, have initiatives to not only share Asian diversity on campus. "At SASE, we have a shared vision of showcasing and Engineers (SASE). He saw an position. "And those comments have really Kelvin Elgar, a Chemical Engineering senior. "But as I grew up, I have become more proud and more in tune with my culture. And those comments have really become unimportant in what I thought about them. Elgar says he has found a place of acceptance at Lamar University, adding, “The students and the faculty here have been more open to celebrating different cultures. I really feel like they’re pushing for diversity.” In 2021, Elgar became president of the Society of Asian Scientists and Engineers (SASE). He saw an opportunity to lead a group of individuals that had a shared vision of showcasing diversity on campus. “At SASE, we have initiatives to not only share Asian culture, but also work with people of other cultures,” he said, clarifying you do not need to be of Asian descent to join any AAPI campus groups. With Lamar returning to on-campus instruction in Fall 2021, SASE began the academic year with the Water Lantern Festival. A united student body stood around Lamar’s duck pond to celebrate the Water Lanterns. Elgar said it signifies a return to normalcy as the campus community renewed its bonds after being apart due to the pandemic.

The air surrounding Asian Night Market was filled with scents of fragrant kabobs and sweet cupcakes generously donated by local Asian businesses Rudy’s Bar-B-Q and Sugai, respectively. The event was connected to the Pakistani Student Association (PSA), formed by twin sisters Samira (Class of 2021) and Umera (Class of 2022) Ahmed, who moved to the U.S. from Pakistan when they were young. Psychology Pre-Med senior Saniya Shahzad ran the PSA stall at Asian Night Market, selling desi bracelets, known as bangles, traditional ornaments in South Asia. The high turn-out led to success for one Reaud Honors student entrepreneur. Volunteer Chair of VSA and Biology senior Krystal Le sold out items from her clothing business, KCreatesByKrystal. Inspired by her success, Le cofounded the Asian Business Student Association (ABSA) to help aspiring entrepreneurs next year.

"The Lamar community recognized Asian Night Market as “Program of the Year” at the Toast to Leadership ceremony. Gratified by the event’s success, Tsan said, “People are more open to learning our culture, and they were excited to come to our event.” As a member of VSA, SASE, and ABSA, Tsan hopes to continue pushing cultural events. At VSA’s Lunar New Year Festival, students commemorated the Year of the Tiger by giving out “lucky” money in red envelopes while a group performed the Lion Dance, a traditional dance in Vietnam and China, to usher in good fortune. "There are other cultures that we want to celebrate, and we hope to continue to collaborate with fellow AAPI organizations to spotlight other regions of Asia,” Tsan said.

India Night also emerged from a collaboration, between the Indian Students Association (ISA) and SASE. ISA was established this academic year by Biochemistry Pre-Med junior and Vice-President Susann Kalathra, with some of her peers. Their goal is to create a haven of cultural unity and celebration between students of Indian descent and the general populace. “In grade school, I wasn’t around many Indian-Americans, so I wasn’t too accepting of my own self-identity,” Kalathra said. “But now that I’ve come to Lamar and met others who have similar experiences as me, it’s been a little eye opening. I don’t feel embarrassed or intimidated.”

India Night, ISA’s flagship event in Fall 2021, gathered students and members of the local South Asian community. Glassy decorations of bright colors and lights brought a festive mood. Students wore kurtas, saris, shawar kameez, and other traditional South Asian clothing. Indian professors gave speeches sharing their personal and academic journeys from India to the U.S. "We celebrated our culture through music, food, and dance performances," Kalathra said. “Multiple types of dances of the Indian culture were performed, from classical dances, like Bharatanatyam, to Bollywood hip hop.”

The increase in AAPI cultural events on campus was appreciated by Chemical Engineering senior Luke Nguyen. “I started college in the fall semester of 2016, and to my knowledge, AAPI events were not very prevalent,” he said. “Asian culture and pride are flourishing right now” because of the rise of student-led organizations, such as SASE, VSA, PSA, ABSA, and ISA.

Former SGA President and honors alumus Edward Doan concurred, saying that the groups have grown from "little to none" to “visible organizations by the time I graduated in Fall 2020.” Doan also credits the Reaud Honors College for supporting him personally through his journey at Lamar. “The people I initially met were my biggest cheerleaders and advisors, which enabled me to become the person I am today,” Doan said. “I spent my latter years passing it on to help up-and-coming groups.”

In conversations with these remarkable student leaders, they all talked of a shared vision to make diversity a central value to Lamar University and the Reaud Honors College—where we celebrate all cultures with enthusiasm.

That dream becomes real whenever students work together to build on successes of the past. This academic year, students helped lead the charge to expand LU’s Multicultural Festival to include community organizations and open the festivities to the public.

Looking ahead, Reaud Honors students in AAPI organizations say they hope to continue to play a major role in cultivating cultural awareness at LU through gatherings that recognize our similarities and celebrate our differences. By taking initiative and bringing people together, they highlight some of the best qualities of our honors college.
The Reaud Honors College’s first Experiential Learning Program (ELP), under the guidance of Class of 2007 alumna Dr. Lindsey (Cauthen) Minter, empowered a team of Reaud Honors students to develop innovative platforms that focus on cancer education to connect patients and caregivers with health professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“All projects were unified by the aim to provide scientifically sound perspectives on treatment options for cancer patients,” said Menna Elsaka, a Biochemistry and Chemistry Pre-Med research team member who graduated in May 2022.

The team’s innovative research led three members—Biology Pre-Med sophomores Sindi Castillo, Jasmin Reyes, and Arizbeth Lopez Garcia—to be the first students ever to participate in the Resilience and Recovery Summit at Lamar University. In the next semester, Fall 2021, five research students traveled to the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) conference in Orlando, Florida, to share their Cancer ELP work as a way of reimaging honors education.

Featured here are highlights from the research team’s NCHC adventure.
Cadenza | 2022 | 26

By Teri Wolfe, Reaud Honors College student

Getting Creative in Honors

Expanding beyond STEM academic pursuits can nurture analytical skills.

Beyond everyday pursuits of academic labs and research in science, math, engineering, and technology, Reaud Honors STEM majors find ways to explore their creative sides by taking imagination-oriented classes. Claudia Cooper, a freshman double-majoring in Biology and English, studied Creative Writing: Poetry under Casey Ford. Cooper has dabbled in writing poetry and stories to entertain friends since middle school, but she lacked confidence in her skills. “I figured this poetry class could give me a good foundation to build upon,” she said.

Structured around discussions about poetry and the creative process and workshops to critique classmates’ poetry, the course provided Cooper validation and motivation to keep writing. “Anyone with experience knows that a writer is their own worst critic. Before, I felt like an imposter because I couldn’t see why people enjoyed my work; all I could see is how I stagnated in terms of progressing as a writer,” Cooper said. “Feedback has the word ‘feed’ in it because it feeds writers motivation to continue.”

Cooper experienced more than the opportunity to explore her writing abilities—she also participated in write-a-thons and a live poetry reading. One of her happiest class memories was leading a poetry discussion. “People seemed to really enjoy the way I read, which left me tickled,” Cooper said, adding, “I know if a career in Biology or English doesn’t work out, I can get a job as an announcer.”

Mathematics and Computer Science senior Kalan Bonnette also forged a creative path at LU based on earlier interests. He explored theatre while in high school but felt intimidated by the prospect of taking an Honors Theatre Appreciation course in college. “I was concerned that the workload would be more intense than the standard course,” Bonnette explained, “but I was completely wrong. I was impressed by the ability of the class to come together and have a dialogue instead of a bunch of disinterested students being forced to chat on a digital discussion board or in a much larger class.”

Discussing theatre with his classmates was his favorite part of class, saying, “Art is all about ideas and what others see in a piece. Talking about that with other people is always refreshing. I am upset that these conversations don’t happen more in our everyday lives because art is often about a shared experience.”

Taking the course offered performing opportunities for Bonnette. “One day in class, Professor Joel Grothe made an offhand comment that the Theatre Department had open auditions, meaning anyone could audition. I approached him after the session and asked when the dates were for auditions,” Bonnette said. “I’ll never quite forget the slight look of skepticism in his face. I showed up to auditions, got cast, and the rest is history.”

Bonnette has participated in four LU shows to date—“The Birds,” “The Good Doctor,” “The Book Club,” and most recently, “Split.” Reflecting on his first show, “The Birds,” he recalled the experience of acting as part of a cast of four characters. “It was absolutely amazing to work with Grothe as a director and to bond with such a small cast,” he said. “We had plenty of time to learn our lines and refine the show, and it felt like a little family.”

He also recalled some challenging moments. For his role in “The Good Doctor,” Bonnette said, “I couldn’t figure out how to make a certain monologue comical. I spent hours trying to figure everything out and was asking my director what I could do differently, and I thought I was done much too early. In actuality, he just knew what I was capable of. Eventually it clicked. After hours of work, I delivered a humorous monologue.”

Beyond theatre, Bonnette has also taken a ballet dancing course at LU taught by Professor Golden Wright. He would like to further explore other forms of dance—tap, jazz, and aerial silks. He also wants to venture down the road of music classes, particularly music theory, since he already plays piano.

After his experience in theatre and dancing, Bonnette found a student organization for partner dancing, Ballroom and Social Event Dancing (BASED). The group is open to anyone in the LU community who wants to express their creativity through dance.

He urges his fellow honors STEM majors to pursue their creativity, saying, “Personally, I think it helps your analytical work when you nurture the ability to think and process creatively. From a more philosophical perspective, when someone has never experienced something, they may have no idea that they would grow to love it.”

He added, “Maybe a composer greater than Mozart is lying beneath someone who is a nursing major who doesn’t particularly care for the career path but is doing so because he feels it is a secure path.”

Katie Sloane, a Psychology junior, added a writing minor to her academic pursuits. “Though I love studying the human mind from every angle, I’ve also always had a passion for writing. One of my goals is to write and publish a book using the knowledge I gain from my degree,” she said.

Sloane first found Gretchen Johnson’s Creative Writing: Fiction class to be nerve-wracking. “I was a bit nervous to be in a class of what I expected to be English majors—all better than me at writing—but I was more than pleasantly surprised by the content and supportive classmates and teacher.”

Through the course structure of reading and writing short stories, Sloane stepped out of her comfort zone as she explored a variety of writing prompts.

Dr. Jennifer Fowler’s Honors Seminar: Artwork of M.C. Escher in Spring 2022.

The prompts “fuel my creativity and aided me in exploring my writing style and learning the do’s and don’ts of fiction writing,” she said.

Encouraged by her experience, Sloane expanded her writing capabilities by joining Cooper in the Creative Writing: Poetry class.

“I highly recommend STEM majors take creative classes,” Sloane said. “It definitely helps me connect with my passionate and inventive side, something that all majors alike need to home in on.”

Being part of the Reaud Honors College community means you are the type of honors student who cares about more than getting a good GPA.

“Typical honors students have their heads in science books,” she said. “It is necessary to venture into other areas to open your mind and spark your creativity in your field. Taking creative writing classes was one of the best decisions I made during college. I will be continuing my minor in writing and will keep exploring different avenues of writing after my journey at Lamar ends.”

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Stepping Up for SETX
From helping families with incarcerated parents to raising crisis intervention awareness, honors students build bridges of hope.

Advocating on behalf of others, especially those whose voices are often unheard or misunderstood, is most effective when diverse perspectives inform the basis for decisions and actions. That includes the youth voice. Since the initiative, I have witnessed how Texas nonprofits have benefited from the enthusiasm, drive, and compassion of young people. That includes the youth voice. It has informed the basis for decisions and actions. That includes the youth voice. It has made nonprofits more effective when diverse perspectives are considered, especially those whose voices are often unheard or misunderstood, is most effective when diverse perspectives inform the basis for decisions and actions. That includes the youth voice.

I saw lots and lots of joy. I loved seeing the kids have so much fun. My time as a non-voting board member broke me out of my shell and pushed me into the world. I saw their joy. Augusta's Angels opened me up to a new world of volunteering and serving communities. I always wanted to make an impact. Before Stepping Up, I never thought to join a nonprofit. Through the initiative, I met nonprofits ranging from sports to the environment to healthcare before I matched with Thira Smith, the nonprofit's executive director. These conversations empower nonprofits and students to choose the experiential learning option that best meets both of their needs. Nonprofits are selected by the college's partner, Northeast Texas Nonprofit Development Center, after reviewing student applications sharing skills and interests.

To reveal how Stepping Up makes a positive impact on student development, I share my civic leadership experience, along with a peer. This academic year saw the largest cohort—13—of Reaud Honors student civic leaders.

Here are our stories.

JERI'S JOURNEY
Helping incarcerated families that remind me of my own

As a child of an incarcerated parent, I was struck by a local social justice movement to positively change the lives of families with incarcerated or deceased parents, helping in ways that I never got to experience while I was growing up in Southeast Texas.

When my mother went to jail, my physically disabled father was left to raise twin girls on his own. My sister Teri and I were in elementary school. In between applying for jobs and dealing with his health, my father had no time to shop for school uniforms required by our district. By the constraint of time, he also carried the expense of buying two of everything.

If Augusta’s Angels had been around when I was a child, I believe my father would have not only felt a burden lifted off his shoulders, but also would have found a community to turn to for support. Today, when I see children receive toys, meals, and clothing, and play educational activities through the nonprofit, I admire their joy. Augusta’s Angels opened me up to a new world of volunteering and serving communities. I always wanted to make an impact. Before Stepping Up, I never thought to join a nonprofit. Through the initiative, I met nonprofits ranging from sports to the environment to healthcare before I matched with the nonprofit Thira Smith founded in 2012 as a legacy to her brother, Augusta Sr. His last act of kindness in my community, a place that reflects a position I was in during my life.

My time as a non-voting board member broke me out of my shell and pushed me into the world. I saw their joy. Augusta’s Angels opened me up to a new world of volunteering and serving communities. I always wanted to make an impact. Before Stepping Up, I never thought to join a nonprofit. Through the initiative, I met nonprofits ranging from sports to the environment to healthcare before I matched with the nonprofit Thira Smith founded in 2012 as a legacy to her brother, Augusta Sr. His last act of kindness happened on Christmas Day in 2011, when he helped a crying boy get a bike he desperately needed.

Before I knew it, I was labeling bikes and stuffing stockings to give to children at Angel Tree Christmas, the board's biggest event. After a couple of months, I knew that Stepping Up had helped me find my place in my community, a place that reflects a position I was in during my life. My time as a non-voting board member broke me out of my shell and pushed me into the world. I saw firsthand how, even in uncertain times, a community can band together to accomplish important tasks. I discovered how essential conflict management is in keeping progress moving within an organization. And I saw lots and lots of joy. I loved seeing the kids have so much fun.

As a leader, I have learned to step up for more community-led opportunities and to become a passionate advocate for improving the lives of families like mine. Looking ahead, I am excited to continue contributing to the future of Augusta’s Angels as a board member.

ARIZBETH’S JOURNEY
Inspired to professionally serve medically underserved communities

“I was caught between choosing other boards, as they all were so interesting and had incredible mission statements, but I know I made the right choice choosing Legacy Community Health,” said Arizbeth Lopez Garcia, a Biology Pre-Med junior.

“The board’s mission is to provide anyone with healthcare despite their financial situations and insurance status. I want to become a doctor and, after learning how nonprofit medical boards are run, I now have a goal to open up similar clinics in Mexico for those who can’t afford care.”

Initially, the board wasn’t what she expected. Going in, Lopez didn’t realize Legacy was bigger than its footprint in our coastal city. Her role as an honorary board member would be with Legacy’s Beaumont Advisory Board, overseen by the larger main clinic located in Houston.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the board adapted to host meetings bimonthly with a mixture of in-person and online. In the board meetings, she witnessed the process of problem solving, with the most pressing problem being the effect the pandemic had on nonprofit funding. The members decided to get involved with the community in non-health-related situations.

The biggest event the board hosted, Lemonade Day, teaches children about starting their own businesses. After the kids get funding from their parents, the board assigns the kids a budget to get materials for their lemonade stand. On Lemonade Day, kids all over Southeast Texas set up their stands to sell lemonade to their neighbors and friends.

“Once the day is over, the board informs the kids of the profits they made. Their profits are assigned to savings and spending, and they also set money aside to pay back their loan that they got from their parents in the beginning,” Lopez explained.

After her nine-month service, Lopez intends to stay on, saying, “I want to continue going to their meetings so I can keep learning and growing by helping my community in need of healthcare.”

AVERY’S JOURNEY
Spreading the word about local crisis intervention services

Nursing sophomore Avery McLain first heard of the Stepping Up initiative through the testimonies of previous participants. “I’m not from the area, so I don’t know a lot about the community that the kids get funding from their parents, the board assigns the kids a budget to get materials for their lemonade stand. On Lemonade Day, kids all over Southeast Texas set up their stands to sell lemonade to their neighbors and friends.

“One day, the board informed the kids of the profits they made. Their profits are assigned to savings and spending, and they also set money aside to pay back their loan that they got from their parents in the beginning,” Lopez explained.

After her nine-month service, Lopez intends to stay on, saying, “I want to continue going to their meetings so I can keep learning and growing by helping my community in need of healthcare.”

I share my civic leadership experience, positive impact on student development, skills and interests.

I always try my best to be involved where I can, because you know you’re representing Lamar and the Reaud Honors College. Even when you don’t have scheduled time with them, you do want to make sure that you’re on top of things. That’s just one of the beneficial parts of the Stepping Up program,” McLain said.

Besides helping children receive school supplies and uniforms throughout the school year, McLain also participated in the board’s annual Christmas program. “Share-A-Toy” is set up like a small toy store for parents to shop for their kids, except the toys have zero cost. “Seeing their love for these families during the holiday season was a great experience,” McLain said.

“In the future, I want to be involved in nonprofits,” McLain said. “I’m glad I got to work with the United Board of Missions to see the inner workings of a nonprofit, like the grant writing, the fundraising, and how decisions are made. I’m grateful I got to provide my own input in that setting.”
Chasing Lightbulb Moments

Dr. Christopher Martin’s infectious passion for academic excellence at LU: 2004-22.

“Ah, the Places You’ll Go!”

Most have heard these five simple words, filled with whimsy and expectation, made famous by the great, late Dr. Seuss. They have encouraged individuals to weave beautiful tapestries colored by lives full of excitement and disappointment, growth and hardship, joy and sorrow.

While traveling along his own adventurous path, as an associate professor of Chemistry at Lamar University, Dr. Christopher Martin has brought educational light to his students for nearly 20 years. His next journey will take him to Ohio Dominican University, professor of Chemistry at Lamar University, deeply appreciative of how his infectious passion for learning has inspired their own academic journeys.

“I love what I do, and I’m doing what I love,” he said. “I have never been satisfied with saying that being a professor was just a job.”

While he fulfilled his call to teach on LU’s campus, countless students have benefitted from Martin’s willingness to pass on his infectious passion for academic excellence and his chasing of “lightbulb moments”.

“After seeing how much love he holds for his profession, it has inspired me to look for that same level of passion in my future career,” said Dakota Emerson, a Chemical Engineering junior.

Armed with dedication, excitement, and tenacity, Martin arrived at Lamar University in July 2004 ready to teach and conduct research. Interested in photochemistry on biologically active systems, he taught his Reaud Honors research students how using light creates changes in substances.

Every chance he can, he relates his research to his teaching to demonstrate to his students that real science happens today, not just in their textbooks.

“I believe in the adage, ‘Give a man a fish, he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime.’ I strive to convince students that learning is fun and want them to want to learn more. I’m successful when my students succeed,” he said.

“Dr. Martin’s teaching increased my confidence and helped me improve my problem solving and verbal communication skills,” said Menna Elsaka, a Chemistry and Biochemistry Pre-Med graduate (Class of 2022). “He was instrumental in changing our bad habits as students. I learned how to refine points, communicate more efficiently, and became a better learner overall.”

Elsaka’s appreciation for the chemistry professor was reflected by her Reaud Honors peers, when the Honors Student Association honored Martin as “Honors Professor of the Year” in 2021.

Touched by the student recognition, Martin reciprocated his respect for the community of high-achieving students, saying, “The honors college provides an excellent opportunity to keep peer support and like-minded individuals together, while simultaneously providing mutual mental engagement.”

Carl Theriot, a Biology Pre-Med junior mentored by Martin as a research student, said, “He has pushed me to truly believe that I am capable of doing the big things I want to do. My dream is to become a doctor, and he has never once questioned that dream or made me feel like I could not do it. He always just encouraged me and offered his support in any way he could.”

Never expecting more from his students than he does of himself, Martin said, “I give everything because I do not want to let my students down. How I act, how high I set the bar for myself, sets the bar high for them too.”

As one of his current Honors Organic Chemistry students, I, too, can attest to the superior quality and high standards of distinction and motivation Martin affords to those he teaches.

Martin’s legacy at Lamar University will shine through his students as we take what we have learned under his tutelage and advance that knowledge forward into our continued education and careers around the world.

Martin taught us, “We must all be willing to change and grow, even when it is uncomfortable.” He also advised, “Life does not give curves.”

Martin’s energy and enthusiastic teaching style opened up many eyes in a multitude of ways. His former students will—whether happy, sad, lost, waiting, or found—carry his lessons onward to all the places they will go in this great balancing act of life.

Let’s wish Dr. Martin a fond farewell with a Dr. Seuss-like goodbye:

Good luck, Dr. Christopher Martin. Congratulations on climbing this new mountain!

As you head off to your next adventure along the way, your LU students want to thank you today. We know you’ll enjoy all the places you’ll see. We count ourselves lucky among the lives you have touched. Never forget that we will miss you so much!”
“My motto for this past year was, ‘Become comfortable with being uncomfortable, and seize the opportunity.’ If there’s any advice that I could give to incoming Cardinals or current students, it’s to just go for it and you will do great things.”

— Taliah Belcher, McNair Scholar, Presidential Fellow, O.U.R. Grantee, and Study Abroad Scholar

From the start of her freshman year, Plano native Taliah Belcher has been actively involved in numerous campus clubs and organizations. During the 2021-22 academic year, she served the LU community in numerous ways, including as: LU Ambassador, president of the College of Business Student Advisory Council, resident assistant, and student director and co-chair for Cardinal SOAR. She previously served as secretary and treasurer for the Student Government Association.

Belcher entered Fall 2021 as an accounting and finance senior, fresh off her summer internship with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). She gained her H.E.A.P. edge by helping First Robotics enhance its marketing and promotion efforts; learning about PwC’s strategy to contribute in many meaningful ways, and our college is proud of each and every one of our Honors Cardinals.

David Williams, Mechanical Engineering Graduate:
In his role as SGA Vice-President, Williams proposed Student Activity Hour for all TSUS institutions at the TSUS Board of Regents meeting. LU will implement his idea, as Cardinal Engagement Hour, starting in Fall 2022.

Ryan Shugart, Mechanical Engineering/Electrical Engineering senior
Christine Osborne, Marketing/English senior: As founders of the Robotic Cardinals student organization, Shugart and Osborne launched Robotic Weekend workshpoks to teach Texas Academy, Lamar University, and area high school students how to build robots. Both are also active leaders in LU’s summer engineering youth camps.

LU AMBASSADORS
Reaud Honors students joining LU Ambassadors team in 2022-23:
Julia Barrett, Kalan Bonnette, Waverlee Cooper, Connor Montgomery, Joseph Murphy, and Shellbie Williams.

LU’s summer engineering youth camps, mentored by the Robotic Cardinals student organization, have expanded to serve students across the region, with plans to expand even further in the future.

Leadership
Sindi Castillo, Biology Pre-Med Junior:
Heading to McGovern Medical School in Houston for her internship as part of the Joint Admission Medical Programs (JAMP). Last summer, Castillo interned at Baylor College of Medicine where she learned anatomy in a cadaver lab, simulated medical patient encounters, and participated in roundtable discussions with various physicians.

Britney Brevell, Biology Pre-Med Junior:
Named Omicron Delta Kappa LU Chapter President. Lamar University became the first college in TSUS to charter the leadership honor society.

Madison Taylor, Nursing Junior:
In her role as Rotaract President, Taylor shared “Rotaract’s Impact at Lamar University” as the featured guest speaker at Rotary Club. She is also an LU Cheer athlete (shown with Dean Thioubdeau) and an LU Ambassador.

SAFETY LEADERS
2022-2023 HSA OFFICERS

Honor students elected Lexus Wilkerson, Sindi Castillo, and Aleema Huda to lead the Honors Student Association as President, Vice-President, and Secretary/Treasurer, and Senator Shelbie Williams and Representative Luis Arevalo to represent the Reaud Honors College and HSA, respectively, in Student Government Association.

Caitlyn Barlow and Amanniyavani Nathamuni will lead Community Engagement; Muhammad Jabbar and Morgan Luke, Service Committee; Patricia Castaton and Luke Sudolski, Intramural Sports; Emma Okawa and Brenna Swanton, Social Events; and Stephanie Barron, Waverlee Cooper, and Hannah Norwood, Peer Mentoring.

*Our Changemakers feature offers an assortment of Reaud Honors students to share an overview of how they imagine, innovate, impact, and inspire our campus community each year. This is not a comprehensive list. Our students contribute in many meaningful ways, and our college is proud of each and every one of our Honors Cardinals.

CHANGEMAKERS

Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity

Read related honors presented students their findings at the following conferences during 2021-2022.


Award-Winning Research


OUTSTANDING SENIOR MAN

Brendon Camp, Political Science and Criminal Justice Graduate:
Camp represented his honors community and Lamar University in numerous leadership roles, including as outstanding delegate at Model United Nations, president of the Moot Court Association, and holds numerous leadership roles, including as outstanding delegate at Model United Nations, president of the Moot Court Association, and Vice-President of the Pre-Law Society. In recognition of his exceptional undergraduate journey, Camp received a Robert Kemble Award for Outstanding Senior Man, accompanied by $1,000, from the Division of Student Engagement. Camp aspires to work for the U.S. Department of Justice and will pursue a JD at Harvard Law School.

ANN SHAW LEADERSHIP AWARD

Kelvin Elgar, Chemical Engineering Senior:
Earning a $1,000 award for fostering a spirit of teamwork and excellence in leadership, Elgar served his Cardinal Community as president of the Student Society of Asian Scientists and Engineers (SASE); peer mentoring co-chair of the Honors Student Association (HSA); as an undergraduate researcher, most notably as an O.U.$ Grant recipient; and as an LU Ambassador. His contributions are driven by a desire to keep diversity and inclusion at the forefront on campus by collaborating with student organizations and community partners.

Ever since my senior year of high school, “my goals were to graduate from LU, attend a top-tier law school, and work in a field of law that is most beneficial to Syrians and Palestinians around the world.”

—Ali Hamza, Presidential Fellow

President Fellow

Ali Hamza, Political Science Graduate:

The highlights of his fellowship included: attending US House Foreign Affairs committee meetings and congressional hearings; meeting with the U.S. Special Envoy to Syria to hear his take on current Syrian-American policies; and attending and reporting on the National Interest Foundation’s event on “Syria Sanctions: The Caesar Act One Year Later.” As a Muslim Syrian-Palestinian American, Hamza aims to be a lawyer advocating for the legal rights of Syrians and Palestinians around the world.

Awards & Recognitions

PHI KAPPA PHI FELLOW & OUTSTANDING SENIOR WOMAN

Tiffany Tran, Biology Pre-Dental Graduate:
Tran represented her honors community and Lamar University in numerous leadership roles, including as TSUS Regents’ Student Scholar, senator of the Reaud Honors College, and president of the Student Government Association. In recognition of her exceptional undergraduate journey, Tran received the Bess Gentry Award for Outstanding Senior Woman, accompanied by $1,000, from the Division of Student Engagement. Phi Kappa Phi also recognized her with an $8,500 national fellowship. Tran aspires to be a dentist and will pursue a DDS at UT Health School of Dentistry.

SENIORS OF SIGNIFICANCE


Looking Ahead

Read related honors students conducting undergraduate research this summer who will present their findings in 2022-2023.

David Beek Fellowship: Zaid Mohammed
Fellows receive up to $10,000 in research support and academic scholarships covering tuition, books, and on-campus room and board. A 1981 Lamar University graduate and 1999 Distinguished Alumnus, David Beek is a Front Artist lawyer and founder/partner of the Back Radders Integration firm in Houston.

Presidential Fellowship: Taliha Belcher
Fellows receive up to $10,000 in research support. O.U.$ SURF Fellowship: David Naftanian, Chloé Smith, and Lily Takeda. Fellows participate in 10 weeks of research and receive a stipend of up to $2,000.

LURA

Read related honors students who will represent Lamar’s undergraduate research as leaders in O.U.$ Lamar University Undergraduate Research Association:
Zaid Mohammed, President; Hannah Norwood, Vice-President; David Matherne, Secretary; Tyler Stuck, Recruitment Director; Tomisin Egbevale, Communications Director.

"Best Master Oral Presentation": O.U.$ STEM 2021, given to Radiation Alumna and Ph.D. Candidate in Mechanical Engineering at Rice University Tyler Martin (Class of 2022) for project: "Tying in-built 3D Super Hydrophobic Intersilts." "Second Place in Best In-Progress Research": O.U.$ STEM 2021, given to Biology Pre-Med junior Vishaal Mundodi for project: "Targeted Flammul Delivery Using Surface Guided Adhesion," conducted at University of Texas Medical School-Houston.

"First Place in Best Poster: Advanced": O.U.$ Expo 2022, given to Senior nursing student Bethany Edwards for project: "Targeting COVID-19 in the Nursing Profession in Texas."

BECK FELLOW

After volunteering at an orphanage in Costa Rica in 2015, Alessia Starrock (Social Work graduate) found herself exactly where she belonged: helping children in need. During her undergraduate exploration of her Social Work major at Lamar University, she developed an immense passion for foster children.

As a David J. Beck Fellow, mentored by Dr. Ginger Gummelt, Starrock (shown above at the U.S. Capitol) researched “The Evolution of Childhood Violence” while coordinating with members of Congress, White House staff, and deans of HBCUs across the nation during her work as a marketing intern at the HBCU National Center in Washington, D.C.

Building on the work she researched as a Beck Fellow, Starrock plans to pursue a Master of Social Work and begin the path to creating her own nonprofit for children in the foster care system.

CARDOINAL ORIENTATION LEADERS

Sara Barboza (Interdisciplinary Studies freshman)
Anellie Bautista (English junior)
Kalan Bonnette (Math & Computer Science senior)
Angie Butta (Nursing sophomore)
David Williams (Mechanical Engineering graduate and Student Orientation Coordinator)

This summer, five Reaud Honors students joined their LU peers to welcome future Cardinals at summer orientations aimed at helping students transition to college life. As Cardinal Orientation leaders, they performed in skits, led small group sessions, informed students of campus resources and questions, and assisted family members with questions. Go, Cardinal Nation!}

STEPPING UP CIVIC LEADERS

Reaud Honors students who served as ex-officio members on the boards of local nonprofits through our service leadership initiative:

Carolyn Gilbert Honors House: Emily Alvarez (Advertising Communications junior)
Census Stopper of SETX: Caitlyn Barlow (Mechanical Engineering & Math junior)
Leadership Southwest Texas: Tommin Egbeawide (Computer Science freshman)
Community in Schools of SETX: Camille Fam (Biochemistry Pre-Med junior)
Legacy Community Health: Arizbeth Lopez Garcia (Biology Pre-Med junior)
American Red Cross-SETX: Amber Maredia (Biology Pre-Physician Assistant senior)
United Way of Beaumont: Avery McLain (Nursing sophomore)
Gulf Coast Youth Soccer Club: Zaid Mohammad (Biology Pre-Med sophomore)
TX Christian Professional Women Network: Line Yid Recinos (Biology Pre-Med junior)
Surviving Parents of SETX: Sanija Shahzad (Psychology Pre-Med senior)
Augusta’s Angels: Terri Wolfe (English junior)
Arts of Greater Beaumont: Jenifer Zarate (Biology Pre-Med sophomore)

CHANGEMAKERS

Mr. O’Brien Stanley earned special student recognition as Honors Professor of the Year by the Honors Student Association. Film and Popular Culture Professor of Communication in the College of Fine Arts and Communication since 1997, Stanley teaches Honors Film Appreciation and honors seminars, including “Marvel Cinematic Universe” this past fall semester. His Reaud Honors students appreciate Stanley’s passion for teaching, crediting him with creating an academic space that allows for dialogue and for his inclusive teaching style that draws students in, even if they don’t know the topic well. Stanley holds an M.F.A. in film and video production from Ohio University and a B.A. in History and Political Science from Stephen F. Austin State University. He worked in corporate video production in West Virginia, then taught high school video production in Houston, Texas, before he accepted a position at Lamar University. In 2009, he returned to his narrative filmmaking roots to work on projects with his youngest son.

Stanley’s contributions to LU include helping direct the Southeast TX broadcast program, in which students videotape meetings of local and regional government entities; working on short science fiction films; and writing a book with other LU faculty members, titled Martian Pictures: Analyzing the Cinema of the Red Planet. His research explores how films create a bridge to society and political science.

CARDINAL ORIENTATION LEADERS

Sara Barboza (Interdisciplinary Studies freshman)
Anellie Bautista (Nursing sophomore)
David Williams (Mechanical Engineering graduate and Student Orientation Coordinator)

2022 STUDENT ORG OF THE YEAR

LU’s MedLife chapter was founded in 2020 by five Reaud Honors students: President Amber Maredia, Vice-President Mackenzie Savage, Treasurer Bethany Edwards, Fundraising Officer Sindi Castillo, and Volunteer Officer Deidre Dages.

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Alumni News

Reaud Honors College Alumni Advisory Council

Hearty welcome to Joshua Davis and Wesley Smith, our newest Alumni Advisory Council members!


Jenny Achilles, 2003. Promoted to senior director and chief program officer at the Treville Foundation in Round Rock.

Carine Ghosn, 2003. Hired as Workday manager at MCG University in Montréal, Québec, Canada.

Josh Dauplais, 2004. Promoted to associate professor of mathematics and named dean Paul R. Geewax Excellence Professor in Business at Texas State University in San Marcos. As part of his professorship, he plans to devote time to the SCALEUP initiative and launch a student entrepreneurship research group named SCALEUP, helping answer the question of why minority-owned businesses don’t grow to full potential.

Mason Tschoop, 2005. Promoted to regional capital manager-Texas at Newcor in Houston.

Blake Windhorn, 2008. Promoted to director of production-research-tax credits and incentives at ABIQ USA headquartered in Fort Worth, Texas.

Rud Ponce, 2010. Hired as director of product management at MeridianLink (formerly StreetShares Platform) headquartered in Port Mica, Florida.


Thaddeaus Green, 2011. Hired as Development Officer at Housing Authority of Prince George’s County in Largo, Maryland.

Wesley Smith, 2011. Hired as assistant professor of pediatrics, hematology and oncology at the University of Kentucky; joined the Reaud Honors College Alumni Advisory Council.


Brett Bertha, 2013. Hired as SIS engineer at BASF in Chattnooga, Tennessee.

Rachel Bimagga, 2013. Hired as senior brand designer for ZolTrain in Denver, Colorado.

Ryan Dragge, 2013. Hired as security technical program manager at Amazon Web Services in Austin.

Elizabeth Files, 2013. Promoted to Inside Sales representative at Forepoint in Austin.

Gwendolyn Mummard, 2013. Promoted to graphic design and content manager at AI2 in Houston.


Kyleigh Romero, 2013. Awarded the Meaning Recognition award for her teaching excellence at Magnolia ISD.

Jennifer Torres, 2013. Hired as student life and leadership coordinator at Selwyn House School in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Jenni Achilles, 2013. Promoted to senior director and chief program officer at the Treville Foundation in Round Rock.

The Houston area LU Alumni Party was held at Saint Arnold Brewing Company in May. Guests included Reaud Honors alumni (back row, third from left) Aarom Lavergne (Class of 2017), Luke Nguyen (Class of 2022), Marcus Rodgers (Class of 2020), and Ryan Sherer (Class of 2018). They were joined by current Reaud Honors students in the front row: Annabelle Broussard (second) and Sindhi Castillo (far right).

Photo courtesy Lamar Alumni Ambassadors.

Jordan King, 2013. Promoted to Program Engineer at Terex Energy and transferred to Brussels, Belgium.

Joceline Benavides, 2016. Hired as junior compliance consultant at Loren S. Stark Company in Houston. Since 2021, she has also served as a board member for the Children’s Transplant Initiative.

Lindsey Darby, 2016. Hired as campaign manager at Fort Page Sage SEO headquartered in San Francisco.

Christopher Hagner, 2016. Promoted to manager of business intelligence at the Oklahoma City Thunder NBA team.


Jacob Martin, 2016. Recognized among the NFT 100 by NFTNOW as the community’s most approachable source for NFT-related legal counsel on subjects ranging from intellectual property, copyright law, litigation, and entity structures.

Emily McMillon, 2016. Graduated with Ph.D. in mathematics from University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Kristen Reynolds, 2016. Co-founded Drinkicks, the world’s first sneaker-themed beverage company.

Sam Toben, 2016. Hired as associate attorney at Apogee in Dallas.

Zach Townley-Smith, 2016. Graduated with MFE from Stevens Institute of Technology.

Julia Gros, 2017. Hired as Tier 1 Customer Support Specialist at Benston in Austin.


Lukas Moravits, 2017. Promoted to sales engineer at D ashleigh Corporation in Houston.


Jamie Stafford, 2017. Awarded the Dan E. Wash Outstanding dissertation award when she graduated with her Ph.D. in physics at the University of Wisconsin. Stafford’s research contributed to activities in nuclear and high-energy physics by using a particular first principles computational method to interpret experimental results obtained at CERN and Brookhaven National Laboratory.

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Dr. Delvin Seawright surprised his mentee at graduation in Fort Worth, texted her a copy of the program from his seat with “Congratulations!” She was so touched, she invited Delvin to Seawright to meet her family and friends after the ceremony. Victoria LaFleur (Class of 2019) graduated from Texas A&M University School of Law this May. Congratulations, #FutureAGLawyer!

Photo courtesy Dr. Delvin Seawright

Brah’s Hamdan, 2020. Hired as Industrial Engineer at Lockheed Martin in Fort Worth.


Katelynn Maxwell, 2021. Promoted to VIPER project engineer at Aero/Space Industries in Houston.


Todd “T.J.” Senter, 2021. Graduated with M.S. in biomedical sciences from the University of Mississippi Medical Center–Jackson.


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Photo courtesy Dr. Delvin Seawright
Celebrations of our Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 Reed Honors College Graduates are available as biography albums on RHC’s Facebook:

To view each album: click on “Photos” and “See All” (mobile) or click on “Photos” and “Albums” (desktop).
Through the Beaumont Foundation of America, young people of exceptional promise and critical financial need are empowered to reach their full potential at Lamar University through generous full-tuition scholarships as Southeast Texas Legend Scholars. The Reaud Honors College is privileged to include 13 scholars as part of our honors community.

Southeast Texas Legend Scholars

Southeast Texas Legend Scholars (among other scholarship recipients): Austin Havard, Catherine Swig, Julie Nguyen, Christine Osborne, Jennifer Zarate, Ailinh Tran, Seth Kees, Lexena Wilkerson, Dakota Emerson, Campbell Fuller, Tanner Weir, and Sergio Mendez (not shown, Reese Bonin).

Thank You Mr. Reaud

The students of the Reaud Honors College would like to extend their gratitude to Mr. Wayne Reaud. Thanks to Mr. Reaud’s generosity, the Honors college has the support it needs to develop its future projects and plans. His donation has provided students with significant educational opportunities, enabling the Reaud Honors College to make an even greater impact on students’ lives. Thank you for helping to provide a quality education and college experience to hundreds of students every year.

Reflecting Back

The 2021-2022 academic year has been an outstanding one in the Reaud Honors College!

Over the past year, the Reaud Honors College partnered with the McNair Scholars Program and Office of Undergraduate Research to promote research and scholarship amongst Honors students at Lamar University. We worked with O.U.R. Director Dr. Cristian Bahrim, McNair Director Pamela Comer, and Associate Provost for Research and Sponsored Programs Dr. Jerry Lin on a grant to support the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. The U.S. Department of Education renewed the program at LU, awarding nearly $1.3 million over the next five years. On the undergraduate level, the program helps first-generation, low-income students participate in undergraduate research.

Another triumph of the honors college this past year was building community through the Stepping Up: Service Leadership Initiative. We had our largest group of student board members in our program history! Students served at 13 nonprofits that included Legacy Community Health, Augusta’s Angels, Caroline Gilbert Hinchee House, United Board of Missions, and Leadership Southeast Texas.

This was also our inaugural year to kick off the Alumni Mentor Program (AMP). We have approximately eight mentees and alumni mentors involved in the program. We also encouraged connections between honors alumni by replacing our Facebook alumni group with a LinkedIn alumni group. We already see more professional updates and engagement than we ever did in the Facebook group!

We launched a brand new website, lamar.edu/honors, to create a more dynamic, user-friendly, and navigable resource for students and alumni. This replaces the hard copy guidebook some of you may remember with searchable content, including a “guidebook” that links all content in one place, that you can access online from anywhere—your laptop and your phone!

Looking Ahead

The upcoming year will bring some exciting changes to the Reaud Honors College as we continue to strive toward our goal of becoming the best honors college in the state of Texas.

We look forward to sending students to Dallas next year to present their experiences in Stepping Up and Partners in the Parks, and to Austin, for Texas Model United Nations (TexMUN). Our biggest community event of the year will be a brand new one for our college—Honors Scholars Day. This event aims to help our community partners and LU students and faculty learn more about honors college-hosted events, honors-in-major, and honors student-hosted events. Honors college students will share their participation in undergraduate research, study abroad, and student-led organizations.

We will continue to work with our Alumni Advisory Council on programs that mutually benefit our alumni and our current students; create creative academic pathways for our students; and share our experiences with our honors colleagues in the National Collegiate Honors Council for years to come.

We look forward to continuing our collegial partnerships with the academic colleges here at Lamar University, collaborating with our industry partners and corporate relations, and connecting with our Reaud Honors College students and alumni.
Every year, current and incoming Reaud Honors College students are invited to participate in our Summer Reading program. Students select from a list of books chosen by Lamar University faculty to read over the summer. The reading clubs meet to discuss the books during the Fall semester, and students also share their perspectives about the books and the club discussions in their ePortfolios. The above books were read by students in this summer's book clubs.