Greetings and welcome to the fall of 2007. I am writing to let you know of some of the exciting events and activities that have occurred in your department. As always, it was a very busy summer and this fall is no different.

This letter features stories on one of our new professors, Dr. Paula Rhode, who specializes in obesity-related issues, and also our esteemed Dietetic Internship Program directed by Dr. Sharon Bode. You will learn about our UNDO research group headed by Dr. Rebecca Lee, which is dedicated to minimizing the incidence of obesity among minority populations. Our alumni spotlight features the very successful and proud alumnus Rómulo Crespo.

**Featured Program**

The University of Houston’s Dietetic Internship program is a Commission on Accreditation of Dietetic Education (CADE) accredited post-baccalaureate, supervised practice program which qualifies graduates to take the examination to become Registered Dieticians. Interns enter the full-time program (40 hours/week for 28 weeks) in January or July of each year. The program goals reflect the major points of our philosophy: quality instruction and broad-based site training which enables graduates to land meaningful professional employment in a variety of areas upon completion. The internship is administratively housed within the College of Education, Department of Health and Human Performance.

The program has a general emphasis and is made up of a 2-week intensive orientation, followed by rotations of 10 weeks in clinical nutrition, 8 weeks in food service and management, and 8 weeks in community nutrition. Each emphasis area is divided into two 4-week rotations for management and community, or 5-week rotations in clinical nutrition. Interns are encouraged to be active participants in planning their educational program based on individual interests. These rotations, along with the assignments, projects, and weekly conferences with the internship director, allow interns to develop advanced knowledge and skills in the areas of nutrition assessment and hospital dietetics; food service environments; individual and group nutrition education; and numerous other skills related to nutrition and dietetics. Graduates of the program must meet 54 identifiable core competencies required by CADE. To see the complete list go to http://grants.hhp.coe.uh.edu/internship/sites/corecompetencies.htm.

The philosophy of the Dietetic Internship program at the University of Houston is to facilitate the transition of an intern from a student to an entry-level dietitian. Being accepted into our program helps ensure that the students obtain the breadth and depth of experiences needed to attain their professional goals.

We believe that education should be firmly anchored in strong ethics, an appreciation for different world cultures, and lifelong service to the community.

For more information go to [http://grants.hhp.coe.uh.edu/internship/](http://grants.hhp.coe.uh.edu/internship/).
I was thrilled that my student had worked so hard, performed so well, and was recognized with such an accomplishment. A. I actually started out planning to attend law school. I graduated from my undergrad university and started working for a large, corporate law firm, with the intention of working part-time and going to school part-time. In the course of working for that firm, I came to the conclusion that a law career was not a good match for me. I instead decided to go back to school and earn my degree in clinical psychology, with a subspecialty in BMed, because I was, and still am, interested in being part of a more public service-oriented profession. A. I had not previously thought of it before, but yes, it probably does. As a former athlete, I likely have social and teaching skills that can be applied to both small groups and individuals, and can relate more easily to various populations. For example, even in cases when I have attempted to assist an individual in changing their behavior, volunteering that I previously played sports often “breaks the ice”, and relates a commonly shared experience. Interestingly, my college sports experience is the one item on my CV that is mentioned by others more consistently than any other, regardless of what context I am in.

Q. Mentoring seems to be an inherent part of who you are. What is your best experience [to date] as a mentor?

Q. What would you like to do in the future?

Rómulo (Rom) Crespo is one proud Cougar and dedicated alumnus. The 12th grade assistant principal at Morton Ranch High School in the Katy ISD is also the president of the alumni club “Katy Coogs.” Their objectives include local community service projects, actively recruiting UH students, and providing scholarship support to high school students, in the Katy and surrounding areas, that will attend UH.

Near fatal circumstances almost destroyed Rom’s plans to be a college graduate and serve his community as an educator. As a 17-year old freshman he was happy to be grown and starting college. He was also totally thrilled (as a walk-on) to have been invited to participate in spring off-season workouts with the Cougar Football team. Unfortunately, just 8 weeks into his first semester, he and a good friend were hit by an 18-wheeler as they were running across the street to catch a ride home. His friend Steven did not make it, and Rom was taken to the hospital comatose and broken. Suffering from severe brain trauma he remained in a coma for 2 weeks and stayed in the hospital for over 2 months. He was told that he may never walk right again (if at all) and that college was probably not an option. But just like the chance he took as a walk-on to play for the Cougar football team, all he needed was another change to prove himself. He did not ask for it; he took it, worked for it, and made it! Rom received his B.S. in kinesiology in 1996, and his master’s in education in 2003. Dr. Joel Bloom and Dr. Jan Wendt were his favorite HHP professors. He constantly uses the coaching principles he learned from Dr. Bloom because Coach Rom is everywhere. He’s coached for schools and in the community in a variety of sports including football, soccer, basketball, wrestling and softball. He also coaches for teams his children play on at the YMCA and Katy Youth Sports clubs.

After teaching for a while, one of his principals told him he’d be a great administrator, which has proven to be true. Rom has an open-door policy for his students. He has encouraged several students to stay in school even though their personal circumstances were overwhelming. One student said, “Morton Ranch is the best school…the principals are always in the halls and at all the extracurricular events. It really makes them seem like they care.”

Mr. Crespo initiated the Latin Festival at Morton Ranch that showcases Hispanic cultures and the participating students are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Everyone loves it.

Becoming an educator led Rom to his wife Deysi. She was working as the registrar for John H. Reagan High School where he was hired as a teacher and coach. Now she’s at UH-Clear Lake finishing her degree in social work.

He had this to say about UH, “Our university is top notch. Many Cougars are well known in their chosen fields for their intellect and talent. I know people who went to [supposedly] better schools and now have UH alumni as bosses. The thing I like most is that you get the same quality education as other universities, just locally; you get the education you need to get your career on track.”
The Understanding Neighborhood Determinants of Obesity (UNDO) Research Team conducts research anchored in an ecological framework that incorporates environmental and individual determinants of physical activity, dietary habits and obesity in populations of color. The work combines theory and techniques drawn from behavioral medicine, community psychology, geography, policy science, social ecology and social marketing. Dr. Rebecca Lee is the Principal Investigator on several grants funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

These projects examine physical activity and dietary habits and their relation to the obesogenic capacity of neighborhoods in Houston and Austin, Texas.

The Health Is Power (HIP) project is a five year project funded by the National Cancer Institute to investigate how neighborhood of residence can help support lifestyle improvements. HIP has enrolled 100 Hispanic or Latina women in Austin and 260 African American and 45 Hispanic or Latina women in Houston, to complete a one year, group based program to increase walking for fitness or eating more fruits and vegetables. Women are measured before and after the HIP program to document their health improvements. After the women have completed the program, the HIP staff will measure their neighborhoods to determine whether those women who live in more supportive neighborhoods are able to sustain their health improvements. So far, the HIP project has found that most of the participants are overweight at the beginning of the project, suggesting great need and interest from this vulnerable population. About 95% report that they are satisfied with the HIP project.

Plans are in the works to disseminate the HIP project on a broader scale via the internet.

The Healthful Options Using Streets and Transportation in Our Neighborhoods (HOUSTON) project is a three year project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Active Living Research Initiative to determine whether neighborhood factors are associated with health among public housing residents. Dr. Lee’s UNDO team has partnered with residents in 12 housing developments. Residents complete brief physical assessments and a survey. Meanwhile, HOUSTON staff has made detailed measurements of all street segments and physical activity resources in the neighborhoods surrounding the housing developments. The individual measures will be correlated with the neighborhood measures to determine the relationship between these neighborhood factors and resident physical activity, dietary habits and obesity. Findings may provide evidence to help to improve physical activity and healthful food options in economically deprived neighborhoods.

To find out more about UNDO visit http://hhp.uh.edu/undo.

New Funding

- Dr. Paula Rhode, Dr. Rebecca Lee, Dr. Norma Olvera and Dr. Brian McFarlin for Obesity Studies Doctoral Curriculum Development. Agency: UH Faculty Development Initiative Program.
- Dr. Max Kurz and Dr. Brian McFarlin for Virtual scientific presentations for HHP courses. Agency: UH Faculty Development Initiative Program.

Alumni Achievements

- Dr. Dale Pease will be awarded the TAHPERD Honor Award at the 2007 Annual convention in December.
- Dr. Dan O’Connor was hired as an assistant professor in our department. He received his doctorate in kinesiology, with a concentration in measurement, in December 2002.
- Dr. Georgia Aljawadi Cruz, M.Ed. in Health Education 2003, is now a first year medical resident at san Jacinto Family Medicine Center at san Jacinto Methodist Hospital in Baytown, TX.
Our faculty and students were featured several times in the English and Spanish-speaking media this year. Television stations, and local newspapers sought out our experts for interviews regarding health, science and research.

**Dr. Phyllis Gingiss** was featured on the Tobacco Control Network (TCN); in *The San Antonio Express News* and in *The Houston Chronicle*.

**Dr. Lisa Alastuey** appeared on KHOU Channel 11; **Dr. Demetrius Pearson** talked about Cowboys of Color and Black Rodeo on PBS/KERA-TV (Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX) and PBS/KUHT in Houston.

**Dr. Rebecca E. Lee** was interviewed by KHOU Channel 11 news, Fox 26’s HOLA Houston, Univision’s (TV Channel 45) *Nuestra Vida*, *The Houston Chronicle* and *The Daily Cougar*.

**Dr. Adam Thrasher**’s research was the focus of a report on Channel 11 News and articles in *The Texas Medical Center News*, and *The Daily Cougar*. **Dr. Norma Olvera**’s BOUNCE-Lite project was featured in Muse News, the newsletter of The Health Museum in Houston, and she has also been interviewed by TeleMundo and Univision. Fox News 26 interviewed adjunct faculty member **Caryn Honig**, an expert on eating disorders, for a segment on people with Type 1 diabetes who skipped their insulin intake in order to lose weight.

News about graduate student **Melissa Scott-Pandorf**’s project to redesign the space suit for NASA appeared on several TV stations including CBS affiliate stations in Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX; Memphis, TN; Peoria, IN and Eugene, OR. The report was also featured on many online science portals.

Graduate student **Alexander Hutchison** was interviewed by Channel 11 News about how athletes can build up their resistance without tearing down their immune systems.