

TEXAS★LEADER

PLANNING TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Global Impact

Growing UT's presence
around the world

Fall/Winter 2025



TEXAS
The University of Texas at Austin



Getting to Know Jim Davis, UT's New President

President Jim Davis shares his thoughts on the bright future of UT and his gratitude for those who so generously support it.

What makes this role exciting for you?

The University of Texas at Austin has a special ability to change lives. It has certainly changed mine. I am the son of Longhorns, my wife, Teresa, and I are alumni, and we are the proud parents of a staff member and a current student. Being part of this campus and serving our University for the past seven years in different capacities has been my greatest professional joy. I am excited and grateful for the opportunity to do more in this new role to help UT Austin continue to change lives.

What are you most looking forward to achieving in this role?

We can be the most impactful university of any kind. We will lead the way in discovering the frontiers of science and technology while at the same time honing wisdom, judgment and discernment through arts and humanities. We will transform health through a patient-centered and technology-enabled hospital of the future at the UT Medical Center alongside the world-renowned MD Anderson Cancer Center. And we will carry on the traditions of excellence that create the best student experiences at UT Austin. We are at a moment in time where UT Austin is poised to be its very best.

This issue of Texas Leader emphasizes UT's global impact and international study abroad opportunities for our students. Why are these efforts important, both on campus and beyond?

Like me, the vast majority of our students are Texans. When they study abroad, they learn more about the world, and the world learns more about us. I lived abroad in Scotland while serving in the U.S. Navy and I studied abroad in Guanajuato, Mexico while I was an undergrad. Some jokingly say I studied abroad for law school when I attended Harvard.

Those times abroad, when we experience different cultures and languages, open our minds to new perspectives. Later sharing that experience with others back home makes our campus and classrooms more interesting and enlightening. More personally, spending some time in another country builds a sense of independence, adventure and discovery that enhances our lives long after graduation. Plus, when we go abroad as students or alumni, we reflect the power and impact of a UT education. No matter where we are in the world, Longhorns know how to make an impression.



James E. Davis, President
The University of Texas at Austin
Ed and Carolyn Hyman Presidential Leadership Chair

SAVE THE DATE

Texas Leadership Society Luncheon

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026 | AT&T HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTER

Mark your calendar and join us for this special event. For more information, please email giftplan@austin.utexas.edu or call 800-687-4602.

GLOBAL IMPACT: UT'S INTERNATIONAL BOARD — of — ADVISORS

As The University of Texas at Austin continues its mission to become the world's highest-impact public research university, members of the International Board of Advisors are helping to put that goal within reach. As a team of dedicated alumni, strategic thinkers, creative problem-solvers, subject experts and generous philanthropists, they are working together to provide advice, support and direction to University leaders.

Our International Board of Advisors currently consists of 48 representatives from 20 nations. Read on to learn how three of them — Ray Brimble, Shanaz Hemmati and Shinichi Iimura — are helping UT strengthen its global visibility.



An Ordinary Man's Extraordinary Journey

Photo by
Ricky Clack

Ray Brimble is creating a legacy inspired by community.

When Ray Brimble, B.A. '74, came to UT, he discovered multiple windows into a great big beautiful world. "It is said about journeys that the person who returns is never the same person who left," he says. "For me, the first leg of what would become a life of many wonderful journeys, both mentally and physically, started at UT."

Through their gift of the Brimble Global Impact Endowment, Ray and his wife, Karen, BBA '92, ensure Longhorns can embark on wonderful journeys of their own.

A Deep Connection

Ray grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in the southwest suburbs of Houston, where he saw himself as "just an ordinary guy" who wanted to do normal things with his friends and his life. He was influenced by his remarkable parents — a mother who emigrated from Cuba and a father from East Texas — who were both intellectually curious and had built successful careers in international trade. Ray was inspired by the diversity of his large multicultural family and his parents' professional associates, who came from around the world to do business in Houston's thriving international community.

"On UT's campus, I saw a beautiful collage of students, the sons and daughters of people who came here just like my family did a generation ago," he says. "UT is a magical place with an old worldly charm about it. I remember walking to and from classes under the big oak trees and stepping into libraries that had a particular aroma of books and wood. There was an earthiness that was comforting to me."

◀
**Ray Brimble, B.A. '74 and
Karen Brimble, BBA '92**

After graduating with a degree in international studies, he earned a master's degree in international affairs from George Washington University. A visionary entrepreneur, he started his first business at 22 and went on to found, run and sell more than 50 businesses. He is currently the founder and CEO of Lynx Holdings, LP, an international real estate development firm, and Seed/Pod Holdings, LLC.

For three decades, he has been a champion for the McCombs Center for Global Business (CGB), which supports hands-on programs that offer students global skills and experience, personal guidance via mentorship, exposure to global leaders and career planning support. He has acted as emeritus chair of the CGB Board of Advisors for most of the 30 years he's been involved with the center.

“On UT's campus, I saw a beautiful collage of students, the sons and daughters of people who came here just like my family did a generation ago.”

— RAY BRIMBLE

CGB was launched in 1999 with government funding. Because the Brimbles are passionate about fostering global perspectives among UT students, they stepped forward with a gift in 2022 to ensure the center could continue to serve Longhorns with transformative educational and career resources.

"For more than 30 years, Ray Brimble's enthusiasm, innovation and generosity have contributed to the advancement of international business education at McCombs," says Deirdre B. Mendez, director of the CGB. "He has served our center and community in diverse ways — as the founding chair of our board of advisors, a member of our faculty, a speaker and guest lecturer and as a major donor. As a dedicated alumnus deeply connected to our students, Ray has garnered respect and admiration from the entire Longhorn community."

Lessons for Life

Years after graduation, students from the Center for Global Business still carry the lessons they learned during their study abroad experience.

Timia Bethea · BBA '20

I conducted research in Ghana as a Presidential Global Scholar. That experience allowed me to see the world as one interconnected place. It also helped me see what I could make happen for myself through effort and challenges. A study abroad experience will positively affect you more than you could ever know.



Christian Pallotta · BBA '19

My cross-cultural management course in Barcelona deepened my understanding of the cultural differences between countries, which has been invaluable in my career as a management consultant. Bringing that insight into my work environment has allowed me to add real value. Through my coursework and travel experiences, I strengthened my emotional intelligence and my ability to put myself in other people's shoes.



Karla Ramos · BBA '22

Working with people from other cultures increased my awareness of different perspectives and broadened my worldview. My study abroad experience also reinforced my childhood dream of living in Europe. After gaining experience at a legal tech company in Austin, I requested a transfer to our London office in 2024 — a decision I will never regret!



Ray also serves on the McCombs School of Business Dean's Advisory Council to assist the dean, faculty and staff of the school in becoming one of the top business schools in the nation. In October 2024, he was inducted into the McCombs Hall of Fame.

"I looked at the recipients of this award over the past four decades, and these people have really changed the world," he says. "I am extremely honored to be included in that roster."

Most recently, he became a member of UT's International Board of Advisors — a group of 48 UT alumni from around the world — to provide advice, support and direction to UT's president and leaders to strengthen and enhance UT's global visibility.

"Serving on the International Board of Advisors is quite a distinction. We offer a broad perspective of the world to help promote the global Longhorn Nation, serving as ambassadors of UT and resources for faculty, students and staff on campus," he says.

He is grateful for the opportunities that started right here in Austin. "I was able to piece together this journey that was part surreptitious, part luck and part hard work. I continue to do business and have made wonderful friends all around the globe, continue to learn about new things and have watched my world — our world — change and change again. What starts at UT truly does change the world," he says. ■

Global Change Maker Scholarships have been funded for 10 years through the Brimble Global Impact Initiative, and CGB is raising an endowment to fund these awards in perpetuity.



Scan this QR code to learn more about the Brimble Global Impact Endowment and start supporting global futures today.

OUR TOWER THE NEXT 100 YEARS

Since its inception in 1937, the UT Tower has stood as a symbol of the bold ambition, academic excellence and extraordinary achievement found only at The University of Texas at Austin.

Join us as we embark on a once-in-a-lifetime venture to restore, revitalize and reimagine our most iconic, beloved landmark for Longhorns today and for generations to come.



Support the campaign:
tower.utexas.edu/support

The Power of Connections



Photo by
Ricky Clack

As a successful entrepreneur, Shanaz Hemmati is using her gifts to create pathways for others.

Those who travel the hardest roads often know best how to help those who follow. Coming to UT from Iran in the late '70s was a life-changing journey for Shanaz Hemmati, B.S. '85. She thought she would return to her homeland after graduation; instead, she is now an avid Austinite who is excited to give back to the University that provided her with so many opportunities. With her husband, Robert Abbassi, BBA '78, Shanaz has created The Shanaz Hemmati and Robert Abbassi Graduate Fellowship to help international engineering students achieve their academic goals. And in her volunteer role as a new member of UT's International Board of Advisors, Shanaz is helping her University expand its global reach.

Finding Her Place in the World

Shanaz Hemmati was only 16 when she arrived in Austin. "When the Iranian Revolution began, I had just started 11th grade. Our school shut down because of the rallies," she recalls. Leaving the country was her best hope for the life she had always envisioned.

Her sister's husband was a master's student at UT, so Shanaz had some family nearby to help her get started. Soon afterward, however, her sister and brother-in-law returned to Iran, leaving Shanaz feeling quite alone. She drew on strengths that had been instilled in her since childhood.

"My mother was a really strong woman," says Shanaz. "She was the CEO of our house. I'm the youngest of five children, and she encouraged and taught us all — boys and girls — the importance of being strong and independent."

Shanaz stayed to attend UT in the male-dominated field of electrical engineering. With the support of her family and the welcoming atmosphere on the Forty Acres, Shanaz came to realize she had found her place in the world.

"Even in those days, there were kids from all over the world at UT. I did not feel out of place," she recalls.

A Mentor to Many

In 2017, Shanaz co-founded ZenBusiness, an online platform to help small startups grow, prosper and thrive, and now serves as its COO. In addition to this demanding role, she also provides mentorship to entrepreneurs through Capital Factory and currently volunteers on the board of the Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce.

"Austin is a hub for technology," says Shanaz. "In addition to a great university, there are lots of entrepreneurs here and that also makes me feel right at home. I enjoy being part of what UT and Austin are all about."

She has now reached a point in her life when looking back means seeing the opportunities she had — and looking forward means doing her best to create the same opportunities for others.

"When I've visited Iran," she says, "I have noticed so much talent but no opportunities. Kids there are so hungry for education."

"I enjoy being part of what UT and Austin are all about."

— SHANAZ HEMMATI

The Shanaz Hemmati and Robert Abbassi Graduate Fellowship will help such students navigate the many obstacles to education abroad. It's a permanent endowment to support international graduate students pursuing degrees in the Cockrell School of Engineering.

◀
Shanaz Hemmati, B.S. '85 and
Robert Abbassi, BBA '78

The first recipient of the scholarship was Atefeh Esfandiari, a Ph.D. candidate in environmental engineering. During their meeting, Shanaz discovered that Atefeh came from the same city where her parents had grown up, nearly 7,700 miles away from the place she now calls home. The connection between the two made the world feel a little smaller, and its heart a lot larger.

"If I can help someone be able to go through the journey, then I feel like I've paid part of my dues," says Shanaz. ■



Atefeh Esfandiari

Ph.D. Candidate,
Environmental
Engineering

I was thrilled to connect with Shanaz Hemmati, a successful UT alumna. Our lunch wasn't just a meeting; it was a moment of shared stories, shared dreams and shared hopes for the future. It was truly serendipitous that we met on International Women's Day, both proud Iranian women, making our mark in this world — a celebration of female empowerment. Shanaz's achievements as an entrepreneur, mentor and advisor are incredibly inspiring. Being part of the Shanaz Hemmati and Robert Abbassi Graduate Fellowship is an honor beyond words. Their support assists me toward my goal of working with pioneering organizations to develop innovative solutions for clean energy storage and being part of this transformative change in the world. Here's to the power of connections and celebrating our shared journey! Here's to celebrating International Women's Day as a reminder of the extraordinary women shaping our world. And here's to Shanaz Hemmati, a beacon of inspiration and a testament to the heights we can reach when we lift each other up.

In Pursuit of Prosperity and Peace



More than 50 years after graduation, Shinichi “Joe” Iimura continues his connection to UT.

For generations, The University of Texas at Austin has exerted a gravitational pull on students from across the world. In a pre-internet, pre-social media era, word about UT’s opportunities, academic rigor and Longhorn spirit reached across the Pacific Ocean and sparked the dreams of Shinichi “Joe” Iimura, B.S. ’74, B.A. ’77. The force of the Forty Acres drew Shinichi from Japan to Austin in 1971, creating an impact that would extend beyond his years on campus throughout his career as CEO of Koyo Engineering, his family’s electrical contracting business. By creating several scholarships, Shinichi is offering his support for international students who answer UT’s call to follow their academic dreams.

The Power of Persistence

“Ever since I was a child, I longed for America, the most prosperous country in the world,” says Shinichi. “I asked my father to pay for my studies, but he had just started a new company and was going through a

difficult time financially. But my passion and strong will to study abroad did not change, and UT’s tuition fee for international students at that time was attractive.”

Studying abroad required both courage and commitment. Shinichi upgraded his language skills with three months of intensive English classes prior to starting at UT. The language demands compounded the difficulty of completing his degree program.

“The dense content and high level of the classes were fascinating, but it was also hard work. I spent most of my student life studying,” he recalls.

With great persistence, Shinichi earned his first degree in civil engineering, then stayed on the Forty Acres for a second bachelor’s degree in computer science.

“Despite my language handicap, I eventually graduated from this prestigious school,” says Shinichi. “It is no exaggeration to say that



ABOVE: Shinichi Iimura, B.S. ’74, B.A. ’77, with his wife, Satoko

LEFT: Shinichi’s 1974 graduation photo

BELOW: Annual meeting of Texas Exes Japan Chapter in Tokyo, June 2025



graduation — my biggest challenge — gave me great courage and confidence for the rest of my life and was a major driving force for the success of my business in Japan.”

The Spirit of Tolerance

Beyond the classroom, Shinichi absorbed Texan, American and global culture by participating in campus events. “At international student exchange meetings, I was able to exchange opinions with students from all over the world and interact with people with varying ideas, which broadened my international perspective,” he says. “And in my interactions with Americans, I learned how friendly, cheerful and generous they are. They would make eye contact and smile, giving a good feeling to strangers and manifesting the spirit of tolerance of the American people.”

“It is no exaggeration to say that graduation — my biggest challenge — gave me great courage and confidence for the rest of my life.”

— SHINICHI IIMURA

Other memories that have stayed with him are a particular meal with his host family — “They treated me to a Texas-sized T-bone steak, and I was amazed at how large and delicious it was!” — and the sight of “tens of thousands of students, adults and children crowding the stadium, wearing burnt orange T-shirts and cheering for the Longhorns.” Shinichi didn’t miss one home football game during his years on campus,

and to this day, he keeps up with his favorite team by watching videos of their games online.

Shinichi also maintains his strong UT connection as the co-founder of The University of Texas Japan Alumni Association (Texas Exes Japan Chapter), which currently boasts a membership of approximately 200 active members. For the past five years, he has served as chapter president and has visited the UT campus annually.

In May 2023, Shinichi accepted an invitation to serve as a member of the International Board of Advisors and has attended IBA meetings in both Austin and Dubai.

“I was very impressed by the vision of aiming to be the highest-impact research university in the world,” says Shinichi. “IBA members are active in the world and successful in business after graduating from UT, so I enjoy exchanging opinions with them. I am exploring with my colleagues how we can make effective use of technology and ways to collaborate with the network of UT alumni in Japan.”

With gratitude for all the opportunities UT provided him, Shinichi has created three scholarships. The Koyo Endowment, awarded by Texas Global, helps UT recruit top students who otherwise might have chosen to attend some other prestigious school. With his wife, Satoko, he recently added the merit-based Iimura Family Scholarship Endowment, which will provide two full tuition scholarships to students from Japan. Since 2018, he has offered The Iimura Peace Endowed Scholarship, for which international students from East Asia compete by submitting an essay on how they would promote peace throughout East Asia and in their home country after graduation. Shinichi hopes this scholarship will help recipients fulfill their dreams — and one more of his own.

“People start wars, but it is also people who make peace,” says Shinichi. “I hope that many peace-loving students will grow up on the UT campus, and together we will see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting peace in the world.” ■

Building on Their Knowledge

Projects with Underserved Communities challenges Longhorns to apply their knowledge far from the Forty Acres in ways that directly benefit others and produce a transformative effect on all.



Ten thousand miles from The University of Texas at Austin — nearly halfway around the globe — stands a building that represents the importance of education and the opportunities it provides. The children's library in Kallathupatti, South India, offers its village's 3,000 residents more than a dedicated space for tutoring, lessons and other educational resources. It's a place for growing hope, for creating community, and for opening a door to a life beyond child labor and the harsh poverty so prevalent in the region.

The library was built in 2021 by UT students through a partnership between the nonprofit CASA India (Church's Auxiliary for Social Action) and Projects with Underserved Communities (PUC), a collaboration between UT's Cockrell School of Engineering and UT Social Work.

Since PUC's inception in 2009, nearly 300 Longhorns have served more than 18,000 people as they've learned about themselves and the world around them. With compassion and care, UT students have worked on



four continents, using their skills on community projects such as installing solar panels at a clinic for malnourished children in Guatemala, expanding a school in Tanzania, and creating access to clean water in Papua New Guinea.

These humanitarian engineering projects exemplify the Longhorn spirit and the University's mission to increase its global impact.

"A university is tasked with generating knowledge and gathering different perspectives," says Tanya Voss, assistant dean for global engagement for UT Social Work. "Now more than ever, it's vitally important that we educate our students about different ways to find solutions to our common problems."

ON THIS PAGE: The children's library provides children in rural areas access to quality educational resources.

Photos courtesy of CASA India.



Starting the Journey

Planning for a successful PUC project begins long before participants board the plane. Students prepare for this study abroad experience in a three-course sequence that starts in the fall semester with project selection. In the spring, students develop a project design and receive preparatory information from Texas Global, a UT office devoted to supporting students through every phase of their study abroad program. Part of Texas Global's plan for student success is to ensure all study abroad applicants clearly define their personal and academic goals prior to departure.

"We ask students what they're hoping to achieve during their study abroad experience," says Tommy Ward, Texas Global's director of education abroad. "We have sessions to encourage students to reflect on their desired outcomes so they can be better prepared to take action to achieve those goals."

Texas Global also prepares students with information particular to the culture of their destination, as well as general health and safety tips.

PUC concludes in the summer with the in-country completion of the project. The PUC teams, typically composed of six to eight engineering students and one social work student, work together to develop end-to-end solutions in collaboration with their chosen community.

"Understanding the lives, attitudes and experiences of other people is central to humanitarian engineering."

— JANET ELLZEY

Offering students the chance to connect across disciplines is a learning opportunity in itself.

"Social work is a connective discipline, helping to bridge between different needs, different communities, different people and different disciplines," says Tanya. "Social work students who participate in PUC learn to believe in their ability to cross into other communities and have dialogues that allow them to find holistic and sustainable solutions."

Janet Ellzey, a professor of mechanical engineering in the Cockrell School, co-founded PUC with colleagues Jim O'Connor, a now-retired Cockrell professor, and Laurie Young, former program coordinator for International Engineer Education. The trio devised PUC in response to students who requested an unconventional study abroad opportunity. Including social work students in the project was part of their blueprint from the beginning.

"Social workers and engineers are very similar," says Janet. "Both are client-focused and outcome-oriented but have complementary skill sets. Engineers have technical expertise, and social workers have strengths connecting and communicating with people."

Once the community project is selected, members of the volunteer Service Learning Advisory Board help students create plans that will maximize the benefits for both the communities and the students' learning opportunities. One important aspect of PUC includes learning how to deal with budgets and fiscal constraints. PUC teams must work together to raise a maximum of \$15,000 to see their projects through to completion.

"One of the real-world experiences we've encountered in the last few years is inflation in construction costs. Fifteen thousand dollars doesn't go as far as it used to," says Janet. "PUC could not exist without the generosity of our donors."

Bringing the Lessons Home

During their time abroad, Longhorns have the chance to leave their mark on places and people around the globe. In turn, the experience leaves them with memories and connections that change their world forever. Students return to Texas with changed perspectives and an increased awareness of the opportunities available to them.

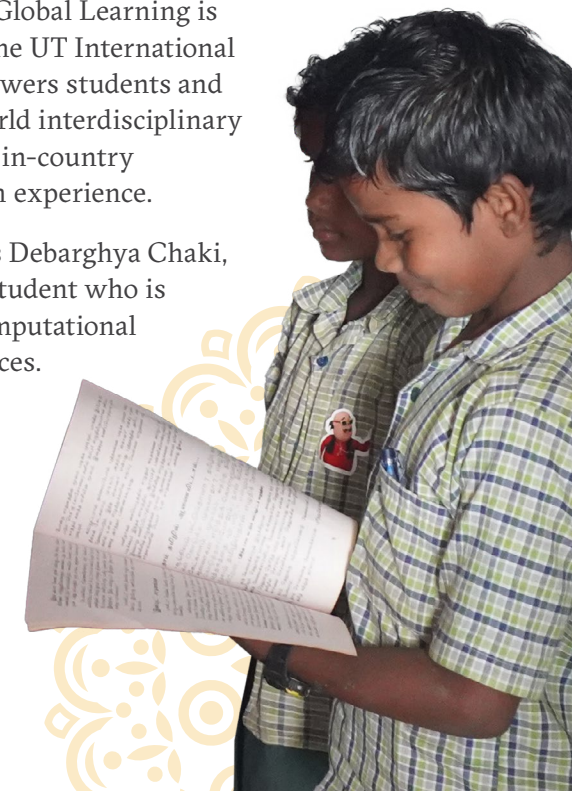
"For many, this might be the first time they've interacted with a resource-strained community," says Janet. "Different opportunities exist depending on where you are. Understanding the lives, attitudes and experiences of other people is central to humanitarian engineering."

PUC projects also provide other Longhorns with a research focus. In summer 2025, a group of students working with the President's Award for Global Learning traveled to Kallathupatti to assess the impact of the children's library on the village's residents.

The President's Award for Global Learning is the signature program of the UT International Board of Advisors. It empowers students and faculty to examine real-world interdisciplinary topics while incorporating in-country learning into the classroom experience.

Among these students was Debarghya Chaki, a biomedical engineering student who is pursuing certificates in computational engineering and data sciences.

"We want to learn how the library has affected the village and how it has improved literacy," he says. "One of the main goals of the library was to reduce child labor in Kallathupatti, and we want to assess its long-



After years of success, PUC has spawned a sister project.

Humanitarian Product Development is a yearlong course sequence in which students design and test technologies to address needs identified through a partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

In summer 2025, a team of UT students traveled to Kenya to assess the needs of Kakuma Refugee Camp, where residents from numerous African countries seek protection from war, violence and exploitation.

Photos by D. Willetts, Matija Kovac, CreativeCommons.org

term effects and role in the community. We also want to evaluate the impact of literacy initiatives on rural villages and how that might be extrapolated for future projects.”

Debarghya has a particular interest in libraries and their impact on communities. When he emigrated from India at age 3, he spoke only Bengali. He remembers spending many hours at his local library in College Station to gain the language skills he needed to attend preschool.

“My mom would take me to the library every day, and that helped me learn English,” he recalls. The experience had an enormous long-term effect on his academic life.

“All through high school, I would go to the library to read and to study. It was a big part of what helped me,” says Debarghya, who aspires to go to medical school after graduating from UT in 2026.



▲ **Katelyn (right) with Ranjitha**

and often thinks of her time in India. After traveling more than 30 hours, the group was received with great excitement.

“I felt like a celebrity!” says Katelyn. “The community held a big reception for us. They gave us handmade shawls, and the children were so excited to have visitors.”

She often wonders about Ranjitha, a bright and curious young villager, and reflects on how the library might change the young girl’s life.

“She was a little older than some of the kids we met,” Katelyn recalls. “She understood what the library meant and was looking forward to using the resources there,” Katelyn says as a warm smile emerges. “I hope she’s doing well.” ■



Planting the Seeds for a Better World

Dannette Lowry and Larry Chew, B.S. ’76, first heard about humanitarian engineering at a Cockrell School of Engineering function. The next morning, they requested a meeting with Janet Ellzey to learn more about Projects with Underserved Communities, which they now support with a generous gift.

“Projects with Underserved Communities is an awesome way to engage students in their first practical engineering projects,” says Larry. “These projects provide genuine help to communities in need and teach students they can make a difference while experiencing the deep satisfaction of improving people’s lives.”

Larry and Dannette developed a taste for travel as students and professionals. Dannette’s study abroad programs took her to Mexico and South America. Years later, Larry’s engineering career took the couple to both China and Russia for four years in each country. The experience gave them a strong understanding of the skills students can acquire through international travel.

“Students in PUC not only use their skills to solve real-world problems, but they must also innovate and adapt to succeed with limited resources and in unfamiliar cultures,” says Dannette. “We hope these students will keep their heart for humanitarian engineering as they rise in leadership, influencing their companies to change the world.”



Your gift to Projects with Underserved Communities makes a difference in Texas and abroad. Scan this QR code to change the world.

A Bridge to the Past



Nothing brings history to life like a visit to the sites where it happened.

Each year, the Frank Denius Normandy Scholar Program in the College of Liberal Arts takes students to locations significant to World War II, connecting them with the past while helping them build a foundation for their future.

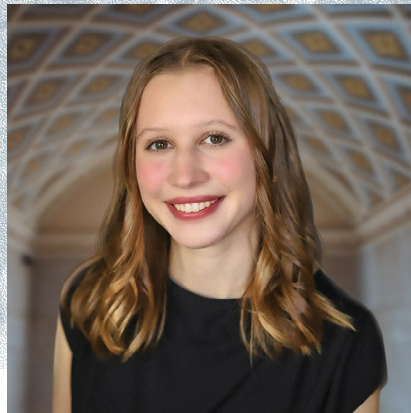
The NSP was founded in the fall of 1989 as a joint effort between The University of Texas at Austin and The Battle of Normandy Foundation. In 1996, Frank Denius — loyal Longhorn, esteemed alumnus, philanthropist, businessman and decorated World War II veteran — made the first of more than two decades of annual gifts to ensure the program’s continuation. The NSP had special significance to him: In June 1944, he was among the brave Allied Forces who liberated Europe from the Nazis. Since 1997, the program has been funded through donations by friends of the Frank Denius Normandy Scholar Program, the College of Liberal Arts and a program fee.

Prior to his death at age 93 in 2018, Frank would meet with students upon their return to hear how the experience has made a difference to their education and their lives. Testimonials from recent participants show that Frank’s legacy continues to make a difference.



ABOVE: A young Frank Denius in his military uniform

BEHIND: American troops prepare for the invasion of Normandy.



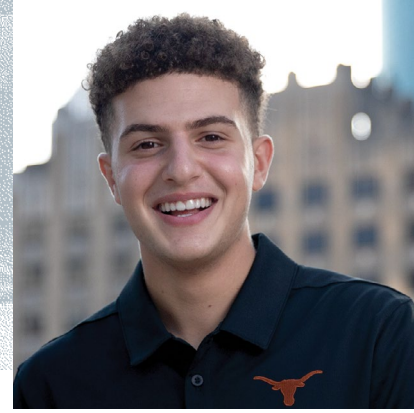
Alayna Parlevliet

Plan II Honors and International Relations & Global Studies, Class of 2026

My grandfather, his siblings and his mother were internees in the Japanese internment camp system in the Dutch East Indies during World War II. I never understood the weight and depth of this story until the Normandy Scholar Program. The NSP pushed me to research my family history, which previously existed only in vague snippets of conversation from my childhood.

I worked with family artifacts and primary source materials to bring awareness to this hidden history for my family and the program. The NSP made me more aware of people's individual histories, cultural memory and the power of words to amass support. The lessons I learned from the NSP will apply to every aspect of my life, especially with my career aspirations in government.

The professors presented World War II as a highly personal history, alive with persisting questions about war ethics and individual choices. Lessons about the concentration camp system were paired with memoirs and diaries from inmates detailing assigned jobs, systematic cruelties and specific survival methods. It's a common mistake to make conclusions about history's lessons and generalize groups without considering the people enduring the conflict. I am forever grateful for this experience, which taught me about individual people and the collective capabilities of humanity.



Ahmad Sammy Hamid

Finance Class of 2025

The Normandy Scholar Program offers uniquely thought-provoking classes, strong relationships with classmates and professors, and an unforgettable trip. It also provides you with immense knowledge, which for me came in handy in an unexpected way. During an interview for a full-time job with an investment banking firm, the company's vice president and I discovered our shared interest in history. We discussed topics I had learned about in NSP. The next day, I received an offer and a compliment from the hiring manager, who told me the VP had greatly enjoyed our conversation. NSP is worthwhile for the educational aspect, but also provides professional development. You become a better speaker and writer, and most importantly, someone who is able to carry on conversations about a topic that many people, especially from older generations, are passionate about.



Josefine Lin

History Class of 2026

Being able to participate in study abroad programs was one of my highest priorities when considering options for a university. When I found out about the Normandy Scholar Program, I decided to do everything I could to be a part of it. It was an intellectually challenging but incredibly personally rewarding experience. It was the best part of my college career, despite being the hardest. The coursework encouraged students to think deeply and carefully. Our professors nurtured our understanding of the world around us, and the community of the students in the program created a support system I will always appreciate. While burning the midnight oil working on projects or writing papers, we found ways to lift each other up. The payoff from all the work and learning is incredible: We got to know more about ourselves and created friendships we'll have forever.

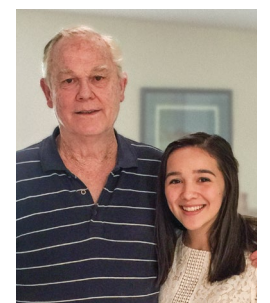


Parker Aguilera

History and Latin American Studies Class of 2024

From an early age, I was taught that education is more than a gateway to opportunities; it's a bridge to meaningful connections. My late grandfather, who grew up in the remote hills of Appalachia, pursued his unquenchable curiosity with such passion that he earned a Ph.D. in history and theology. Our conversations frequently revolved around my academic aspirations and my burgeoning interest in historical narratives. Before he passed away, I excitedly shared my discovery of the Normandy Scholar Program with him, to which he enthusiastically responded, "You must pursue this." The program became a cherished topic of discussion between us during his final months.

Parker with her grandfather, Sgt. Robert Martin Schmidt Jr., U.S. Marine Corps, recipient of two Purple Hearts



The Normandy Scholar Program fosters a unique sense of community and belonging, making it a space where you'll find not just academic growth but also personal development. As you navigate the program's challenges, you evolve into a more empathetic, critically minded student, peer, writer and historian. It influences how you engage with the world. The Normandy Scholar Program offers an unparalleled experience, one you won't find in any other study abroad or academic cohort.

ABOVE: American troops marching down the Champs-Élysées

BELOW: Corporal Frank W. Denius in France, August 1944, and with fellow soldiers in Belgium, December 1944. Photos courtesy of the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

The Lasting Scars of World War II

Each year, Normandy Scholars visit the Platform 17 Memorial at Berlin's Grunewald Station, from which nearly 10,000 German Jews were deported to labor and concentration camps. This stop made a lasting impression on Jordan Smith, who was in the Normandy Scholar Program in 2016. Nearly a decade later, the visit to Gleis 17 still evokes strong memories for her.

"There are places in the world where the history lingers, and the energy is changed forever by the events that happened there," says Jordan. "At Gleis 17, you could just feel the heaviness. I remember having to take a step back mentally to get through that day because it was so heavy with history, you could feel it pressing down on you."

The day helped Jordan bring her own family history into sharper focus. In 1945, her great-grandfather — a member of General George S. Patton's army — encountered many of Dachau's surviving prisoners. He never spoke of the traumatic sights with his descendants, but the NSP gave Jordan a deeper understanding of his wartime experience. "Seeing the physical scars of World War II in Europe was part of what made the Normandy Scholar Program one of the most impactful things I did as an undergraduate," she says.

Jordan captured her memories of Grunewald Station in this remarkable poem, written as part of her creative thesis. ■

Gleis 17

*On our fifth day in Berlin,
we take the train west.*

*We take the S7 line to the Grunewald S-Bahn station,
twenty-three of us,
together on the train with real Berliners
going about their everyday lives.*

*The station is different now than in 1944:
the old tracks are long abandoned,
a short tunnel walk away from trains that run
like clockwork, every half hour,
and delicate green trees now grow up
through the wooden beams and metal rails*

*that once carried more than fifty-
thousand Berliners in cattle cars
to places with names like
Łódź
Theresienstadt
Minsk
Kaunas
Riga
and eventually
Auschwitz-Birkenau.*

*The names are engraved
in the rusted metal grates
lining the sides of the tree-grown tracks —
the names of the places, of course —
no one knows the names of the people.*

*I stand slightly back and a bit to the left
of my body
because this is a place that
screams
across the decades
and into the soft skin
above the inside of my left elbow
where I dig them out with bloodied fingernails.*

*Numbers keep it clinical,
neat —
a series of dates
alongside the names
with their helpful numbers of Juden,*

*and the three-hundred fifty-three Juden
who left Berlin for Theresienstadt
on January 10, 1944
could be considered
luckier than the twenty-nine Juden
shipped to Auschwitz
six months later
on June 15 —
but were they?*

*Did you know they charged the victims?
Four pfennigs per kilometer for adults,
but only two for children under four.*

*Berlin was their city, too
more theirs than mine —
but on our fifth day in Berlin
the train that takes me east
stops at home.*



Jordan Smith
B.A. '17



Your gift to the Normandy Scholar Program can keep the past alive for future generations of Longhorns.



Scan this QR code to make your gift today.

A World to Discover

With a gift to the Plan II Honors Program, Lee and Philip Zinn are providing Longhorns opportunities for new ideas and perspectives.



Lee and Philip Zinn, B.A. '78, love to travel. "By going to other places," says Philip, "you can learn how people in other countries do things differently. Travel gives you an opportunity to broaden your perspective."

Since they married in 1997, Philip and Lee have visited Australia, Antarctica, Africa, Europe and various locations across North America. Through their travels, they've discovered a lot about each other and the world. One of the things they've learned is an easy way to strike up a conversation just about anywhere on the planet: Wear burnt orange.

"No matter where in the world we are, if I'm in a Longhorns T-shirt," says Lee, "someone will say 'Hook 'em!'"

With more than 580,000 living UT alumni across 176 countries, Longhorn Nation and the influence of its graduates spreads far beyond the Forty Acres. Philip and Lee want UT students to discover how travel can create a sense of global community as well as shape and expand their minds. They've made a future gift to UT to establish the Zinn Family Scholarship for Plan II Education Abroad. Their generosity will create a permanent endowment to provide scholarship support for students in the College of Liberal Arts participating in study abroad programs through the Plan II Honors Program.

◀ Lee and Philip Zinn, B.A. '78

A Missed Opportunity

Lee knows how travel can change someone's life. Born and raised in Israel, she came to the U.S. on a work visa as a 20-year-old. She was about to return to her homeland to start medical school when she met Philip at a mutual friend's dinner party. One of the first things she learned about the man who became her husband was that he was a graduate of the Plan II Honors program at UT.

"It was practically the first thing he said after introducing himself. 'Plan II' is practically his middle name," Lee jokes.

Philip, whose siblings Andrew and Dorothy are also UT alumni, oozes with pride in his liberal arts education. With plans to go to medical school after earning his bachelor's degree, he focused on Plan II courses that would expand his general knowledge, saving the medical training for later. He credits Plan II for helping him achieve professional success during his 40-plus years as a San Antonio-based cardiologist, which included the distinction of being named a "Texas Monthly Super Doctor" for nine consecutive years.

"By going to other places, you can learn how people in other countries do things differently. Travel gives you an opportunity to broaden your perspective."

— DR. PHILIP ZINN

"Plan II is a great program," says Philip. "Some of the classes had 10 people or fewer, and it gave me an opportunity to interact with some of UT's top professors. I learned some very meaningful skills — how to think and how to analyze — and Plan II gave me a good appreciation of a variety of ideas and perspectives. It helped me learn how to interact with others."

Philip does have one regret about his years as a Plan II student: He did not enroll in any study abroad programs.

"The opportunities were there," he says, "but doing a study abroad program wasn't as commonplace as it is now."

EDUCATION ABROAD IMPACT



4,600+ Longhorns study, intern and research abroad every year



UT has the **third-highest** education abroad participation in the U.S.



85% of UT alumni rank their experience abroad as the top contributor to their success

Continuing to Grow

The Zinns no longer miss opportunities available through UT. They attend alumni events and connect with friends Philip made during his undergraduate years.

"Every year, we meet up with a group of graduates who come from all over the country for the Texas-OU game in Dallas," he says.

Campus events have inspired the Zinns to give back to the University. "We come to many alumni events," says Lee. "They are all fascinating and they make you want to continue to grow and be part of the community. UT has been so good to us, so why not contribute?"

With their gift, the Zinns are keeping their Longhorn love alive for future generations. Their scholarship fund will give Plan II students the chance to discover something about themselves and others.

"Plan II and UT gave me a lot," says Philip. "We hope our gift will help someone discover a path that is really meaningful to them and perhaps help them discover something they hadn't originally planned to do." ■

Would you like to help a Longhorn learn more about the world? Scan this QR code to make your gift.



A Willing Ambassador

Proud alumnus Rohan Small has a sense of responsibility to UT and its students.

Rohan Small, B.A. and BBA '91, grew up in the Cayman Islands, about 450 miles south of Florida. As the eldest of four boys, he was sometimes left in charge of his younger siblings. On those occasions, his mother had a hard rule: If she returned home to discover something had gone wrong in the household, it would be Rohan's fault. "It was a very effective system," Rohan recalls with a laugh, "because I had to make sure my brothers behaved."

If that's how Rohan learned about responsibility and taking care of others, the lesson is of great benefit to Longhorns in the McCombs School of Business. With his wife, Rohan has created the Rohan and Brittany Small Endowed Excellence Fund for Student Success in Business within the McCombs Success Scholars program. Their goal? To help business students focus on their studies and take advantage of the multitude of learning opportunities UT has to offer.



Eye-Opening Opportunities

Rohan was born with a drive to succeed. Once he set his sights on earning a degree in accounting, he researched the best place for him to get an education. In 1986 — and still to this day — UT ranked #1 in undergraduate accounting programs in the U.S.

With a scholarship from a Cayman financial institution to help finance his dream, Rohan left his Caribbean home determined to make the most of his time on the Forty Acres.

"I came from a small island, and UT was the world to me," he says. "It was an eye-opener in terms of all the offerings there, and the idea was to take advantage of it all. There was no way I was going to come to the school for four years and limit myself."

While earning degrees in accounting and computer science, he immersed himself in the culture of Texas — football, food and music — and took on a role of ambassador



"I came from a small island, and UT was the world to me. There was no way I was going to come to the school for four years and limit myself."

— ROHAN SMALL

for his home nation to help his fellow Longhorns learn a little bit about the world. In his second year on the Forty Acres, he co-founded the Caribbean Students Association and later served as its second president.

"Even though we embraced the Texan culture, we kept our own culture — that was our grounding, and we didn't want to lose that," he says. "Texas opened our eyes, which made us better people, and we hopefully opened students' eyes about the Caribbean. It was a win-win situation."

Investing in People

As a partner at Ernst & Young (EY), Rohan divides his time between his homes in the Cayman Islands and Florida. Knowing how he got to where he is in life inspires him to give back to the University that made it all possible, and his wife Brittany is on board with the plan.

"Rohan is so invested in people," says Brittany, "and UT helped him take that to the next level and succeed in the financial world. We want to help students cultivate their personal skills so they too can achieve success."

◀ **"In some organizations, you feel like you are just a number," says Rohan Small, shown here with McCombs Dean Lillian Mills (center) and Brittany Small. "What we have at UT — a family feeling and a close connection — is special."**

After meeting with Dean Lillian Mills from the McCombs School of Business, Rohan and Brittany elected to support McCombs Success Scholars, a two-year academic support program. Participants represent a diverse body of McCombs students with a demonstrated record of academic achievement. The curriculum gives participants the opportunity to take many of their core courses with the same cohort of students, with additional programming focused on leadership development, career discovery and social networking.

"We wanted to give back to a program that wasn't well funded," says Rohan. "Dean Mills introduced us to about 20 students in McCombs Success Scholars who had sharp ability but might have lacked some of the financial means. Their passion was seriously evident."

With lasting fond memories of his time at UT, Rohan continues his connection to the Forty Acres with a deep understanding of the impact the University made on his life and his responsibility to carry forward the lessons he learned.

"Being at UT dovetailed nicely into my 33-year career at EY, where our purpose is to 'build a better working world.' As a proud Longhorn, I tell people wherever I go that 'what starts here changes the world' is absolutely true. UT is where I started, and now Brittany and I are changing the world." ■

Texas Leader SPOTLIGHT

Meet University of Texas at Austin alumni and friends who are changing the world through philanthropy and careful estate planning.



Gail Burris Cooksey, B.J. '76

Birmingham, AL

What are your favorite UT memories?

Walking through the campus in the spring and in the fall was so beautiful. I'm thinking about how many times I had to ride my bike across campus a million miles an hour to get to class on time. As a student, I lived and breathed "The Daily Texan" and reported on major events, including Richard Nixon's resignation. I still remember all the people I worked with there.

How did UT prepare you for success?

I worked as a journalist and in corporate PR for many years before I started my own PR firm. I wouldn't have accomplished what I did without the knowledge and experiences I gained at UT. Griff Singer, a journalism professor and Daily Texan advisor, was very influential. He was so supportive, and all of his classes were great. He taught me how to do a good interview, find and write a good story, and how to get to the truth and communicate it.

Why did you choose to give to UT?

So much of what I learned at UT helped me throughout my career. This is a way to give back. The gift planning advisors at UT have been super helpful. They let me know that if I designated the University as the beneficiary of my IRA to support the Moody College of Communication, UT would get 100% of the money without paying taxes. That was something I never knew!

What impact do you want your gift to make?

First I funded a scholarship for students, but I wanted to do more. Now I'm supporting an advertising and PR lab that offers real-world situations so students can build a portfolio of work and prepare for the job market. With a current gift, I can support students now, and with an estate gift, I can continue that support in the future. My goal is to help the next generation of students along their path toward changing the world.



Dr. Carolyn R. Mueller, Ph.D. '97 & Dr. Gary L. Mueller

Austin, TX

What are your favorite UT memories?

Carolyn: During her 20-year tenure at the School of Nursing, Dean Dolores Sands would tell the audience at commencement, "You may never need an architect or a lawyer or a communications professional, but I guarantee you that at some point, every one of you will need a nurse, and when you do, you better hope that nurse graduated from UT!" It was always fantastic to hear.

Gary: Thinking about the Longhorns winning the national championship in 2005 still gives me goosebumps!

How did UT prepare you for success?

Dean Sands was a tremendous leader and instilled a lot of confidence in me and the other students in my cohort. When a faculty position at UT became available just after I had graduated from the School of Nursing, I knew I was qualified, and I was ready to put my education to work on the Forty Acres. The experience and knowledge I gained while getting my Ph.D. positioned me perfectly for this next step. And to get the key to the building from which I had just graduated? That felt fabulous!

Why did you choose to give to UT?

Gary and I both value education tremendously. We seek to support programs that often are overlooked or forgotten. And where better to give back than to the school that helped you get ahead! We've done a lot to support our schools and have gone beyond for those schools that have gone beyond for us.

What impact do you want your gift to make?

Our gift will endow a professorship focused on clinical pediatric nursing education at the Ph.D. level. It is of critical importance for nursing students to be educated in how to care for children and their families. We hope our support for education and research in this highly specialized and complex field will make a positive impact not only on future UT graduates, but also on the patients they will treat.



Bette Spain

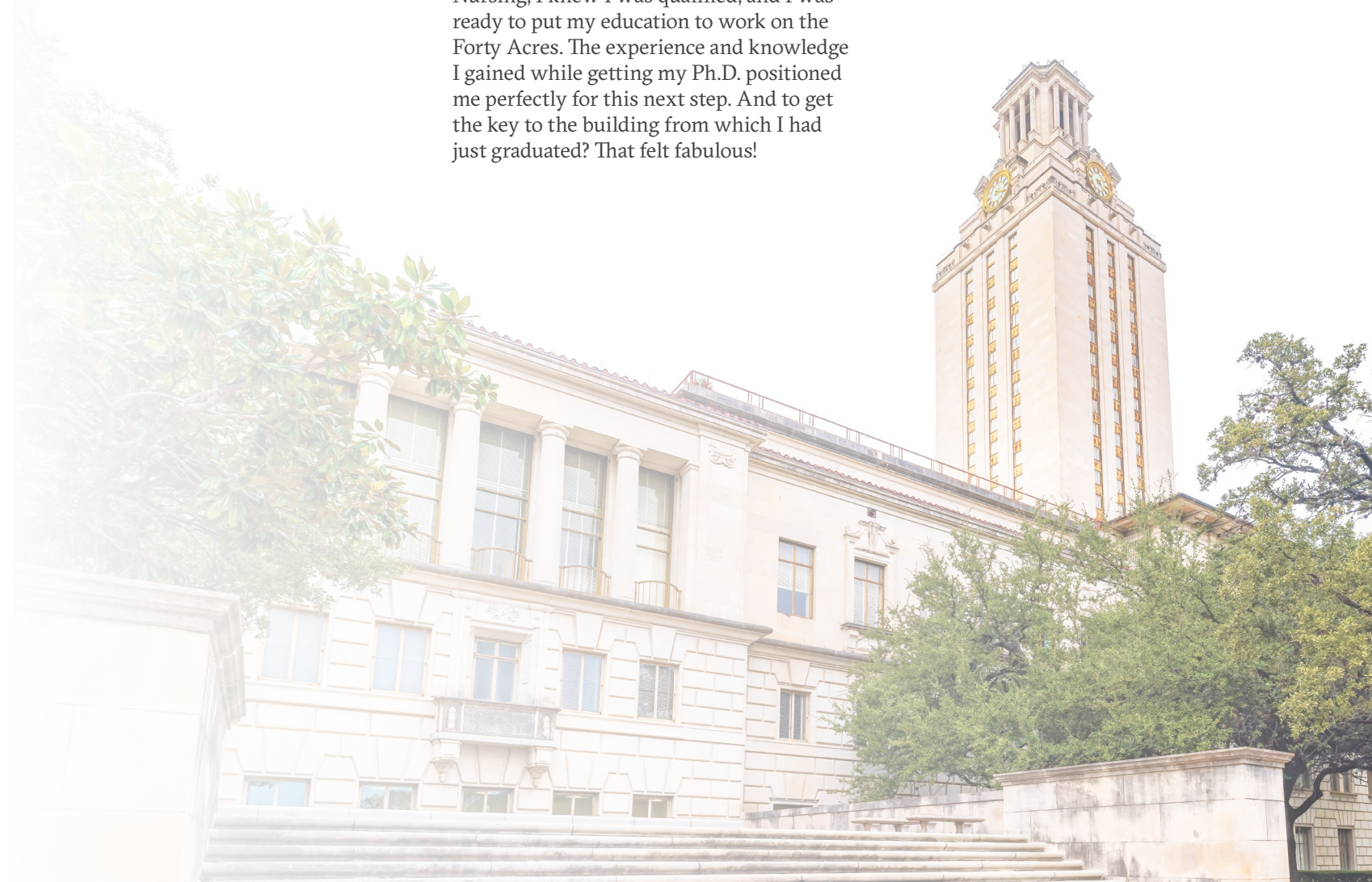
New Braunfels, TX

Why did you choose to give to UT?

I have lived with multiple sclerosis for more than 20 years. MS is a common disease of the nervous system with the same symptoms as many other conditions, so it took a while to get diagnosed. I spent lots of time searching for a physician, even traveling to Dallas to see an MS specialist. I finally found Dr. Léorah Freeman, a neurologist in the Multiple Sclerosis and Neuroimmunology Center at Dell Medical School. She is an excellent physician, created an innovative exercise program to improve long-term outcomes of people with MS, is committed to advancing knowledge of MS and has received research funding from national and international organizations. She keeps up with the latest treatments and research and provides MS educational seminars that let me connect with other patients. We all learn from each other, and I finally feel truly supported. I am excited about supporting a world-class academic medical institution that is so close to home.

What impact do you want your gift to make?

When my husband and I were newly married 54 years ago, we took out a life insurance policy to give us peace of mind in case something should happen to one of us. We don't need the policy anymore, so we named Dell Medical School as the owner and beneficiary — a unique and easy way to support Dr. Freeman's work. I'm already feeling my gift's impact through the care I receive and the seminars available to me, which I know are helping others too. I've learned valuable tips on exercise and nutrition that help people with MS, and if I'm not feeling well enough to travel, I can access seminars online from home. I'm happy to make this investment in the health of present and future generations.



TEXAS LEADER is published for members of the Texas Leadership Society and other alumni and friends of The University of Texas at Austin. To submit story ideas, comments, questions and address changes, call us at 800-687-4602 or email giftplan@austin.utexas.edu.

Managing Editor
Adrienne Leyva

Contributors
Eden Bonniwell
Sharon Reynolds
Audrey Webb

Cover Photo
Ricky Clack

Art Director
Maddie Pelan

Designers
Tomoko Bason
Danielle Cox
Maria Huang
Maddie Pelan
Hannah Titus

TEXAS*LEADER

**1 University Station
Mail Stop A3000
Austin, TX 78712
giving.utexas.edu/giftplanning**

Address service requested

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Austin, TX
Permit No. 391

 **TEXAS Global**
The University of Texas at Austin

Take the World by the Horns: FIRST SEMESTER ABROAD

Students can now launch their journey to a world-class degree at The University of Texas at Austin with an academic adventure abroad during their first semester.

With a deep dive into one focused area of study, freshmen have the opportunity to go beyond the classroom and apply their knowledge in an experiential international setting.

In an increasingly global marketplace, Take the World by the Horns helps students learn to communicate across cultures, incorporate diverse perspectives into their work and lead with empathy.



For more information on this unique program, visit utx.global/start-abroad.



“Being able to study abroad my first semester allowed me to gain many of the life skills I needed coming into college.”

—Tess Bausano, advertising major

