UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-SAN ANTONIO

2020: A Year of Creativity and Resilience

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2020: A Year of Creativity and Resilience
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ON THE COVER

Marc Molina ’19 is a testament to the quality of the University’s academic programming to prepare students for a broad range of advanced professional studies. Molina is currently in his second year as a doctoral student in the Borderlands History program at the University of Texas at El Paso, where he received a fully funded, five-year fellowship. Read more about Molina and other proud A&M-San Antonio graduates starting on page 22.
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There’s more than one reason Texas A&M University-San Antonio is the fastest-growing university in the state. There are more than 6,700 reasons – at least one for every student who has chosen to enroll and unlock their own potential. A&M-San Antonio was literally created to offer new possibilities for students, faculty and the south side of San Antonio it serves. The late Sen. Frank Madla knew access to a high-quality, affordable education was the key to open any door for so many who were previously denied.

A&M-San Antonio is bursting with new possibilities. Since May 2009, enrollment has grown more than 340 percent. Serving our mission to open up new possibilities for this student body opens the doors of leadership to a whole new generation of leaders.

Graduating from college not only changes the life of the graduate, it changes the lives of their family and their community. As graduates move on to professional lives and have their own children, the talk around their kitchen tables inevitably moves from “will you go to college?” to “what college will you go to?”

Increasingly, the answer to that question for many will be A&M-San Antonio. President Cynthia Teniente-Matson – herself a first-generation college graduate – is leading the way to create that future. She is thinking differently, but leading with the same old resolve and grit that has elevated the Texas A&M University System to become what it is today.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio has strived to improve upon its students’ college experience, all thanks to the outstanding faculty and staff who have taken on this young university’s extraordinary mission. Even during a pandemic, the University enhanced recreational sports and launched an intercollegiate athletics program.

A&M-San Antonio isn’t just educating the students enrolled there. A&M-San Antonio is creating new possibilities for south San Antonio and the state of Texas by leading community partnerships to narrow the digital divide and bring access to quality and affordable education to all.

Take a look, and I think you will see the unlimited potential of this 696-acre campus. A&M-San Antonio is a young university with inspired possibilities.

Chancellor
Texas A&M University System
A Year of Creativity and Resilience

Just 12 months ago, we were poised for another year of “firsts” at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. For reasons expected and for many unanticipated, 2020 will long be remembered as a year that tested each of us and, at the same time, resulted in an incredible portfolio of creativity and resilience.

As with every university across the nation, A&M-San Antonio faced head-on the trials of a global challenge that stretched resources and brought unprecedented difficulties for our students and their families. At the same time, the University community focused on its top priority, the safety of our students, and continued supporting their academic pursuits.

This January marks my sixth year as president of A&M-San Antonio. As I reflect on this time, I keep coming back to this thought: This Institution continues to drive forward no matter the situation or the need. And this is due to our faculty, staff and students. The very reason we were created 11 years ago, and why the majority of our students choose A&M-San Antonio, is to push beyond improbability and the unexpected.

In this publication, you will find stories and information about innovative programming, alumni making an impact in our community and beyond, and highlights from faculty who excel in their disciplines and fields of study. There is also a glimpse into our vision for the future of A&M-San Antonio, with the continued imperative to Be Audacious as we move the University into 2021 and beyond. And you will read about how faculty, staff and students have worked together to create a safe environment, adapt to the global pandemic and rethink what it means to learn, discover, teach, serve and lead. We’re leading the conversations, strategy and actions to address many of the problems facing Texas and the nation, such as digital equity, while delivering excellence across academic programs. We are also continuously assessing the student experience.

Among this year of firsts that you will read about is a $2.1 million grant from the Federal Department of Education to the College of Education & Human Development, one of the first of its kind in the nation; the collective impact of the ASPIRE program that partners A&M-San Antonio with seven school districts on the south side of San Antonio; the construction of state-of-the-art facilities and athletic fields to address the growing student population; and an overview of a program focusing on the success of students who were once in the foster care system. You will also see a growing trend in support from University friends and donors.

As you read through these pages, I hope you see what I see each day – and that is the heart and soul of our faculty, staff, students and alumni. In academia, success is often measured in terms of data, such as graduation rates, research or endowments. This year, success was more about heart, selflessness, giving back and how our University community came together for the greater good.

And give more for the greater good, we did. While we cannot understate the impact and tragedy of the pandemic, throughout the challenges of the pandemic, we continue to drive forward with opportunity and creativity. My last six years as president of A&M-San Antonio have been the highlight of my career, and never have I been more honored and humbled to serve an institution than this past year.

“ALTHOUGH OUR INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION IS DELAYED, WE HAVE BEGUN OUR GLOBAL INTRODUCTION OF A&M-SAN ANTONIO TO JAPAN.”

Teniente-Matson was named 2020 US-Japan Public Intellectual by the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnerships.
THE NEW POSSIBLE
A YEAR OF SUBSTANTIAL GROWTH AMID A PANDEMIC
When the world hands you a pandemic, find the possibilities.

That spirit of resilience, perseverance and creativity in the midst of a global health crisis encapsulates the resolve of Texas A&M University-San Antonio students, faculty and staff to maintain forward momentum on the exciting trajectory of this vibrant campus community and proud Hispanic-Serving Institution—now entering its second momentous decade as the youngest institution within the Texas A&M University System.

Like every higher-education campus and community across this nation, A&M-San Antonio was forced to adapt to a new set of operational realities in response to COVID-19. This unprecedented event will continue shaping how we teach and learn, how we conduct business and socialize, and how we accomplish the basic tasks of daily life for our families and within our neighborhoods for more months to come.

The Institution quickly pivoted during the Spring 2020 semester at the onset of the pandemic to ensure, foremost, that students’ essential living and learning needs were met and that faculty had the tools and resources to continue engaging with students in a fully virtual setting. At the same time, we remained a campus on the move. We pushed forward with plans to open our new Classroom Hall, providing much-needed additional classrooms and offices.

Adopting a hybrid teaching and learning model for Fall 2020 ensured that incoming freshman students in particular would safely experience on-campus instruction and peer interaction. A new block schedule also gave first-time students an option for in-person instruction. The University forged ahead with initiatives to enhance student learning and engagement, ceremoniously breaking ground on a new building to house the University’s College of Business and Library, and launching a competitive intercollegiate sports program.

As A&M-San Antonio contemplates and anticipates a return to in-person instruction and student experiences, we are mindful of our responsibility to address the lasting impacts of a pandemic while continuing to pursue the Institution’s audacious plans on the horizon, including more changes to the campus footprint and strengthening our commitment to academic rigor and faculty scholarship to ensure greater opportunities and access for our students across undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degree programs.

A&M-San Antonio is moving the needle toward a future that is undeniably bright, and toward a smarter understanding not only of what’s possible, but also of what is absolutely essential as we emerge from this pandemic.
A CHORUS OF VOICES SPEAK TO NATIONAL CONCERNS

Coupled with the COVID-19 health crisis was a national angst that emerged during Summer 2020 in cities across the country in protest of specific incidents of racial injustice and an underlying culture of systemic racism. A&M-San Antonio students were among many who engaged in the Black Lives Matter movement, leading conversations and activities to encourage tolerance and respect. In addition to the organizing efforts of the University’s Student Government Association (SGA) president, Allyssa Atkinson ’21, one of those student leaders, Business Management major and former SGA president La-Tieka Sims ’20, penned the poem, “Black Summer,” to capture that shared angst. One line of her poem reads: “And I can’t let myself be on my knees while they can’t breathe.”

A&M-San Antonio President Cynthia Teniente-Matson likewise issued a message of tolerance on behalf of the University, stating that: “Today, more than ever, we have a collective and individual responsibility to act with purpose and to build communities that can dismantle social inequities. While we face uncertain and stressful times that are compounded by the pandemic and the resulting economic crisis and tremendous loss of life, I am certain that together, we can and must raise our collective voices to ensure the end result will overshadow and rise above the cacophony of those who speak and act with hate. Together, at A&M-San Antonio, we can reaffirm a shared responsibility to make San Antonio, our state and our world a more equitable and just community.”

Former SGA president and Business Management major La-Tieka Sims ’20 performs her poem, “Black Summer,” with fellow students at several University events. Read the full poem at tamusa.edu/la-tieka-sims.

A&M-SAN ANTONIO FALL 2020* BY THE NUMBERS:

- 6,763 students enrolled
- 362 faculty
- 18:1 student-faculty ratio
Maximizing Scholarships
New Program Expands Affordability and Access

As more families of high school students face increasing costs of earning a university degree, A&M-San Antonio launched a new initiative to extend access and affordability. The Achiever Promise provides free tuition to qualifying graduating high school seniors in the top 10 percent of their class who enroll at A&M-San Antonio and graduating high school seniors from an Early College High School in Texas who have at least 30 credits.

Boosted by a grant from the A&M System Regents Scholarship Fund, which provides over $100 million across the 11 institutions in the system over the next 10 years, the Achiever Promise also provides access to the support, resources, services and world-class faculty that create opportunities to become the next generation of leaders and creators, according to Brandy McLelland, vice president of Enrollment Management at A&M-San Antonio.

ASPIRE, or the A&M-SA and south Bexar County ISD Partnership to Impact Regional Equity and Excellence, is a first-of-its-kind collaborative effort between a public university and seven south Bexar County ISDs. The partnership focuses on developing educational programs and services to support existing programs to tackle persistent teacher shortages, curriculum development challenges and gaps in services for children with special needs in San Antonio.

To read the full story, visit tamusa.edu/achiever-promise.
Progress during a pandemic. Even in the midst of a global pandemic, Texas A&M University-San Antonio – the fastest-growing institution within the A&M System – continues to move forward. One year to date following its 10th anniversary marked by a groundbreaking, the University opened the doors of a new $30 million state-of-the-art classroom and studio building Aug. 20. The facility’s nearly 60,000 square feet of additional space, made available at the start of the new academic year, provides essential instructional space. Separate from expanding classroom capacity, the building contributed to facilitating health and safety plans for adequate social distancing among students and faculty participating in a limited number of in-person classes during the Fall 2020 semester.

“This building is a visible representation of A&M-San Antonio’s growth and the impact of a growing enrollment,” said University President Cynthia Teniente-Matson. “As we look around the corner, we know the expansion of University facilities infused with the latest technologies encourages collaboration and speaks to a learning environment that supports research and public service – all leading to expansion of our regional economy.”

On Nov. 17, 2020, the University ceremoniously broke ground on a new building that will house the College of Business and Library, projected for completion in 2022. The $53 million project will add 15 instructional spaces as well as faculty and administrative offices. As important as the additional physical space, the new academic building will facilitate critical expansion of student offerings and programming and increase research capabilities, said Dr. Rohan Christie-David, dean of the University’s College of Business. “This new building will help us foster a culture of innovation that will benefit our students, make our research more impactful and allow us to be of even greater service to our community.”

A&M-San Antonio has maintained a steady pace in developing its campus footprint in recent years, with projects totaling a $253 million investment in buildings and infrastructure that will further bolster the south side of Antonio and south Bexar County. To meet the needs of a burgeoning student population, the University is likewise formulating plans for a second on-campus residential hall and is seeking potential partnerships with private developers to offer campus-adjacent housing and dining venues.

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A&M-San Antonio celebrates with a ribbon-cutting for its athletic practice fields and a ceremonious ground-breaking for its College of Business and Library building (below). To see more photos from the event, visit tamusa.edu/cob-building.
Launching Competitive Sports

Gearing up for game day. “Building a sports program from scratch is all the more challenging during a health pandemic, but we are moving forward with great anticipation,” noted Darnell Smith, A&M-San Antonio’s first director of intercollegiate athletics and recreational sports. With acceptance to join the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and the University’s entrance into the Red River Athletics Conference (RRAC) in Summer 2020, the University’s athletics program represents the first of its kind for south Bexar County for bringing intercollegiate athletics to the area and supports A&M-San Antonio’s aggressive growth trajectory to expand opportunity in the region.

“Our deep thanks to the 86th Texas Legislature and the Texas A&M Board of Regents for approving our athletics program,” Smith said. A&M-San Antonio alum and state Rep. Leo Pacheco ensured the legislation was passed, along with A&M College Station alum and state Sen. Pete Flores.

SMITH’S APPOINTMENT IN EARLY 2020 WAS FOLLOWED IN SUBSEQUENT MONTHS BY THE HIRING OF THE UNIVERSITY’S FIRST THREE COACHES AND AN ASSISTANT ATHLETICS DIRECTOR. While initial plans called for launching competitive women’s softball, men’s golf, and men’s and women’s soccer programs during the Fall 2020 semester, due to COVID-19, these programs will commence in Spring 2021, adhering to all conference safety protocols, Smith noted. “Our student athletes are beyond excited to get started, even if it means playing a bit differently at first to meet health and safety requirements.”

Earlier in 2020, the University also named the inaugural coach of its newly launched intercollegiate esports program, joining a growing national trend in fostering STEM-related learning and competition. A&M-San Antonio is now also a member of the National Association of Collegiate Esports and is already making a name for itself through early competitions within the Collegiate Stargame and TESPA leagues.

As part of the University’s master growth plan, according to Smith, the expansion of the campus recreation district is on target to open a state-of-the-art recreation center in 2023 that will support the continued expansion of competitive intercollegiate athletics programs, including women’s and men’s basketball, and expansion of health and recreation opportunities for all University students.

“BUILDING A SPORTS PROGRAM FROM SCRATCH IS ALL THE MORE CHALLENGING DURING A HEALTH PANDEMIC, BUT WE ARE MOVING FORWARD WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION.”
A&M-San Antonio: Leading Texas in Helping Former Foster Youth Earn College Degrees

A pilot partnership in Bexar County – the first of its kind in Texas to help former foster and adopted youths pursue their dream of earning a college degree – is setting record numbers at A&M-San Antonio. After launching a year ago, the program is supporting 68 students who are former foster youth or adopted students. Funded by a Bexar County Fostering Education Success (BCFES) grant, the program provides mentoring and basic needs critical for success at the university level including food, school supplies, hygiene products and extracurricular activities. A key focus of the program is financial literacy. The program provides mentorship and individualized training to help students manage expenses and income.

One A&M-San Antonio student who benefited from the Fostering Assistance, Transitions & Education (FATE) program is Fernando, a 2020 A&M-San Antonio graduate who entered the foster system when he was 10 years old. He was taken from his grandmother, along with three other siblings, following his mother’s incarceration. Fernando, who majored in Criminal Justice at A&M-San Antonio, is now pursuing a master’s degree at Tarleton State University, a credential he credits the FATE grant with helping him realize. Eventually, Fernando wants to become a parole officer or possibly earn a doctorate.

“The FATE program removed a lot of barriers for our foster and adopted youth so they are able to pursue their academic dreams, stay enrolled and graduate from the University,” said Kimberley Nañez, executive director of the Student Academic Success Center. “We’re supporting students in simple, practical ways, like emergency aid to reduce stress while helping them bridge the support gaps most needed.”

BCFES grant partners include A&M-San Antonio, Alamo Colleges, the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the Bexar County Children’s Court.

Read the full story at tamusa.edu/fate-program.
When the novel coronavirus knocked on the door of San Antonio, Texas A&M University-San Antonio and its nearly 6,800 students, faculty and staff were ready. In February and March, as the global crisis spread to communities urban and rural, the University was actively detailing plans for remote teaching environments, operational changes and safety protocols. The changes implemented were unprecedented for both the University and the community.

What mattered and continues to matter is that every decision led with the safety of the students and how the Institution would continue to support the academic mission, according to A&M-San Antonio President Cynthia Teniente-Matson. Fast-forward nearly a year, and A&M-San Antonio has continued to meet the challenge. “We've tackled COVID-19 from a perspective of opportunity,” Teniente-Matson said.

A coordinated strategy has guided the faculty, staff and students in maintaining the safety and health of the campus community and supporting the faculty, according to Mike O'Brien, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

“I continue to be appreciative of the faculty and their commitment to focus on the students,” O’Brien said. “In many respects, they are on the front lines of both teaching and guiding students through a very rough road. When the pandemic knocked on our door, we all stepped up, did and are doing the right things and taking care of each other while staying focused on our students.”

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WHEN A PANDEMIC KNOCKS ON THE DOOR

The anatomy of A&M-San Antonio’s strategy to tackle COVID-19

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What does a university do when a global pandemic knocks on the door? Rally, reset and leverage the open spaces of campus to rethink how to celebrate and socialize with students.

Throughout A&M-San Antonio, students, staff and faculty reinvented the traditions and activities that mark the academic year and signify the milestones of the Jaguar community and academic experience. While the events were experienced differently in 2020, what rang true was their essence and meaning.

**Commencement**

As the University prepared for commencement, administration and Academic Affairs, along with student organizations, redesigned what would become Operation Graduation: Curbside Edition to honor May 2020 graduating seniors. Hundreds of students and their family members and friends—following strict social distancing protocols—participated in the event, from meaningful moments to commemorative swag to photos.

“All of us recognize the importance of a graduation ceremony to celebrate the journey. If you happen to be from a first-generation household or family, the opportunity for the entire community to celebrate your accomplishments is life-changing,” said A&M-San Antonio President Cynthia Teniente-Matson.

During the drive-thru celebration, students had the opportunity to take turns having a picture taken with Teniente-Matson and University mascot General the Jaguar, all while adhering to social distancing guidelines. Similar curbside commencement celebration activities were deployed for December 2020 graduates over the course of three days, Dec. 13-15, followed by a virtual commencement ceremony Dec. 15. tamusa.edu/curbside-commencement

**Virtual student services**

From academic advising to New Student Orientation, the University found creative ways to address student needs throughout 2020 that enhanced personal service. Students were provided additional opportunities to connect with support and other services by phone and remotely with advisers to register for courses as well as engage in real-time chats to answer questions. Orientation for new students was also reformatted for a virtual experience, with students meeting with their classmates and learning about University life and the array of resources and services available to them.

**Festival de Cascarones**

As every San Antonian well knows, the annual city-wide Fiesta celebration marks the beginning of spring and an opportunity for organizations, businesses and others to support community need. Since 2012, A&M-San Antonio has hosted an on-campus Festival de Cascarones celebration featuring food, music and live entertainment that marks the end of San Antonio’s Fiesta celebrations. The event includes a cascaron smashing contest, reflecting the Mexican tradition of bringing good luck to a person by breaking a confetti-filled egg over his or her head. For the past eight years, students who won the contest received a tuition waiver for a semester. This year, the event went virtual and viral via Facebook Live. Students were offered an opportunity to win a tuition-free semester for the best at-home video submission capturing the Jaguar spirit of the annual tradition. tamusa.edu/festival-de-cascarones

**Lights of Esperanza**

This event, which annually draws thousands from across Bexar County, was redesigned with a focus on safety and health mixed with holiday traditions. The fifth annual Lights of Esperanza celebration Dec. 1 was a “drive-in edition” featuring a screening of the movie, “Elf,” in addition to the traditional holiday lighting of the campus and a fireworks display. tamusa.edu/lights-of-esperanza

**Community engagement and service**

The impact of COVID-19 brought newfound appreciation for partnerships, both new and existing. In the same manner that the University leveraged a wealth of talent and expertise from within the A&M System (including the Texas Division of Emergency Management and the A&M Health Science Center), the pandemic and the 2020 holiday season saw the A&M-San Antonio community dedicate its talents, expertise and service to tackle some of the most pressing issues in our community.

- Through the collective impact of the ASPIRE (A&M-SA & South Bexar County ISD Partnership to Impact Regional Equity and Excellence) network, the University helped launch and lead a groundbreaking school COVID-19 testing initiative supported by Community Labs LLC that will potentially impact 68,000 students and more than 10,000 staff in south Bexar County across seven school districts.

- The University provided free flu shots to A&M-San Antonio students.

- Students spent over 3,000 hours volunteering throughout San Antonio and Bexar County to tackle community issues like food and housing insecurity, including more than 20 students who helped build houses with Habitat for Humanity.

- Financial literacy was also a priority, with programs such as GEAR UP and Junior Achievement providing in-person financial education for 75 K-12 students and their parents.

- Employees donated gifts to 29 families during the holiday season through San Antonio’s Adopt-A-Family program. In addition, the A&M-San Antonio Military Affairs Department spearheaded our Toys for Tots collection efforts, ensuring that over 85 children would have a toy.


The University mobilizes a risk management group comprised of staff and faculty with expertise in health and safety, facilities and academic operations and communications. Spring Break marks a new day for A&M-San Antonio as 1,100 courses move to remote learning and the University implements a series of steps to transition many employees and faculty to virtual operations. Students, whose primary learning experiences were in person, transition to 100 percent remote learning. Information Technology Services provides nearly round-the-clock training and services to move the campus to a remote environment. Daily (and later weekly) sprint check-ins led by the Risk Management Group result in newfound agility and operational solutions. From redesigning admission campus tours to advising sessions to faculty interactions to new student orientation to graduation – a spirit of resilience and creativity infuse every corner of the University.

A&M-San Antonio rallies behind students scheduled to graduate, delivering Operation Graduation – a first-of-its-kind virtual and drive-thru experience for the Class of 2020. Among the many milestones of 2020 were students representing the first cohort to graduate as part of the Institution’s comprehensive expansion as a four-year university.

A&M-San Antonio implements Community. Safety. TOGETHER. as the new academic year starts in August 2020. The University continues to support a safe environment while reengineering student experiences and University traditions.

While the pandemic has influenced how the University operates, what is constant is a resilience and can-do spirit across the Institution. Key partnerships, at the university and the A&M System level, continue to be essential. A&M-San Antonio is leveraging collective impact by contributing to broader community safety, including working with local independent school districts.

"Together, these preventative and proactive measures implemented successfully continue to protect the health and safety of our campus and colleagues," President Cynthia Teniente-Matson said.
Throughout 2020, the A&M-San Antonio community did not stray from its mission or values, but instead found creative ways to mark milestones and maintain campus traditions and celebrations amid the global pandemic. During Fall 2020 Convocation, a time when faculty and staff gather to officially launch a new academic year, some shared their insights for enhancing an already strong and vibrant teaching and learning campus community.

**FACULTY/STAFF**

**DR. CARL SHEPERIS**
Dean, College of Education and Human Development

As we saw the pandemic unfolding, it was something that we recognized right away was going to impact our community and our students differently than it impacted the rest of the country. Our students come from underprivileged backgrounds for the most part, with high levels of poverty, and so recognizing that we had students who weren’t going to have Internet access, looking at how to embrace and support those students whom we know are incredibly high-need at the moment … And not just the students, but the staff and faculty who have family members who are struggling in the same way.

“We all have a high degree of pressure that we place on ourselves for performance, and it’s important to recognize that nobody’s gone through an issue like this pandemic before. Most of my faculty members are parents, they have kids at home, and one of the things I’ve told them over and over is family comes first, and that they have to take care of their family and take care of their children, and then work will happen. So let’s be flexible about how you do that.”

**DR. EDWIN BLANTON**
Executive Director, Mays Center for Experiential Learning and Community Engagement

One of the things the University did to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic was to anticipate student needs so that we could support them in every way possible. This included creating a guide for the campus to supervise remote work for students. We also realized that, for many of our students, if they lost hours or employment completely, they would need to rely more on our campus food pantry, the General’s Store. So, the General’s Store switched to an online ordering method and curbside delivery. What this allowed was for students to place their order and then come to the General’s Store and pick it up, all while remaining social distanced. Also, we were very fortunate that the Spurs Sports & Entertainment foundation donated 300 hot meals that we were able to give away one afternoon in just a matter of minutes.

“To all my colleagues who work at A&M-San Antonio, I would like to encourage them to just keep moving forward. We really are doing something really wonderful here in how we support our students, and that is such a vital part of our success.”

**DR. WILLIAM BUSH**
Professor of History, College of Arts and Sciences
Chair, Department of Communication, History and Philosophy

Meeting the needs of students has been at the top of my mind both as a professor and as a chair, but then also meeting the needs of the faculty and staff of my department to enable them to meet the needs of their students. I am confident that we are making rational decisions right now that balance the health and safety of students, faculty and staff with the mission of the University.

“Our work of teaching students, our work of thinking and writing and contributing to new knowledge as best as possible – that work goes on. I would argue that that work maybe is even more important right now.”

**DR. AMY LEWIS**
Associate Professor of Management, Associate Dean, College of Business

One of the things I like most about A&M-San Antonio is the faculty are drawn here because the mission resonates so much. There’s been a lot of fear and uncertainty, and that makes sense in terms of such an uncertain environment. Day-to-day, everything is changing so much, and so that’s just a little bit more of a challenge. It’s so much easier to remember that we’re all trying our best when we remember that we’re all individuals who care for each other. That’s what’s been driving me personally since March: trying to make sure we still have a sense of community.

“The University is still on the path for great success … Even though the University and our community are facing challenges, and we’ve got some struggles, we also have a lot of brightness ahead.”

**DR. JOSEPH SIMPSON**
Associate Professor of Sociology, College of Arts and Sciences
President of the Faculty Senate, 2020-21

The challenge of providing a safe and fulfilling educational environment during a global pandemic, the challenge of overcoming systemic racism and inequalities and the challenge of producing impactful research in a world in need of a scientific and humanistic voice – these are among the opportunities and needs that Dr. Joseph Simpson suggested University faculty will engage in during the coming year.
A&M-San Antonio student leaders likewise have worked diligently to encourage their fellow classmates to take care of themselves and their families in the midst of COVID-19, and to stay the course with their studies. Here are a handful of pandemic perspectives offered by students during Fall 2020 Convocation.

**ALYSSA ATKINSON**
President, Student Government Association

The message that I started off my campaign with… translates to ‘toward the future.’ So, no matter how small the step is, we are all getting through this together. My main point of that campaign slogan was to reach out to students during this pandemic. I had to do it through social media and make sure everyone – no matter whether a transfer student or a first-generation student coming into our University – had a voice, that we were all going to get through this pandemic together and that we were all going to get through going virtual together. I just wanted to make sure they had someone they could lean on.”

**ARMANDO ALANIS**
Vice President, Student Government Association

Being located here on the south side, the University has done so much not only in the ways that it gives students a lot of agency to improve campus and improve the entire south side of the community, but to be an integral part of this area of San Antonio.”

**KARINA SALMON**
Ms. A&M-San Antonio 2020

The message that I would give to the faculty and staff here and all the leadership we have on this campus is that we’re all in this together, and we have to make sure that we are in contact with each other. We also have to make sure that we’re all O.K., because during this time, it may get a little hectic and we may lose ourselves in uncertain situations. But to know that we are a community here and that we all have each other’s backs is something good to remember that I think some people forget at certain times when it’s rough.”

**ZACHARY FRANCKOWIAK**
Mr. A&M-San Antonio 2020

I think a lot of times, when we experience situations that don’t feel like they are ideal, we can sort of pull back, and I’ve learned that when you feel that uncertainty and discomfort, you should actually give more. Maybe you don’t learn best in an online modality – myself included. Still, allowing yourself to adapt, to accept, to seek that discomfort and to persevere as a student ultimately is going to make the end result of graduating that much more wonderful of an accomplishment. But it’s also going to help you see that you can persevere if you apply yourself, and it’s going to build your self-efficacy and self-esteem.”

**MARISSA LOPEZ**

With my family, we actually sit down at the table and we do our homework together, which is really a fun thing that my kids are like, well, I guess if mom is doing it, then I can do it, too. You have to be able to keep that time management going, and when things are due, when quizzes are due, you have to show them that no matter what, you can continue. And with all the obstacles and things that get in your way, you can finish what you started.”
STEADFAST IN OUR FOCUS

When Texas A&M University-San Antonio closed its campus to students abruptly in March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we asked our faculty to perform the impossible.

Hi, everyone. Within days, our face-to-face instruction – the preferred method of pedagogy, especially for those who thrive in a hands-on learning environment – went remote. Professors and instructors with years of classroom experience had to pivot and adapt their curricula to remote learning. Soon, a “few weeks” became the rest of the semester, but our faculty didn’t miss a beat, delivering a quality education to the thousands of students who expected – and deserved – nothing less.

We’ve had to rethink virtually every aspect of our learning, discovery and engagement as a university. Ideas have come from every corner of the campus, and with these observations and suggestions, we continue to find even better ways to keep our campus safe. Whether it is new ways of reaching students using digital technologies, new operating procedures that permit lab activities to move ahead or the development and delivery of virtual conferences – we’ve reinvented how we deliver our mission in a COVID-19 world.

We’ve stayed the course on our mission to our students during these precarious times, and we will continue to successfully prepare and deliver our academic programs. Indeed, how we do this will make the difference between our students thriving in a novel educational environment adapted for our times or languishing in one that leaves them disaffected and disengaged.

As we step into a new year of possibilities, I am deeply appreciative of the fortitude and diligence of our academic leadership team, our faculty and our academic staff. They remain steadfast in their focus on our students and academic excellence while doing what is needed to ensure the safety of our campus community.

The New Year holds great promise for our students and A&M-San Antonio.

Sincerely,

Provost
Lectures and labs weren’t the only aspects of traditional academic life refashioned for a virtual platform as a result of COVID-19. Many club events and experiential learning activities were reworked to incorporate social distancing and remote participation. But while life at A&M-San Antonio adapted to the challenges of a global pandemic, faculty and staff were focused on the student learning experience and excellence. From new programming opportunities in the works for the College of Education and Human Development, to new physical spaces on the horizon for the College of Business, to impressive accomplishments for the College of Arts and Sciences, faculty and students tested their mettle against COVID-19, proving their tenacity in adjusting to unforeseen challenges.

Arts and Sciences students score academic wins

Future diplomats

In the case of A&M-San Antonio’s Model United Nations (MUN) program, the pandemic itself provided a real-world glimpse of how to maintain essential international dialog during a global crisis. The University’s MUN team captured its first regional conference award from the Southern Regional Model United Nations (SRMUN) conference, conducted virtually Oct. 23-25, with a theme of “Understanding and Combating Global Multidimensional Poverty and Inequality.” A&M-San Antonio’s John Suk ’20, representing Chile in the General Assembly Plenary, won Best Delegation, competing against 193 students from institutions that included Northwestern, Georgia Tech and UTSA.

While the University’s MUN program is still largely in its infancy, from an initial startup grant of $5,000 from the Mays Center for Experiential Learning and Community Engagement in 2016, the club has steadily gained steam and stature. The program has won awards at local, state and regional conferences, according to Sarah Kupcho, team advisor and Political Science program coordinator and lecturer. tamusa.edu/model-un

Next-level communicators

A&M-San Antonio student journalists also received accolades for their work in 2020. Jaguar Student Media – representing El Espejo magazine, online news publication, The Mesquite, and the Enlace news broadcast – earned 14 awards from the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association, the most recognized and competitive collegiate journalism association in Texas. Those wins included eight statewide first-place awards.

Communication students are likewise celebrating two national awards for the Spring 2020 issue of El Espejo. The Associated Collegiate Press awarded the student-produced magazine a Pacemaker Award in the four-year feature magazine division. In addition, the publication won second place for the design and visuals for its COVID-19 coverage, “We’ve Been Here Before.” El Espejo, which launched in 2018, is the first student-run magazine in the Texas A&M System to win a Pacemaker award and places the University in the company of other Pacemaker winners like the University of Miami, Ball State University, Drake University, University of Kentucky, Syracuse University and the University of Oregon. Read the award-winning Spring 2020 issue at elespejomag.org/issue-3.

A new opportunity launching in 2021 will allow several A&M-San Antonio students to participate in an innovative virtual radio and television internship program. The joint partnership between A&M-San Antonio’s Communication Program and Univision 41 will pair each student with a professional reporter or producer for weekly mentoring, training events and the opportunity to work on the journalism projects they design in collaboration with Univision.

Entrepreneurs in training

Dr. Douglas Carter, instructional assistant professor in the College of Business, teaches courses in entrepreneurship to undergraduate and graduate students. During the Spring 2020 semester, a
team of student entrepreneurs, to be accompanied by Dr. Carter, qualified to compete at the Draper Entrepreneurship Competition at Smith College and at the Richards Barrentine Values and Ventures Competition at Texas Christian University. Both in-person events were cancelled due to COVID. Students also weren’t able to travel abroad to take part in the popular European Innovation Academy, a highlight for many A&M-San Antonio business majors.

Despite such disappointments, students learned essential lessons about how to communicate and network in new ways, according to Dr. Carter. Throughout the courses he taught during 2020, Dr. Carter witnessed students becoming more comfortable with navigating a variety of technology platforms, running online simulations and learning to work virtually in teams.

“All this plays into the world of entrepreneurship – how you must pivot approaches based on verifiable data and alter product scope and delivery,” Dr. Carter said. “This pandemic has provided a real-life example of how, as a business leader, you must be willing to embrace change and figure out how to operate within a new reality.”

Faculty scholarship
Across the College of Business, faculty members from the departments of Accounting and Finance, Management and Marketing, and Computing and Cyber Security remained active in their professional outreach and research activities during 2020.

Faculty scholarship included published book chapters and articles in the mainstream press and in professional and scholarly journals, from The Economist and Journal of Consumer Behaviour to International Journal of Management Excellence and IEEE Access (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers). A number of faculty shared their research with national audiences. Recognition of faculty expertise likewise took the form of scholarly appointments and awards. Among those accolades: Assistant Professor of Computer Science Dr. Smriti Bhatt was awarded a Trusted CI (Cyber Infrastructure) Fellowship from the National Science Foundation (NSF) Cybersecurity Center of Excellence. As part of her ongoing research focus, Dr. Bhatt co-published the article, “Future Smart Connected Communities to Fight COVID-19 Outbreak,” in the journal, Internet of Things. The article proposed approaches to prevent, monitor and fight against spread of the virus using IoT devices, data-driven applications and smart infrastructures.

POSITIONED FOR POSITIVE IMPACT

The demonstrated commitment of Texas A&M University-San Antonio to be a driver of change in surrounding south Bexar County communities was further bolstered by two grants awarded in 2020 that will increase digital inclusion for students and families and expand access to higher learning to underserved populations.

Closing the equity gap for individuals with intellectual disabilities. A $2.1 million grant from the federal Department of Education to the University’s College of Education and Human Development (COEHD) will fund a unique program to boost the ability of students with intellectual disabilities to either earn a college degree or complete a college experience through the creation and launch of the Transition University for Career Advancement and Successful Adulthood (TU CASA) post-secondary program.

The TU CASA project will integrate work with school districts in south Bexar County that are part of the ASPIRE partnership. Additionally, the project establishes a bridge between the Burleson School for Innovation and Engagement (Edgewood ISD) and the A&M-San Antonio campus and will promote workforce development.

PARTICIPATION IN TU CASA WILL LEAD TO A CAREER PATHWAY FOR INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS.

According to Dr. Carl Sheperis, dean of COEHD, participation in TU CASA will lead to a 1.5-year-long University and Career Experience Certificate (UCEC) and a career pathway for integrated employment and the development of independent living skills leading to overall improved adulthood outcomes. With the launch of TU CASA, A&M-San Antonio will be one of only four Texas higher-education institutions to provide support and services for academic and social inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in academic courses, extracurricular activities and other aspects of attending college. For more information, see the full press release at tamusa.edu/ doe-grant.

Bringing the digital divide for students and families. A $750,000 grant from USAA will support A&M-San Antonio and its partners to focus on digital inclusion and addressing south Bexar County’s homework and remote learning gap. The Digital Inclusion Project (DIP), created in partnership with the City of San Antonio and City Education Partners, will initially impact 2,400 homes in Edgewood ISD, neighborhoods adjacent to Sidney Lanier High School and Gus Garcia University School, a charter middle school formed in partnership with A&M-San Antonio as an initiative of the ASPIRE collaboration.
As part of these efforts, A&M-San Antonio is creating a centralized helpdesk operated by the University’s Information Technology Services unit to support students and families. The support will be delivered by A&M-San Antonio student employees trained in technology support and customer service.

“As a public university, A&M-San Antonio carries a responsibility for advancing educational outcomes and supporting workforce development in the communities we serve. Our shared commitment with the City of San Antonio and City Education Partners is collective impact in action,” said A&M-San Antonio President Cynthia Teniente-Matson.

Since the pandemic began in March, many families across the country have experienced hardships related to food insecurity, limited access to technology and connectivity for remote schooling, lack of child care and sometimes even homelessness, said Harriet Dominique, USAA’s chief diversity, inclusion and corporate responsibility officer. “Aligned with our mission, we hope this continued support that we are able to provide to key nonprofit organizations helps with some of the burdens families are experiencing.” For more information, see the full press release at tamusa.edu/usaa-grant.

“Our shared commitment with the City of San Antonio and City Education Partners is collective impact in action.”
As Texas A&M University-San Antonio continues building a robust undergraduate and graduate studies and research program, graduates attest to the value of their A&M-San Antonio experience and degree in preparation for a broad range of advanced professional studies.

Academic excellence that opens doors. As a first-year medical school student at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md., A&M-San Antonio graduate MIGUEL RAMIREZ ’15 implores students and alumni to never stop pursuing their dreams, no matter how long it takes.

Originally from Guadalajara, Mexico, Ramirez moved at the age of 14 with his parents to the San Antonio area in 2001. He started attending A&M-San Antonio in summer 2012, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in Biology in 2015 after transferring from St. Philip’s College. “It took me a little longer once I started attending because I was always working full-time,” Ramirez said. Now 33, Ramirez believes he is exactly where he should be.

While Ramirez had been interested in science since he was a kid and imagined someday becoming a doctor, the death of his father from Leukemia in 2019 gave Ramirez the extra nudge he needed to apply to medical school. “Going through that process, including his diagnosis in 2018, really convinced me it was time.” Ramirez said. “My father was able to live longer than the doctors thought he would. He was a really positive, strong person, and it was an honor to be by his side when he died.” That experience convinced Ramirez that he could help others through such challenges.

Ramirez is likewise excited that, as part of his studies, he will have the opportunity to conduct research on a little-known genetic syndrome called Aicardi that his 10-year-old niece has had since birth. The malformation of a key structure in the brain can cause seizures and spasms. While there is no known cure, Ramirez hopes to explore how a ketogenic diet might improve quality of life for individuals with this rare condition.

As a first-year student at Johns Hopkins, most of Ramirez’s pre-clinical classes have been virtual during COVID, with limited in-person activities for his anatomy lab. His close proximity to health care providers who have been on the frontlines in the fight against the pandemic ...has humbled him. “I feel like I am coming into medicine at an historic time,” Ramirez said. “With COVID, so many things are going to change.”

One obvious shift Ramirez expects will be toward a greater focus on telehealth to make care more available to more people. Another trend Ramirez sees is the need for physicians from diverse backgrounds who are bilingual. “Don’t be intimidated by the process,” Ramirez said. “Apply to the top programs.” He was accepted to more than half of the institutions he applied to, including Mayo Clinic and Yale School of Medicine.

Faculty who encourage and guide. MARC MOLINA ’19 is a self-described non-traditional student. After graduating from San Antonio’s Central Catholic High School in 2007, he pursued coursework in political science, but those studies didn’t resonate with what he wanted to do. So instead, Molina followed his interests to work at an organic farm in Austin, do some backcountry hiking and camping and play in a band. His growing curiosity about food systems and how humans have interacted with the land over time is part of what helped Molina realize he had an historian’s brain. “I didn’t realize it at the time, but what I was doing that whole time was approaching these activities
with questions about past and present and about place,” Molina said.

He is currently in his second year as a doctoral student in the Borderlands History program at the University of Texas at El Paso, where he received a fully funded, five-year fellowship. He credits the help and encouragement of his professors at A&M-San Antonio to apply to graduate school and to consider environmental history as a focus. A Summer 2019 graduate of A&M-San Antonio, Molina received his bachelor’s degree in History with a minor in Mexican American/Latinx/Southwest Borderlands Studies and a research internship at the San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum.

Molina’s dissertation exploring the history of an environmental region between the Chihuahuan Desert and lower Rio Grande Valley of the U.S.-Mexico border known as the Tamuipilan Mezquital – from its first indigenous inhabitants through the construction of two bi-national dams and a water reservoir in the mid-20th century – attempts to understand environmental change over time and the reciprocal relationship diverse human communities form with each other and with the land, explained Molina.

“The ecosystem doesn’t stop at the border,” Molina said. “Comparing how national politics and environmental ethics have been translated on both sides of the border and have shaped different outlooks about what is sustainable and equitable is fascinating.” Applying a transnational lens over several centuries also allows asking questions about the impacts of different approaches taken over the years that we can learn from to apply to current practices, according to Molina. “It can open up the imagination for how to reorient ourselves to the land.”

Molina is keeping his eyes on a variety of career options ahead, including teaching, public service, a government role in the National Parks Service or Department of the Interior or working with a museum or nonprofit agency. “My undergraduate experience at A&M-San Antonio was a process of making sense of my surroundings and following my curiosity to find out what would bring me contentment,” Molina said. “Something
The way in which Texas A&M University-San Antonio welcomes and embraces its military students is a key part of why Rosa “Gaby” Porras chose the University to complete her bachelor’s degree, graduating in May 2020, summa cum laude, with a degree in Early Childhood Education. As a retired staff sergeant from the Army, Porras understands firsthand the struggles many veterans face when transitioning to civilian life. So, in her role as a student worker, she was always more than eager to help other veterans and family members complete the necessary paperwork to process their education benefits.

When she began her coursework in 2016, Porras already held an associate’s degree of applied science from the Community College of the Air Force. Her involvement in Tau Sigma National Honor Society – a society for transfer students – likewise made her a go-to source for assisting other students with their transitions to university life.

With the onset of the global health pandemic, Porras pitched in once again, helping staff the wellness tents around campus that provide temperature checks to students and visitors. That experience paved the way for her current role at A&M-San Antonio. Several months after graduating, Porras began her new job as public health and safety coordinator for the University.

While Porras was disappointed that she wasn’t able to walk the stage at commencement due to COVID-19 restrictions so that her 8-year-old son, Richard, could watch her graduate, what more than makes up for that is how accommodating everyone is in the Military Affairs office. “As a student worker, my manager worked with me so that I could go to class, work and still have time to pick up my son at the end of the day,” Porras said. “They are forever part of my family now.”

Experiences that make a difference. In November 2020, BIANCA GOODRUM ’14 defended her dissertation – via Zoom – at the culmination of a three-year doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of Texas at San Antonio. For the past seven years, Goodrum has worked as a counselor, including five years as a grief counselor at the Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas. That’s where she completed a practicum for her master’s degree in counseling and guidance at Texas A&M University-San Antonio, graduating in May 2014.

It’s perhaps no surprise that Goodrum’s interest in counselor wellness and self-care has been the focus of her dissertation. “I’m keenly interested in the stories of other grief counselors and how they have learned to take care of themselves as they assist others through their painful journeys,” Goodrum said. “Especially for those who work in death and dying, hearing the narratives of loss can take a toll on counselors, who themselves may begin to experience emotional, mental and physical exhaustion.” Goodrum believes the COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified the need for understanding how to practice self-care.

With her decision nearly two years ago to enter private practice, the pandemic also ushered in a new reality for her professional pursuits. Her decision in March 2020 to cancel all in-office appointments and transition clients to telehealth was an extremely tough one for Goodrum. “Providing counseling services through a screen doesn’t let you pick up on body language or lean into a space for something as simple as offering a tissue box,” Goodrum said.

In such a new frontier, the issue of self-care and wellness takes on another complication. For counselors as well as for their clients, that added layer of anxiety about when this pandemic is going to end and they can again connect in meaningful ways with friends contributes to a sense of loss, Goodrum noted. “You have to learn to mourn that loss of celebration or of plans constantly changing. Only then can you reclaim or reshape what you want life to look like once we move past this pandemic.”

Whatever her next chapter, Goodrum wants to always stay engaged in private practice at least on a part-time basis, but she is ready to explore additional opportunities, perhaps as a counselor, an educator or a licensed professional counselor supervisor. She credits her education at A&M-San Antonio as pivotal in giving direction to her professional aspirations.

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The 2020 Alumni Awards on Oct. 17 adapted as a celebration of achievement, like most all group gatherings during the pandemic, with a heavy dose of social distancing, reduced capacity, streaming video and lighthearted technical difficulties. The annual ceremony honored notable Jaguars in three categories, A&M-San Antonio’s student organization fundraiser, and honored notable Jaguars in three categories: Recent Graduate, Spirit of the Jaguar and Distinguished Alumni. The Distinguished Alumni and Recent Graduate honorees were awarded for their outstanding professional accomplishments, while Spirit of the Jaguar honoree was recognized for providing exceptional service to our community.

Distinguished Alumni Award: TIM INGRAM ’13

After graduating from A&M-San Antonio with a degree in Kinesiology, Tim Ingram became a personal trainer. Within a year, he became a top-earning fitness instructor in San Antonio. His success quickly increased his confidence, which led Ingram to realize a long-term dream: the opening of his own strength-training center, Heavy Metal Fitness.

Heavy Metal Fitness did not grow fast or suddenly explode in popularity. Instead, member by member, athlete by athlete and competition by competition, Ingram and his staff forged a reputation in the strength community.

Ingram is exceptional at transforming regular people into competitive strength athletes. He helps his clients build confidence while teaching them how to train for optimal performance. Ingram uses what he learned at A&M-San Antonio not only to serve the strength-training community, but also to help others seeking motivation and resources to improve their health.

Spirit of the Jaguar Award: IRMA IRIS DURAN DE RODRIGUEZ ’14

As a City of San Antonio employee, Irma Iris Duran de Rodriguez coordinates policy efforts between agencies, departments and City Hall to tackle constituents’ needs. She is part of various organizations, both professional and academic, and she participates in groups such as Communities in Schools, the State Association of Texas Pioneers, the Women’s Club, the San Antonio Charro Association and the Fiesta Commission.

A mother of two young girls, Duran de Rodriguez teaches Sunday school at St. Brigid’s Catholic Church. A lifetime Girl Scout member, she is active in her daughters’ troop as a co-leader and committee member of various Girl Scouts of South West Texas groups focusing on development and strategic planning. She volunteers in Girl Scout recruitment and was appointed the Volunteer Action Committee chair to review outdated policies and provide the best possible services for San Antonio’s girls and their parents.

Duran de Rodriguez intends to run for the Northside Independent School District Board, Seat 5, to honor her commitment to her community and helping children achieve in school.

Recent Graduate Award: CHRISTOPHER A. CASTRO ’17

Christopher A. Castro’s experience as a student studying abroad in the European Innovation Academy (EIA) helped him realize a desire to mentor A&M-San Antonio students. His experience also inspired him to donate to the University and the College of Business to support current students in need of financial assistance and expand study-abroad opportunities. Additionally, Castro volunteers as a College of Business Study Abroad alumni ambassador to assist students as they prepare for the EIA experience, and he mentors freshman finance majors.

Castro is an IT business analyst for Zachry Group. He serves as a liaison between the Information Technology Enterprise Support Team and end business systems users working in the Zachry Group companies. To date, Castro says his most important personal achievement is being featured in a Turino, Italy, newspaper and on the EIA website for placing sixth worldwide out of 95 new product teams at the conclusion of his study-abroad adventure.

**Ingram’s professional advice:** “Follow your passion, but back it up with knowledge.”

**Duran de Rodriguez’s professional advice:** “Be proactive in planning your future, but open to exploring a different path.”

**Castro’s free investment advice:** “Invest in yourself, and go to school. Doors open when you have a degree.”
University Expands Leadership Expertise with New Hires

Texas A&M University-San Antonio grew its Jaguar team in 2020 with strategic hires in academic and administrative leadership positions.

**DR. DEBRA FEAKES**
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
Start date: September 2020
A chemist by training, Dr. Feakes has maintained a passion for teaching throughout her appointments in public and private higher-education institutions. Her research interests include the synthesis of boron-containing compounds for potential use in treatment and therapy for certain types of cancer. A strong proponent of the undergraduate general education core, Dr. Feakes brings a focus on faculty development, getting students involved early in the processes of research and scholarship, designing programs that leverage opportunities to meet the emerging needs of the region’s economy, and developing resources and targeted interventions that ensure student success.

**DR. ROHAN CHRISTIE-DAVID**
Dean of the College of Business
Start date: June 2020
An award-winning researcher, Dr. Christie-David specializes in banking, financial derivatives, market microstructure and corporate finance. He has published dozens of articles in elite and high-quality journals and holds an ACIB from the Chartered Institute of Bankers, now the Institute of Banking & Finance, London. Dr. Christie-David brings to his role a zeal for engaging with industry, developing opportunities for faculty and students to conduct research that is timely and relevant, and providing students with more interdisciplinary programming, experiential learning, internships and student team projects.

**VICTOR PANTUSA**
Assistant Manager, Environmental Health & Safety
Start date: April 2020
Pantusa joins A&M-San Antonio with a strong background in environmental health and safety and compliance, having served in various capacities over three decades at the Texas Biomedical Research Institute, Texas A&M Health Science Center and the University of Houston. Pantusa brings critical knowledge to assist the University as it expands its undergraduate and graduate research initiatives and programming.

**DR. HENRIETTA (HENRI) MUÑOZ**
Executive Director, Institute for School and Community Partnerships
Start date: October 2020
Dr. Muñoz, a San Antonio native, has led family economic and educational success initiatives for nearly 15 years. In her new position, located in Edgewood Independent School District, Muñoz oversees partnerships and solutions to persistent challenges affecting the Edgewood ISD through SB-1882 initiatives, as well as the Educare initiative within the framework of the A&M-SA and south Bexar County ISDs Partnership to Impact Regional Equity and Excellence (ASPIRE). Her focus on strengthening the school-to-college educational pipeline in south Bexar County includes creating a wrap-around model to provide schools with skilled teachers as well as relevant experiences and employment opportunities for students.

**PATTY MENDOZA**
Director, Henry G. Cisneros Institute for Emerging Leaders
Start date: October 2020
Mendoza brings more than a decade of program management and academic experience to her role with the Cisneros Institute. An incubator of talent helping to prepare students for leadership roles in the community and industry following graduation. Her work includes leading initiatives to develop graduates skilled in building and cultivating effective teams, managing group dynamics, making ethical decisions, leading change in complex environments and dealing with organizational challenges. She also partners with University faculty and staff to develop curricular and co-curricular offerings and certificate programs in leadership development.

**DR. MARI FUENTES-MARTIN**
Vice President of Student Success and Engagement
Start date: January 2020
Dr. Fuentes-Martin brings a deep understanding of the dynamics of higher education in Texas and the student populations A&M-San Antonio serves and a proven track record of excellence in executive leadership and administrative acumen. In her role, she leads University efforts to enhance the resources, activities and services supporting student affairs, as well as to link the collection, assessment and use of data to establish and inform best practices for student success and engagement across the Institution.

**KATHRYN FUNK-BAXTER**
Vice President of Business Affairs and CFO
Start date: May 2020
Funk-Baxter has served in public higher education for over 25 years and brings a deep understanding of financial, budget and administrative operations to her current role. She oversees a broad range of business and campus development initiatives in addition to departments responsible for technology, campus safety, business operations, financial operations, Title IX, human resources, regional development partnerships and compliance. A certified public accountant, Funk-Baxter received the 2019 Distinguished Service Award of the Southern Association of College and University Business Officers.

**DAVID MCKENNA**
Executive Director of Operations
Start date: August 2020
McKenna brings a wealth of facilities and operational experience to his role at A&M-San Antonio, the fastest-growing institution within the Texas A&M System. McKenna’s previous positions in higher education and with industry include oversight of architectural and structural quality control and day-to-day management of multiple campus operations, including facilities, food services, the University police department, contract oversight, risk management and safety, audit responses and real estate.
Go Jaguars!
A&M-San Antonio Hires Inaugural Athletics Directors and Coaches

The year 2020 proved pivotal for laying the groundwork to launch a competitive intercollegiate athletics program at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. With a team of new hires now in place, the Jaguar spirit is set to take hold across the University and within the San Antonio community as intercollegiate competitions begin in earnest in 2021.

Darnell Smith
Director of Intercollegiate Athletics and Recreational Sports
Start date: January 2020
In this role, Smith supports A&M-San Antonio’s aggressive growth trajectory and the institution’s goal to extend the student experience by overseeing implementation of the University’s intercollegiate athletics strategic plan and by managing resources, facilities, finances and fundraising efforts for the division of athletics. No stranger to San Antonio, Smith spent his junior and senior years as a defensive end and linebacker at San Antonio’s Taft High School, where he earned all-district and co-defensive Most Valuable Player honors. A three-time recipient of the Arthur Ashe Scholar Award at Oklahoma State University, Smith previously served as the assistant athletic director of compliance at the University of Central Oklahoma, where he spent the past decade overseeing NCAA compliance, student-athlete services and student-athlete welfare programming.

Stephen Sherman
Assistant Athletics Director
Start date: May 2020
Before joining A&M-San Antonio, Sherman served as an assistant athletic director and head cross country and track and field coach at Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU). While at OLLU, Sherman led his teams to a combined 11 Red River Athletic Conference championships in men’s and women’s cross country and track and field, and was named Conference Coach of the Year on 10 different occasions.

Nicole Dufour
Softball Coach
Start date: May 2020
Dufour is a graduate of Southside High School in San Antonio, where she was a four-sport letterman in volleyball, basketball, softball and track. Most recently, Dufour served as an assistant coach of the Concordia Texas softball team, where her team advanced to the ASC Tournament twice, including an appearance in the ASC Tournament semifinals in 2018 for the first time since 2000.

Christi Cano
Golf Coach
Start date: May 2020
A native of San Antonio, Cano received a full athletic scholarship to play golf at Oklahoma State University, where she was an All-American in 2001. A five-time winner of the San Antonio Women’s Amateur Championship from 1999-2003, Cano has competed in three U.S. Women’s Opens, and she won the Texas Women’s Open in 2013. Prior to joining A&M-San Antonio, Cano served as the head men’s and women’s golf coach at the University of Houston-Victoria, where she began her collegiate coaching career and where her teams captured six individual team titles and three individual titles.

Leslie Pierce
Soccer Coach
Start date: May 2020
Pierce began her coaching career in 2009 and has served in a variety of coaching capacities in higher education and in high school settings as well as coaching in youth soccer and futsal clubs. While assistant director of coaching at Gulf Coast Youth Soccer Club in Nederland, Texas, Pierce was tasked with growing and expanding the girls’ select Division 1 program, and she assisted with the operations and college recruitment of high school players. In addition to her coaching experience, Pierce enjoyed a stellar playing career at Harding University and was part of a Bison team that made the NCAA II national tournament.

Travis Yang
Esports Head Coach
Start date: January 2020
Yang brings more than a decade of experience in esports as a coach and competitive player. He previously served as the assistant esports coach at Ashland University in Ohio’s inaugural 2018-19 season, leading the university to multiple first-place finishes in the AVGL Collegiate Fortnite Tournament Series. Yang’s program development includes coaching, recruitment, camps and outreach as he prepares students to compete in the Collegiate Stargame and TESPA leagues as a member of the National Association of Collegiate Esports.

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The importance of every person having a voice was the essential lesson learned by Democracy Fellow Denique Escobedo, a junior Business and Accounting transfer student from Palo Alto College, where she received her associate’s degree in Mathematics. Social media, while popular with younger people in particular as a platform to express opinions, only goes so far, Escobedo admitted. “To have your voice count, you have to actually vote.”

Democracy Fellow Walter Perry agrees with Escobedo about the importance of getting outside the digital bubble. “COVID-19 made the whole world stop, but through that process, it’s made many of us realize there is a big world out there outside the digital world,” said Perry, a senior Marketing major who graduated in December 2020, with plans to continue his studies at A&M-San Antonio to pursue a master’s of business administration.
Every Gift Makes a Difference
Proud Alumnus Proves the Exponential Impact of Giving

This past December, LeWayne Ballard’s generosity during Texas A&M University-San Antonio’s inaugural Day of Giving made all the difference. Ballard’s matching gift of $2,000 during the single-day fundraiser’s “Power Hour” helped boost gifts supporting scholarships and the General’s Store Food Pantry.

Ballard, a two-time graduate of A&M-San Antonio (a bachelor’s 2013 in computer information systems and a master’s 2014 of business administration), is the chief technology officer for Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson, LLP. Ballard, who oversees IT operations, including security and compliance for the firm’s 45 offices throughout the United States, says he “always appreciated A&M-San Antonio’s commitment to serving the south side and bringing education opportunities that are affordable to the city’s underserved and lower-income student populations in particular.”

Among the good causes of great importance to Ballard are helping the next generation of college students pursue their education goals, and doing what he can to ease the financial challenges of the elderly, including volunteering for the past six years with Meals on Wheels.

A firm believer in lifelong learning, Ballard is currently working on his Ph.D. in Education at the University of the Incarnate Word. His dissertation research is focused on establishing a cybersecurity framework for young children and students. “Many are quick to give children access to the Internet without any formal education on its inherent risks,” said Ballard, stressing that it’s not only things like cyberbullying that pose a risk. “Students need help better understanding the potential harm of their own digital footprint. What they leave behind could hurt their future employment and education opportunities.”

Part of the problem, Ballard says, is that parents and teachers remain unclear or are at odds with their own roles and responsibilities for keeping kids safe on the Internet. “I want to build a framework that provides awareness and guidance.”

Ballard attended A&M-San Antonio when the University’s business courses were still being taught at Brooks City Base and before the Institution started enrolling freshmen. Ballard says witnessing the steady rise in the University’s enrollment and its expansion of degree programs gives him joy, knowing that many more students will have the opportunity to follow their professional dreams.

Ballard is a firm believer in lifelong learning. LeWayne Ballard ‘14 has volunteered with Meals on Wheels for the past six years.
Friends of A&M-San Antonio Extend Value and Access

The generosity of Texas A&M University-San Antonio donors continues to bolster the Institution’s focus on supporting students during unprecedented challenges, launching new scholarship programs and experiences and building capacity and access to a quality university degree. In Fall 2020, A&M-San Antonio also launched a campaign to support three new buildings (see page 8 for the full story) and the introduction of facilities for its inaugural athletics program.

PRESIDENT’S CIRCLE:
The President’s Circle supports the unanticipated needs that arise in a rapidly changing environment. Donors provide vital financial support that help A&M-San Antonio respond to the most immediate needs of those who are the heart of our community: the students.

“The President’s Circle of giving is an integral part of the philanthropy necessary to grow and sustain our campus here in San Antonio,” said Lowry Mays, Mays Family Foundation, President’s Circle member and Dream Maker Society member (inducted 2010).

For more information or to become a member of the A&M-San Antonio President’s Circle, visit tamusa.edu/giving.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND ENDOWMENTS:
A&M-San Antonio is dedicated to helping students achieve their academic dreams and to do so without financial stress. Through the efforts of the A&M-San Antonio Foundation, local and national corporations, foundations and organizations continue to support students and their experiences as well as faculty.

Since 2008, more than $3 million has been raised for A&M-San Antonio students. Generous endowments and scholarships include the AT&T Scholarship Endowment, the Frank L. Madla Jr. Scholarship Foundation and the San Antonio Hispanic Chamber Scholarship. We are deeply grateful for the support from individual, corporate and foundation donors.

GET TO KNOW OUR JAGUARS!
See more student stories at tamusa.edu/um.

EVELYN CAMPOS, CLASS OF 2021
Major: Sociology
Hometown: San Antonio, Texas

"THE THANK-A-THON IS A GREAT WAY TO SHOW OUR APPRECIATION FOR OUR DONORS. THANK YOU, DONORS, FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT!"

The Office of University Advancement hosts the Fall 2020 Thank-A-Thon, where students and staff call and personally thank the University’s donors.
At Texas A&M University-San Antonio, 98 percent of students receive financial assistance thanks to the generosity of individuals, corporations, foundations and organizations. Scholarships continue to be an integral part of helping students realize their pursuit of a university degree. Seventy-one percent of A&M-San Antonio students are the first in their family to attend a university, and many are working, raising a family or both.

Rafika Islam, class of 2024, Armed Forces Communication Electronics Association scholarship recipient

As a result of your generosity, I will not only be able to make my family and myself proud, but I will be one step closer to earning a degree. I will stay motivated and focused, and will uphold the standards as a recipient of this [Armed Forces Communication Electronics Association (AFCEA)] scholarship.”

Rafika Islam, CLASS OF 2024
Major: Computer Science
Hometown: San Antonio, Texas

Desiree Arrendondo, CLASS OF 2021
Major: Political Science
Hometown: Pleasanton, Texas

I am so pleased and honored to be given a chance to further my education and pursue my goal[s] by receiving the [Toyota MLK] scholarship ... I cannot stress this enough: Thank you for your support.”

Sebastian Urista, CLASS OF 2023
Major: Physical Education
Hometown: San Antonio, Texas

Visit tamusa.edu/giving to learn how you can help support scholarships.
As the pandemic impacted communities across the nation, the safety and well-being of Texas A&M University-San Antonio students became the priority. As with so many, students and their families faced unanticipated job loss and food and housing insecurities; and for some, the choice of stepping away from their academic dreams. A&M-San Antonio’s strategy to alleviate some of these pressing needs was the Jaguar Lift Campaign, a campaign to support the Emergency Relief Fund and General’s Food Pantry, the only operating campus food pantry in San Antonio during the COVID-19 shut-down.

A generous grant from the San Antonio Spurs Give program provided an additional 300 meals to campus community members experiencing food insecurity due to the pandemic during June.

“The pandemic has impacted our students in so many ways. Our University community and friends stepped up to help alleviate the challenges and hardships students have continued to face,” said Jeanette De Diemar, vice president for advancement and external relations. “We are deeply grateful to those who gave to this campaign and will continue to give.”

Another first for the student relief effort was the collaboration with A&M-San Antonio’s student athletes in the esports program, who raised more than $5,000 during the first-of-its-kind Jag-Wars, where students went head-to-head on gaming platforms such as Madden, NBA2K and Rocket League. The esports player who received the most donations from viewers received an esports scholarship. President Cynthia Teniente-Matson was a guest athlete during the event.

“Jag-Wars was an excellent opportunity for our esports athletes to show off their gaming skills while also raising funds to help their fellow students and their families,” said Esports Head Coach Travis Yang. “I’m extremely proud of our student athletes not only for how well they played, but for how much they were able to raise during this unique event.”

For more information, visit tamusa.edu/giving.
A&M-San Antonio’s General’s Food Pantry teams up with Spurs Give at a special event on June 10 to provide 300 meals to campus community members experiencing food insecurity due to the pandemic.

9,100 MEALS
GENERAL’S FOOD PANTRY HAS PROVIDED TO STUDENTS AND FAMILIES IN NEED.
HOW DO WE CHARACTERIZE 2020?

A year that bore tremendous loss for so many? Or a year that brought unprecedented challenges? For Texas A&M University-San Antonio, 2020 was a year that touched our hearts, stretched our imaginations and will be remembered as a year that exemplifies the Jaguar spirit of resilience and generosity.

To our friends and donors: Thank you for your support and gifts that are making a difference in the lives of our students and their families. Every gift, no matter the size, is already changing lives as we address the most pressing needs of our students impacted by the global pandemic: loss of employment, and food and housing insecurities. We’re also hard at work creating new partnerships and collaborations to provide solutions for digital inclusion in our community, and access to higher education through the Achiever Promise and scholarships. And we’re launching programs and services to tackle financial literacy and the talent pipeline and workforce development.

This year, many of you gave for the first time, from students to alumni. We raised more in scholarships; received major gifts from the government and corporations including USAA and the Department of Education; and launched a student emergency relief fund to help our students continue to pursue their academic journey.

Visit tamusa.edu/giving to learn how you can help support students through scholarships and direct need.