

\$2.4 Million Grant Helps UHD Support “Upward Bound” Students and Future Leaders

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HOUSTON –A recent \$2.4 million, five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education will extend the University of Houston- Downtown’s (UHD) Upward Bound program, which tailors academic and social instruction for high school students.

Upward Bound is a federally funded program that assists first-generation, low-income, college-bound students with the academic and life skills necessary to graduate from high school and succeed in college. UHD’s Upward Bound program – currently in its 31st year – has provided nearly 3,000 students from Houston Independent School District (HISD) with individualized training in mathematics, laboratory science, composition, literature and foreign languages.

Approximately 100 students a year commit to attend a week of intensive training during the summer, as well as Saturday courses on the UHD campus throughout all four years of high school. UHD supplies these teenagers with stipends, provides them with meals and takes them on college tours across the nation to visit top universities. The university also conducts workshops that assist students with financial literacy, community leadership, college admission and test preparation, and brings business leaders to campus to offer their real-world expertise to the students.

"Because many low-income, minority teenagers lack the role models and incentive to stay in school and develop dreams for future careers and success, our Upward Bound program meets a critical need in the community," said Dawana Lewis, director of UHD’s Upward Bound program. "There is nothing more gratifying than cultivating a love for learning and a persistent discipline in these students that leads to college and graduate school completion and ultimately changed lives."

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Shari Bhims, a former UHD Upward Bound student, knows the challenges of persisting in school, as well as the rewards of hard work and focus. "Upward Bound definitely gave me the academic and social skills that I needed to accomplish my dreams and create the kind of life I wanted for myself and my family. With that foundation, I graduated with a bachelor's degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C., a master's degree from Prairie View A & M University and recently received my law degree from Texas Southern University."

In addition to the individualized training the students receive from college-level and high school teachers on campus, they also have full access to computer and science labs and receive hands-on instruction from current UHD students who serve as tutors. UHD also regularly hires its former Upward Bound students who are in college to return to campus and counsel new recruits to the program.

UHD's Upward Bound program ensures that participating students leave the program with a secure foundation for college studies, as well as a commitment to community service. From planting gardens in the 3rd Ward to serving food to the homeless, these students are not only taught the knowledge and skills to succeed, but also the importance of applying that learning to benefit others.

"Research has proven that bridge programs like Upward Bound can mean the difference between economic success and failure," said Lewis, who just returned from a cross-country trip with more than 30 students to visit universities and cultural attractions in Alabama, Florida and Georgia. "More than 95 percent of Upward Bound students at UHD pass the TAKS test and graduate from high school. We're excited to expand our program with our new federal grant and look forward to helping more students accomplish their dreams."

About the University of Houston-Downtown:

UHD, founded in 1974, is one of four distinct universities in the University of Houston System, and is the second largest university in Houston and the 15th largest four-year, public university in Texas. One of the most ethnically diverse universities in the country, UHD ranks 37th nationally for graduating Hispanic students with bachelor's degrees and 37th nationally for graduating African- American students with bachelor's degrees. Approximately 2,000 students graduate from UHD each year. For information about UHD, please visit www.uhd.edu.

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