

FALL 2016

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A Publication of the Graduate College of Social Work

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**

GRADUATE COLLEGE of SOCIAL WORK

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MISSION STATEMENT

The University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW) prepares diverse leaders in practice and research to address complex challenges and achieve sustainable social, racial, economic, and political justice, local to global, through exceptional education, innovative research, and meaningful community engagement.



NOTEWORTHY

What a year! It is with a tremendous amount of pride — Cougar pride — that I reflect on the noteworthy accomplishments of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW). I am excited to share some highlights from an incredible first year at the helm of the GCSW. Inside you'll find examples of scholarship and leadership, community engagement, innovation, and the generosity of those who believe in the work we do.

One of the highlights of the year was writing the College's strategic plan with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners. Staying true to the already extraordinary work of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni, together we dug deep to craft a bold vision of creating a world in which justice for all is not an aspiration but a reality.

[OUR VISION] TO ACHIEVE **SOCIAL, RACIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL JUSTICE, LOCAL TO GLOBAL**

Another highlight of this year was embracing Houston and experiencing firsthand a wonderful city known for its world-class leadership. Progressive leaders, including Houston's new mayor Sylvester Turner and University of Houston President Renu Khator, alongside prominent GCSW alumni, have inspired an environment full of possibilities for purpose-driven change. It's an exciting time to be in Houston! As dean of the GCSW, I am eager to build upon a strong tradition of excellence and innovation.

I hope you enjoy this snapshot of our year as much as I have enjoyed my first year as dean.

Warmest regards,

Alan Dettlaff, PhD, MSW
Dean and Maconda Brown O'Connor Endowed Dean's Chair

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

QUICK FACTS

THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK IS ONE OF 14 COLLEGES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, A CARNEGIE-DESIGNATED **TIER ONE** PUBLIC RESEARCH INSTITUTION.*

667
ACRE **CAMPUS**

40,000+
STUDENTS

24
RESEARCH **CENTERS**

90 COLLABORATIONS
WITH RESEARCHERS
IN **90 COUNTRIES**

DESIGNATED **HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION (HSI)** AND **ASIAN AMERICAN-SERVING INSTITUTION***

2nd **MOST RACIALLY/ETHNICALLY DIVERSE** UNIVERSITY IN THE NATION[^]

*CARNEGIE FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING (2011, 2016)

*US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (2012)

[^]US NEWS & WORLD REPORT (2010)

NEW PROGRAM OPTIONS

EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES

MSW/MPP

This fall the GCSW welcomes its inaugural group of students pursuing a new dual-degree program that pairs social work with public policy.

A natural extension of GCSW's innovative curriculum, the new MSW/MPP degree option arose from student and community interest in increased opportunities and experiences in policy and political social work.

Students enrolled in the MSW/MPP program work on both degrees concurrently and prepare to become social welfare policy professionals such as policy analysts, research associates, and statisticians.

"The skills, theories, and practical experiences that students will gain through this unique program are essential for preparing professionals who are equipped to tackle the pressing social welfare challenges we face both today and in the future," said Suzanne Pritzker, associate professor at the GCSW and lead faculty for the GCSW's Political Social Work specialization.

Students are required to participate in internships or field practicums offered through the GCSW. Dual-degree students are eligible to participate in the GCSW's Austin Legislative Internship Program, offered during legislative years, in which students work full time as policy analysts to learn firsthand how policies are made.

ONLINE PROGRAM

To help combat predicted shortages of social workers in numerous regions, including Texas, the GCSW has developed an online curriculum to address better the needs of prospective students.

"Increasingly, students are turning to online classes as a means of achieving their educational goals," said Ginger Lucas, clinical assistant professor at the College and director of the new online program. "This program has the same rigorous standards as our traditional program but offers flexibility to students who work or have personal commitments that prevent them from attending in-person classes during traditional hours."

The new program responds to the national trend of students looking for more options and flexibility in pursuing advanced degrees. It also increases enrollment options for currently employed social service workers, Lucas said.

"The new online MSW program is ideal for professionals in the industry who want to continue to work while advancing their careers with training, education, and licensure from a top-ranked, nationally accredited program."

ART SCENE

This spring, the GCSW joined Cairo, Paris, Cape Town, and Rio de Janeiro as a site selected by world-renowned calligraffiti artist **eL Seed** for his artwork.

The artist's unique style combines Arabic calligraphy with a message inspired by the local community. The GCSW building now imparts a message from famous Houstonian Sam Houston: **"Knowledge is the food of genius, and my son, let no opportunity escape you to treasure up knowledge."**

When **eL Seed** selected the GCSW, he had no idea the building housed a College dedicated to social justice. He was pleasantly surprised to learn that the GCSW champions causes so closely aligned with the purpose of his art, to bring people, cultures, and generations together.

"It's funny, I don't believe in coincidence. So it's destiny. I think that my work is, in a certain way, social. There is a social part of it. I am trying to raise awareness of a social issue. And that's funny because in the end I didn't pick the building of science. Looks like we connected because of it."



ART SCENE

SOCIAL JUSTICE PROVIDES INSPIRATION

Over the years, the GCSW has assumed a quiet tradition of commissioning and showcasing social justice-inspired art. The College welcomes new students with an introduction to *Pulling Together*, a richly colored mosaic mural at the building's entrance. Commissioned in 2000 by former dean Ira Colby, the piece depicts life-sized people pulling apart the chains of oppression. The conversation about its symbolism marks the beginning of the students' engagement with social justice at the GCSW, an engagement that will continue throughout their careers.

"[ART] CAN BRING CERTAIN ISSUES TO THE FOREFRONT OF A PUBLIC DISCOURSE, PARTICULARLY IF THE ARTWORK IS PLACED IN A SETTING THAT ATTRACTS WIDESPREAD ATTENTION AND IF THE MESSAGE RESONATES WITH THE [PEOPLE.]"

HOUSTON ARTIST REGINALD ADAMS,
CREATOR OF *PULLING TOGETHER*



Artist Anat Ronen paints *Equality Means Education for Everyone*

As an advocacy project in Fall 2015 for the course Social Work and Global Justice Issues, taught by Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams and Professor Aabha Brown, one student group organized an event inspired by the work of Malala Yousafzai to promote global female education. With the support of generous donors, the students commissioned local artist Anat Ronen to paint an eight-foot-square portrait of Malala while standing in front of the GCSW building in order to draw an audience who otherwise may not have considered the issue or its importance. Following the event, the donors dedicated the piece, *Equality Means Education for Everyone*, to the College, where it hangs on the building's second floor as a reminder of the power of advocacy and art in social justice.

GCSW RESEARCH

Rich partnerships between faculty and community fuel an active research environment marked by collaboration and innovation. As a College at a Tier One university (see *infograph on page 4*) that gives research a top priority, the GCSW is producing increasingly multi-disciplinary, translational, and transformative research.

The following examples of projects from the 2015-2016 year reflect our vision to achieve social, racial, economic, and political justice, local to global.

HYPE 2.0 Project (Helping Youth Prevent Engaging in Risky Behaviors): Focuses on the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and addresses the development of youth assets via financial literacy, parent-child communication, and career development among African American and Hispanic youth in the greater Houston area.

Funded by: Administration for Children and Families: Family and Youth Services Bureau
Co-PI: Sheara Williams Jennings, PhD

SMART Cougars & SMART Cougars Plus: Addresses racial disparities in HIV prevention. See story on page 16.

Funded by: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP)

PI: Luis Torres, PhD
Co-PI: Samira Ali, PhD

Trauma, Stress, and Coping Experiences Among Unaccompanied Latino Immigrant Children in Texas: Seeks to understand the experiences of unaccompanied migrant youth and the challenges they face with integration in their families, communities, and schools.

Funded by: The UH Center for Mexican American Studies, Communities in Schools of Houston
PI: Jodi Berger Cardoso, PhD

Youth Count 2.0: Developed an innovative and community-focused method to identify accurately the prevalence and composition of the homeless youth population with the aim of generating reliable data to improve services and policy.

Funded by: Greater Houston Foundation: Greater Houston Fund to End Homelessness
PI: Sarah Narendorf, PhD

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

CULTURAL PREFERENCES IN PALLIATIVE CARE



“THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT POOR **COMMUNICATION** BETWEEN PROVIDERS AND PATIENTS MAY BE ONE OF THE BIGGEST, YET FIXABLE, CONTRIBUTORS TOWARD END-OF-LIFE ETHNIC AND RACIAL **DISPARITIES.**”

Dr. Isabel Torres, associate professor and past recipient of several grants from the National Cancer Institute, identifies factors and culturally appropriate strategies to address end-of-life care disparities and improve the quality of care provided to one of the fastest growing segments of the aging population: older Latinos with advanced cancer.

“The assumption in the US is that most people want to be told their diagnosis and prognosis flat out, but people from other cultures may have different communication styles and preferences, and knowing these preferences is key to improving patient care and outcomes as well as the use and quality of palliative care services,” said Torres.

Her recent R21 grant award from the National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Nursing Research is funding a two-year study that interviews 100 older Latinos with stage three or

four locally advanced, recurrent, or metastatic cancer and their caregivers. The study also interviews older Anglo patients with advanced cancer and their family caregivers. All are being asked about their preferences regarding the content, style, and timing of diagnostic and prognostic information.

“An important piece of our new NIH study has to do with identifying and understanding patient and family preferences specifically regarding how they want to be told ‘bad news.’ Interestingly, patient preferences related to what is referred to as ‘truth telling’ vary quite a bit across cultures.”

Dr. Torres’ dual appointment with the GCSW and the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center is an example of the collaborative relationships at the cornerstone of GCSW research and the future of social work.



A FEW OF HER FAVORITE THINGS

Favorite movie: *THE SOUND OF MUSIC* (Brown's emphasis)

Favorite article about social work: Definitely Ann Hartman's editorial "Many Ways of Knowing."



Photo Credit: Danny Clark

Favorite quote: "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive."
– Howard Thurman

Favorite snack: Topo Chico

Guilty pleasure: BBC television

Favorite things about Houston: We are a microcosm of the world. We care about each other. We believe in hard work. GREAT restaurants.

WHY DID YOU SELECT THE GCSW AS YOUR ACADEMIC HOME ?

"THE **UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON** IS THE MOST RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY **DIVERSE** RESEARCH UNIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES, AND THE **GCSW** REFLECTS THIS AND IS **DEEPLY COMMITTED** TO INCLUSIVITY. IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO WALK INTO A ROOM AND SEE A GROUP OF STUDENTS WHO REFLECT THE WORLD. **I LEARN MORE FROM THEM THAN I COULD EVER TEACH.**"

BRENÉ BROWN

ENDOWED CHAIR CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES

News of the Huffington Foundation's two-million-dollar pledge over four years to establish the Brené Brown Endowed Chair marked one of the year's most exciting moments. Here, Dr. Brown reflects on the endowment, the social work profession, and her training at the GCSW.

What kinds of opportunities will the endowment create for students? I will never forget receiving the call about the Huffington Endowed Chair. I'm deeply grateful, and it still feels a little overwhelming. Every semester, I get emails from doctoral students who are interested in studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy [Brown's areas of research]. These resources will give students the opportunity to work on our team as we drive to bring this work to the world.

What drew you to social work? The importance we put on meeting people where they are, our commitment to contextualized practice, and the call to have tough conversations about topics that matter. The world would be a better place if everyone had a little of our training.

Best thing about being a social worker? Being able to find patterns and make connections between things that other people see as unconnected. Social work has taught me to understand the inextricable connections between micro and macro; among thought, behavior, and emotion; and among the social, political, and economic. Fortunately, social work also teaches us how to be okay with discomfort. Making connections and finding patterns is uncomfortable work.

What does social work research have to offer to the profession? To the world? I think my work has resonated with the world for two reasons: accessibility and context. I went through my social work training during a period of time when we were taught that what we had to offer was an important and unique understanding of the world. Our journals didn't have the same ratings or impact factors of the bigger psychology journals, but that wasn't the point. Our goals were to meet people where they were, to offer a contextualized understanding of the world (versus one that pathologized people), and never to back down from hard conversations about race, gender, orientation, class, or age — all of the tough topics that we were taught to lean into. I was raised on Ann Hartman's editorial "Many Ways of Knowing." I'm not sure that I'd have my career today had the research pressures in my early years been what they are today. As social workers, we need to be very careful to stay out of comparison and never forget what we do well, why we do it, and whom we serve.

What would the perfect social work tagline/bumper sticker say?

You don't have to do it alone. We were never meant to.

NEW FACULTY

The GCSW welcomes six new faculty members, including an associate dean of Academic Affairs. Diverse research interests, such as adolescents' mental health outcomes, elders' health disparities, structural inequality and opportunity, and shame and guilt, promise to enrich learning in the classroom, to deepen connections in the community, and to make substantive contributions to social work research and practice.



NICOLE BROMFIELD

Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

Dr. Bromfield's research interests are women and children's health and social well-being, particularly in the global south. Projects are framed with a social justice lens and driven by community needs with the desired outcome being social policy change.



SAMIRA ALI

Assistant Professor

Dr. Ali's scholarship focuses on community-based participatory research (CBPR), primary and secondary HIV prevention, and the impact of structural conditions on youth and women's health behaviors in global and local settings.



REIKO BOYD

Visiting Assistant Professor

Dr. Boyd's research is organized around three areas of inquiry: racial/ethnic disparities in children's services systems, structural inequality and opportunity in African American communities, and infant and adolescent health and well-being.



ROBIN GEARING

Associate Professor

Dr. Gearing's research focuses on informing and improving adolescent engagement and developing evidence-based interventions to improve the mental health outcomes of adolescents with serious mental illnesses and of their families.



CHRISTINA MIYAWAKI

Assistant Professor

Dr. Miyawaki's research interests include health disparities among older adults of color; health and acculturation, with a focus on immigrant caregivers of older adults; association of race and ethnicity with older adults' health; health promotion; and healthy aging.



RONDA L. DEARING

Visiting Research Professor

Dr. Dearing's research focuses on shame and guilt, hazardous alcohol use and alcohol use disorders, help seeking, and self-change. She also has extensive experience with strategies for retaining participants in multi-wave longitudinal studies.

“OUR TRAVELS IN CUBA FOCUSED ON HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, WOMEN’S HEALTH, CULTURE — ISSUES THAT GCSW GRADS WILL NEED TO BE WELL-VERSED IN.”



INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

GCSW STUDENTS VISIT CUBA

Understanding social work in a global context is a tradition at the GCSW. The College has long-standing relationships with social work programs in Asia and the United Kingdom. In 2013, the Council on Social Work Education awarded the GCSW its Partners in Advancing International Education (PIE) Award.

When decades-long travel restrictions to Cuba were eased, Dr. Luis Torres knew he had found the next destination for the GCSW’s Latin American Study Abroad Initiative. Established in 2011, the Initiative aims to build bridges and strengthen the organic ties between Houston and populous Latin American nations through student excursions to countries including El Salvador, Bolivia, Mexico, and now Cuba.

“Students gain a deeper understanding of social justice issues and develop fluency in professional and clinical language in both English and Spanish,” said Torres.

For two weeks in June, Dr. Torres, five GCSW students, and 13 other University of Houston students visited Havana, where they partnered with faculty from the University of Havana, then traveled to Cienfuegos, Santiago, Trinidad, and the beach at Varadero, where they participated in a beach-cleanup service project. Students also explored social justice-themed literature, engaged with poets and LGBT artists, and met the publishers who create handmade books at Ediciones Vigía.

“Cuba is in the midst of a transformation, and questions of social, racial, economic, and political justice are going to come to the forefront. We have a lot to learn from each other’s journeys, and exchanges like our 2016 Learning Abroad Program to Cuba are a great start to the conversation,” Torres said.



Go Coogs! GCSW’s Latin American Study Abroad Initiative visited five cities in Cuba.

SMART COUGAR AWARDS

HIV PREVENTION PROGRAM EXPANDS REACH



“LATINOS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS ARE AFFECTED DISPROPORTIONATELY BY HIV/AIDS. HIV TESTING IS FREQUENTLY DELAYED DUE TO ACCESS TO CARE, AFFORDABILITY, OR TREATMENTS THAT ARE NOT RESPONSIVE TO CULTURE OR AN INDIVIDUAL’S CONTEXT.”

One of the GCSW’s most successful community initiatives received additional funding this year from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

SMART Cougars (Substance Use, Mental Health, and HIV/AIDS Risk Assessment and Testing) is a partnership between the GCSW and Houston Area Community Services (HACS).

The three-year project aims to prevent and reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS among Hispanic and African American youth at UH and in the surrounding community by making free rapid HIV testing and counseling available.

“Hispanics and African Americans account for 57 percent of the Houston metropolitan area population but represent 82 percent of new HIV diagnoses and 73 percent of people living with HIV,” said Dr. Luis Torres, Associate Dean of

Research and Strategic Partnerships and principal investigator of the SMART Cougars. “In these communities, HIV testing is frequently delayed due to challenges with identification, engagement, and retention in care, making our project critical for public health locally and nationally.”

A new funding award of \$900,000 launched SMART Cougars Plus, which expands the original program to reach other minority youth on campus and in the community.

“Young people aged 18-24 who are Asian American, Asian, Southeast Asian, North African and Middle Eastern, and are UH students or live in the surrounding community, will now be served because of the new award,” said Dr. Torres.

Additionally, SMART Cougars Plus will target UH students who are veterans or active members of the military regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

2016 GCSW GALA

BRINGING HOPE TO HEALING

When we asked attendees of GCSW’s 2016 Scholarship Gala, *Bringing Hope to Healing*, to share their visions of what hope is, they responded with sincerity, passion, and humor. *See sidebar.*

Their ideas about hope are a perfect reflection of the hope they invested in the future of social work. Over \$115,000 was raised for scholarships as we honored Jon Allen, PhD (Spirit of Social Work Award) and retired GCSW professor and alumna ‘80 Sandra A. Lopez, LCSW (Social Work Excellence Award).

To crown a wonderful evening, gala chair and GCSW alumnus ‘09 Robert Hilliker, LCSW used his own generous starting pledge to rally the crowd into raising an additional \$25,000 on the spot. That is enough to fund a full-time MSW student for two years!

Heartfelt thanks to all of our generous donors and the entire GCSW community. You really said it best: **Hope is beautiful!**

Hope Is ... Possibilities
Hope Is ... A Way of Life
Hope Is ... Empowering Change
Hope Is ... The Future
Hope Is ... The Belief that Reality Will Meet and Choose Justice

Hope Is ...
What Social Workers Bring

HOPE IS ... BEAUTIFUL

2016



Vince Pryor, Robert Hilliker, and Dean Dettlaff show their Cougar pride

NEW ENDOWMENTS

\$1 MILLION ENDOWMENT SCHOLARSHIP

Longtime GCSW supporters J. Victor and Bobbi Samuels have extended their commitment to aid the College's students with a one-million-dollar scholarship endowment.

"Social workers strive to improve individuals and communities and to help the neediest in society," Vic Samuels said. "The GCSW has become a primary source of social workers in Houston and our surrounding area. We expect our gift to be an investment in our city, now and in the future." The gift builds on an endowed scholarship that the couple established in the GCSW in 2014.

"This generous gift will further support the next generation of social workers who choose this

profession because they are caring, because they are compassionate, and because they want to actively address issues of social, racial, economic, and political justice," said Alan Dettlaff, dean of the College.

J. Victor Samuels is the former CEO of Victory Packaging, which he established in 1976. He and his wife also endowed the Bobbi and Vic Samuels Center for Jewish Living and Learning at Houston's Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center. He recently was awarded an honorary degree at the University's 2016 commencement ceremony. Mrs. Samuels is a UH alumna and was a longtime instructor at UH–Clear Lake.



Bobbi and J. Victor Samuels attend the 2016 GCSW Gala

BRENÉ BROWN ENDOWED CHAIR

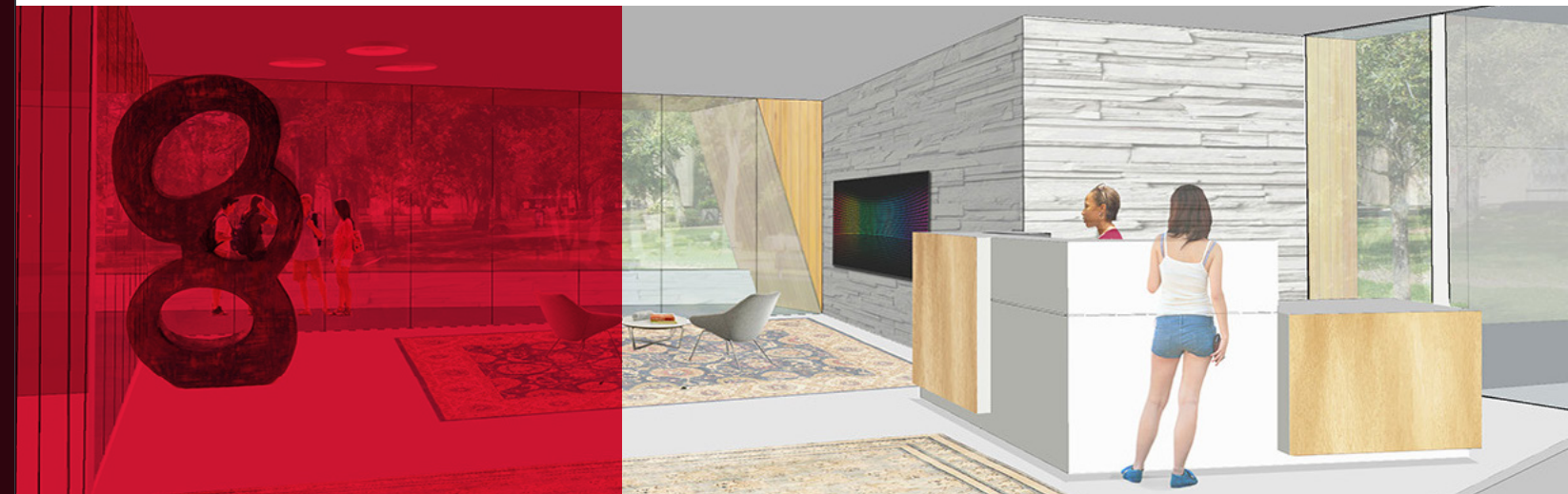
The Huffington Foundation has pledged \$2 million to fund the Brené Brown Endowed Chair in the Graduate College of Social Work. The endowment's resources will attract world-class students pursuing training in Grounded Theory methodology and will amplify the impact of Brown's work. **See story on page 11.**

LOOKING FORWARD

GCSW's next exciting iteration is just on the horizon. The Social Work Building renovation project received a generous pledge of \$1,250,000 to make exterior improvements, including an addition, that will empower students, faculty, and staff as they strive to fulfill the GCSW's mission.

Upgrading our facilities from predominantly lecture-style instruction halls to a research-centered, highly technological interactive learning space will create a social work education environment suitable for the 21st century. The enhanced building will support the work of the GCSW community and inspire greater collaboration among student groups, faculty, and community partners.

We invite Houston's leaders to join this exciting project by matching the initial pledge with a \$1,000,000 gift by December 31, 2016. Such a gift would not only establish a personal legacy for the donor, but also produce measurable public advancements in the city of Houston. By investing in social workers, donors will be helping to build and strengthen communities for a stronger city, nation, and world. For information about making a contribution, contact Connie Loyd at 713-743-3599 or clloyd2@uh.edu.



Concept drawings by Brave Architecture

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2016 Graduation: MSW students support Professor Donna Amtsborg's #1800SAFE project



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and Art Scene videos! uh.edu/socialwork/news/noteworthy

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