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CENTER FOR MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Noticias



Dr. Tatcho Mindiola

FROM THE DIRECTOR

In this edition we feature three of our students from the Academic Achievers Program (AAP) at Austin High School. The students are members of the fourth AAP cohort that CMAS has sponsored, beginning in 1998. CMAS selects students for a cohort as they enter the tenth grade. We work with them for the remainder of their time at Austin, providing them with mentoring, tutoring, and skills workshops with the intent of preparing for their admission to college, preferably at the University of Houston. If the students adhere to our requirements and gain admission to the University of Houston, they are then eligible for membership in the Academic Achievers Program-UH and a four-year \$10,000 scholarship. Once a cohort graduates from Austin, CMAS selects another cohort and the process starts again. To date, 194 Austin students have participated in the program, and 192 have graduated with 138 gaining admission to the University of Houston and 37 attending other institutions of higher education.

Felipe Benitez is a student, who at a very young age had to overcome serious behavioral issues and familial adversity. His older brother was a victim of violence who almost died from a broken neck. A few weeks later Felipe's mother was diagnosed with cancer. She passed two years after being diagnosed leaving Felipe, his father, and three siblings to deal with the aftermath. At the time, Felipe was ten years old. Felipe is now aspiring to enter the University of Houston and earn a degree in computer technology.

Maria Guadalupe Lugo is one of five children of a single-parent household. Her mother has struggled to provide for her children, and she always stressed education as the way to have a better opportunity in life. Maria says that she did not get serious about attending college until she joined the Academic Achievers Program. She says that she is proud of her brother and sister for going to college part-time, but that watching them grapple to raise a family and simultaneously go to school has influenced her to delay marriage and starting a family until she has earned her college degree.

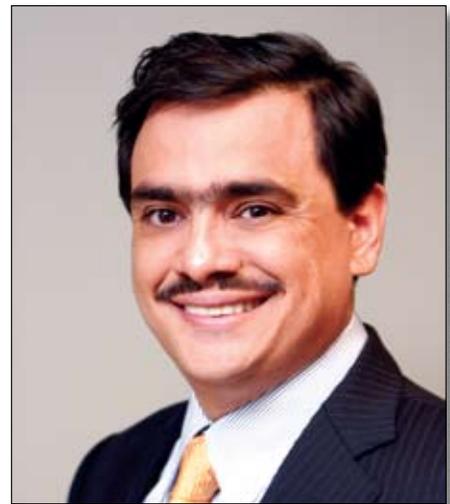
Continued on page 11

Jacob M. Monty: From Passionate Student to UH Regent

In 2008 Governor Rick Perry appointed Jacob M. Monty to the University of Houston's Board of Regents. Monty brings an impressive array of legal skills, as the founding partner of Monty Partners LLP, a firm specializing in employment, labor law and immigration issues. In addition, Monty brings his own history as a student burning with the will to succeed and the desire to acquire knowledge.

Monty originally hailed from El Paso, where he was one of seven children. After high school graduation, he worked in the construction industry for three years. The difficulty of the work coupled with the inspiration of a close friend who had gone to college convinced Monty to begin an undergraduate degree in January 1990. Monty chose to enroll in a heavy course load each semester, including summer school. He finished his undergraduate degree in August 1991 – a mere nineteen months after beginning college. With barely a few days respite, Monty began at UH Law School that same month. When asked about his family's reaction to his graduation with his bachelor's degree from UT-Arlington, he recalls how "happy and proud" his family felt since he was one of the first in his family to go to college.

Monty graduated with his J.D. from UH in 1993; he was admitted to the bar in 1994. Four



Jacob M. Monty

short years later he founded the law firm which he still manages and which is the largest Hispanic-owned employment and immigration law firm in the Southwest. He represents employers in investigations and audits conducted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), Department of

Continued on page 11

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Felipe Benitez: Overcoming Obstacles	3
Maria Guadalupe Lugo	4
Marc Anthony Martinez	5
Estevan Azcona: Visiting Scholar and Ethnomusicologist	6
Adriana Alcantara: Research Scientist in Biopsychology	7
Academic Achievers Program-UH Program Update	8
Academic Achievers Program–High School Update	9
Two New CMAS Staff	10
Kudos	12



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MISSION STATEMENT

The Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at the University of Houston was established in 1972, as an interdisciplinary academic program encompassing the liberal arts, education, and social sciences focusing on the Mexican American and broader Latino experience in the U.S. Its mission is to advance knowledge, promote critical thinking, and foster the value of service to the community. This involves designing a broad spectrum of public and scholarly programs. Located within the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, CMAS has evolved into an academic unit with several major components: teaching, research and publications, recruitment and retention, leadership training, academic advising, and community service.

Felipe Benitez: Overcoming Obstacles

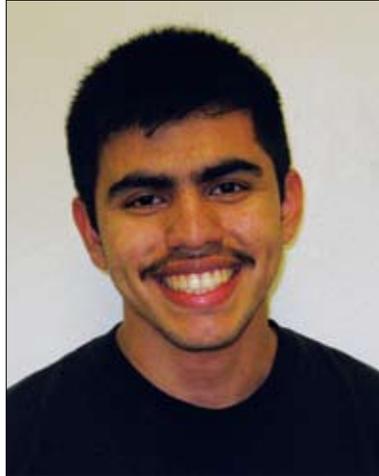
My name is Felipe Benitez. I was born on September 1, 1991 in Houston. When I was at Carillo Elementary School, I was a very negative person. I got angry at almost everyone for ridiculous reasons, such as losing a baseball or soccer game. I had low grades and I ended up in the principal's office about every week because I picked fights at school.

When I was about seven or eight years old, my oldest brother, who was in his late twenties, was kidnapped in a random act of violence. The abductors stole his car and beat him pretty badly. While they still had my brother in the stolen car, there was a terrible accident as they tried to escape from the police. Another car hit my brother's car and his head was on the side that the car hit. As a result, his neck was broken. I'm not sure how long my brother stayed in the hospital, but, fortunately, he lived.

A few weeks passed and everything was back to normal. One day though, my mother started to feel sick. We gave her some medicine but it didn't help. A few weeks passed and I noticed that she was starting to develop a few markings on her skin. Every time my dad got home, he had to massage her because she was in so much pain. Later on, it became worse. A few months later, Salvadorian doctors found out that she had liver cancer. They told the news to my parents, but by that time it was too late. She went to a different hospital but nothing could be done. The cancer had already destroyed her liver and everything else in her body. Nothing else could be done but to wait until she died. She was sick for two years and she died on January 19, 2001. I remember my dad telling me the news, but at first I didn't believe him. I was ten years old when she died.

This event affected the entire family: my father, two older brothers, and my sister. All of us just emotionally separated from each other into different routes. We each had to learn on our own how to move forward after her death.

After I finished elementary school and was about to start my next three years in middle school, I decided to change. I felt it was time to start thinking about my future. In order to begin



Felipe Benitez

aiming for a career, I decided to work on my grades by doing very well in my classes. Most middle-schoolers just think about the "now." Many people want everything given to them so that they have an easy life. But I think I have to earn my own way in life and I am determined to be in the next generation's workforce. I also decided to join a martial arts program that is still at my middle school. I joined it to develop respect and discipline within myself and for other people.

When I started high school, everything felt better than during middle school. I started out with pretty strong grades in my freshman year.

When I began my sophomore year, I decided to join Skills USA, an organization that encourages high school and college students to pursue a career as a professional at their current ability to perform the job, and to increase leadership skills to become successful leaders for the future. That same year, I also joined the CMAS Academic Achievers Program from the University of Houston-Central. This program has helped me improve academically in all my subjects. The tutoring, the after-school study sessions, and the emphasis on leadership based on personal experience has strengthened me emotionally to be able to improve my life.

All the events that I have gone through and the help from AAP have helped me focus on my goals. For my career, I wish to become an IT Technician. I am currently studying for several industry certificates such as A+, Network+, MCAS, etc. Later this spring I will participate in six competitions in the Skills USA organization. These six competitions are ones that I have chosen because they will help me acquire and hone skills for my IT Technician career.

All the events that I have gone through have shown me how difficult life is, but these times are part of my life experience and I know I can continue the plan that I began in sixth grade to prepare myself for the future ahead. I could not be doing as well as I am now without AAP. I'm looking forward to going to college here in Houston so that I can continue to be near my family. ❌



Maria Guadalupe Lugo

My name is Maria Guadalupe Lugo. I have an older brother, an older sister, and two younger brothers. I am the third child in my family to graduate from high school and attend college. My siblings and I were raised by a single parent, our mother Maria Guadalupe Garcia, who has struggled to provide everything that we could possibly need.

My older brother, older sister and I never thought we would graduate from high school because neither of our parents did. They were not able to finish school because of their economic situation when they lived in Mexico with their parents. My mother always insisted that I graduate from high school, earn a college degree, and pursue a career so I wouldn't have to depend upon anyone to make it in life.

My older brother and sister are currently attending college part-time because after high school they put their college dreams on hold to have children and raise a family. Although I am proud of them because they are going to college, their decisions influenced me because I realized that I did not want to have children before I had a college degree. I see how they have to struggle to make ends meet and how much harder their lives are because they work full-time and go to college part-time, coming home late and unable to spend much time with their families.

My life at Austin High School has been adventurous ever since freshmen year. I was a member of the JROTC drill team my first year in high school and discovered talents I didn't know I had. However, during my sophomore year I didn't continue with the drill team because I was being given a lot of homework and wanted to focus on school. I became dedicated to my school work and would stay up late most nights to finish it. Now I'm a junior and in the beginning of the year I started playing volleyball because I really liked playing it and my family told me I was really good at it. After volleyball season was over, I joined the



Maria Guadalupe Lugo

Emeralds, a dance group, and the Future Business Leaders of America and started working with the school newspaper. The demands of school, however, forced me to drop my participation in the Emeralds. One of my passions is dancing and I would like to join a dancing club, but that also has been put on hold because of the demands of making good grades.

When I was younger I didn't care about going to college, I just wanted to graduate from high school and get a job, but in the tenth grade I heard about the Academic Achievers Program (AAP) that would help students with tutoring and provide them with a college scholarship at UH, if they dedicated themselves to school and made good grades. At first, I didn't pay much attention but my friends kept talking about all the great opportunities we would have if we joined. Now that I'm part of the program, I can tell that it has helped me boost my grades higher. I have also noticed that I am able to discuss subjects that previously I did not understand because I now have the knowledge to feel comfortable talking about those subjects.

The mentors that the program provides are great. They help us with our homework, class projects, and prepare us for the SAT. If your grades happen to drop, they are there to help you get them back up and they make sure you understand everything that you need to know to be a successful student.

At the beginning of every school year I set goals for myself, but my main goal is to finish high school with an A average and be accepted to college. I am undecided on what I want to major in because of all the great careers that one can choose. My goal of finishing high school with an A average is very important to me because I know it will set me on a path to accomplish something great.

One day I know I will be able to make my mother proud when I graduate from college. I also know that I will not stop trying until I walk across the stage with my college diploma in hand. ❌



Marc Anthony Martinez

I was born on January 16, 1991, the only child of Johnny J. Martinez and Mercedes Martinez. Both of my parents were born in Houston, Texas and so were their parents. However, my dad's grand-parents were from Spain and my mom's grand-parents were from Guadalajara, Jalisco in Mexico.

When I was growing up, I did not care about school. I had no motivation to excel academically because very few of my family members had graduated from high school. Of those who entered college, most of them were forced to drop out because they had to get a job to support their family. I hated school and never did homework. I was content as long as I scored a seventy and passed. I was unaware of the benefits of good grades. I was also a very quiet and shy person because I feared appearing less competent than my peers.

In fifth grade I received some extremely negative feedback from some of my family members. The impact of this was so great that I realized I needed a fresh start. So I asked my father if he could switch me to a new school. He decided to change me to a public school. I worked hard to earn good grades, so that I could prove my family wrong about me. I continued to earn good grades all the way until high school, but I had no idea of what these good grades could do for me. Looking back, I can say that turning my life around never would have happened without my father's support.

I heard about the Academic Achiever's Program (AAP) through a friend my freshman year in high school. I decided to fill out the application and I submitted it, and during my sophomore year I was accepted. I had heard terms such as Pre-AP courses, AP courses, dual credit courses, and GPA, but I never understood their importance or significance to my life. The AAP educated me on how Pre-AP and AP courses can boost a GPA, and also how dual credit classes can help me earn college credit hours. I was very naive about scholarship opportunities prior to joining the program. I had never applied for a scholarship because I did not think I would qualify.

Through the program I have met other goal-oriented students like myself, which definitely helps me stay on course with my academic goals. The AAP mentors have gone through many of the situations that we currently face. As former high school



Marc Anthony Martinez

students, they share their mistakes with us, so that we can learn from them, and since they have already walked in our shoes I feel like I have someone I can relate to. I would also credit the rise in my GPA since I have joined the program to the dedication of the mentors. They are always willing to put in the extra time to help us with our schoolwork. They also provide a ride to your home if needed. After getting to know the mentors I began to see them as friends because they are willing to do so much for me. The program has also taught me not to be selfish and give back to my community by offering myself as a volunteer.

One aspect of the program, which I'm particularly thankful for, would have to be the Summer Sessions at UH. The guest speakers provided useful insight to many aspects of the "real world." However, the most beneficial part of the Summer Sessions was the tours we had around the University of Houston's colleges. Visiting the different colleges helped me narrow my major to Marketing with a minor in Media Production. Another valuable aspect of the Summer Sessions was the Leadership Retreat. Before the retreat I really didn't talk to anyone that much and I had a difficult time accepting people. The retreat helped me get to know the other members of the program at a more personal level. It helped me to be more open and outspoken, and now I don't feel timid around them. I also feel more confident and willing to join other organizations. Many people have told me that I seem more independent, and that my leadership skills have improved because I'm no longer too shy to voice my opinion. Thanks to the AAP, school is now my main priority and I have created great friendships.

Some of my short-term goals are to graduate with enough scholarship money so that I won't have to be a financial burden to my family as I attend college. One of my long-term goals is to be the first in my family to graduate from college. Also, I want to have a stable job to support my future family. With the Academic Achievers Program these goals no longer seem impossible.

I feel very fortunate to be a part of the AAP at Austin High School. There aren't enough words to explain how grateful I am for this honor. The program has helped me in every aspect of my life – academic, personal, and social. ❏



Estevan Azcona: Visiting Scholar and Ethnomusicologist

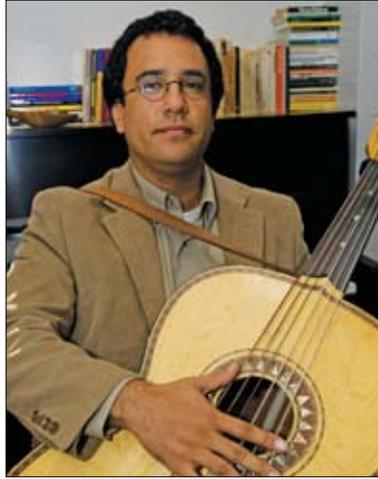
The current CMAS Visiting Scholar is Estevan César Azcona, who is the first scholar of Mexican American music brought to UH by the CMAS Visiting Scholars Program since Manuel Peña in 1992-93.

Azcona's field of ethnomusicology is the study of music and culture. It is both based in musicology, or the history of music, and in anthropology, or the study of culture. Thus, it considers music, music-making, and the environment of music-making in the context of a particular frame of reference, incorporating social and cultural influences.

Azcona's interest in his field began when he took a World Music class as an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He had been a musician himself before college and this experience helped him realize he could study music in college without exclusively pursuing a career in performance.

In 1985 he received his B.A. in Music with a concentration in ethnomusicology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Azcona went on to complete a master's of Music in ethnomusicology at UT-Austin in December 1999, and a Ph.D. there in August 2008 with a dissertation title of "Movements in Chicano Music: Performing Culture, Performing Politics, 1965-1979." Azcona's research examined the music of the Chicano Movement in the context of the competing political ideologies of cultural nationalism and internationalism.

Azcona's work has received many professional acknowledgements in the form of fellowships and grants. When asked which of these has particularly contributed to his career formation, Azcona mentioned two of them. The first was the Minority Faculty Fellowship, awarded to him in the summer of 2000 when he was a visiting lecturer in the department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University – Bloomington. The second was a pre-doctoral fellowship and was awarded for 2002-04 by DePauw University under the auspices of the Consortium for Stronger Minority Presence in Liberal Arts Colleges (CSMP). The mission of the CSMP is to bring scholars of color to colleges, thereby broadening course offerings and introducing scholars who may be future hires at those institutions. This fellowship gave Azcona the opportunity to design full-length courses. Its awarding also served as an important and timely verification to Azcona that his work would one day be valuable to an academic entity.



Estevan Azcona, Ph.D.

When Azcona talks about the great boon that the appointment as the CMAS visiting scholar is to him, he first mentions how easy the transition has been into the CMAS community of Latino scholars at UH. "It's an exciting time for the university. There's great diversity among the students, and increasingly among the faculty. The Moores School of Music is also very exciting. Actually, I'm the second ethnomusicologist on their staff." Azcona is appreciative for the excellent support from CMAS and from the School of Music. He says, "CMAS has provided an environment for me to get some important work done and has helped me feel at home in a new place."

Azcona's most exciting project to date has been the creation of a CD in 2005 for the Smithsonian Folkways series, known for its collection of American music. The CD is titled *Rolas de Aztlan: Songs of the Chicano Movement*. Daniel Sheehy, the director of the Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, had heard Azcona give a conference paper on the music of the Chicano movement and approached Azcona about compiling the CD. Azcona, with colleague Russell Rodriguez, co-produced the CD, with Azcona writing the liner notes. This collection is significant as it is one of the few documents in the Smithsonian Folkways collection dedicated to the Chicano experience, and it highlights the Movement.

Azcona's own study and work as a musician has contributed to his interest, understanding, and commitment to ethnomusicology. He grew up playing bass and while in graduate school began performing in professional mariachi groups, playing the *guitarrón*. He joined the UT ensemble, the Mariachi Paredes de Tejastitlan and in his second year began teaching the group, ultimately holding this appointment for over four years. His master's thesis dealt with mariachi performance in the Mexican restaurant as it relates to culture, identity, and space. More recently, he has learned to play the *jarana*, an instrument from Vera Cruz, Mexico that is much like a rhythm guitar. He feels that his playing "helps to create a common ground with the musicians I interview. For instance, when we talk they don't have to explain everything, be it Mexican folk instruments and music styles to talking about guitar chords. And, while Movement musicians might not have played the same style as I did, those styles motivated or influenced their music. Also, they saw that I had to study to learn these instruments."

Azcona reminds us, "Chicano music offers us a glimpse into the futures that America itself is going to encounter, those that delve into the crossing of borders." 



Adriana Alcantara: Research Scientist in Biopsychology

Hearing Adriana Alcantara speak about her research in biopsychology is to be swept forward by her excitement, energy, and focus – the same components, along with her groundbreaking research that have already brought her recognition as an exciting scientist sought by many academic institutions. Luckily, Alcantara chose UH and arrived here about one and a half years ago. She recounts part of the process which brought her to UH. “I had been exploring many options across the U.S. as a way to best continue my career. I knew that I was ready to launch to the next level since we had already accomplished major breakthroughs in research on addiction. As I learned more about UH, and more about the Psychology department, my excitement increased. During the interview process, I saw the richness of the values of my colleagues and I could see the match with my values. I could also see the excellent match in research and in teaching.”

Alcantara’s field is biopsychology, or the study of the brain and the mechanisms in the brain from which behaviors emerge. Biopsychology is one of the disciplines of psychology and it falls under the umbrella of neuroscience. Just as psychology’s unique perspective is to bring insight into behavior, biopsychology’s unique perspective is to study behavior by looking directly at the brain.

Alcantara’s research has been fueled by the same sense of wonder and curiosity that she experienced initially in her field when confronted by the neuron, the basic unit of the brain. She has also brought forward her fascination with the synapse, and how its mechanisms translate to learning and memory. In fact, her research has brought the unique perspective of the synapse to the field of addiction research. This perspective has brought breakthroughs, such as the important finding that new synapses emerge in the brain with drugs of abuse. Using electron microscopy to look at the synaptic organization of the addictive brain, it is possible to see the change in synapses and how they change. While Alcantara’s focus has been on alcohol abuse and binge drinking, synaptic research has also provided insight into the compulsive nature of cocaine addiction and may also explain the long-lasting effects of craving and relapse. Altogether, her research findings may lead to improved behavioral and pharmacotherapeutic treatments for addiction that target specific neural networks in the brain.

Alcantara considers the strong network of Latino faculty as



Adriana Alcantara, Ph.D.

evidenced by the Latino Faculty Council one of her favorite aspects of the UH structure. In particular, she credits Tatcho Mindiola for his unique role as a pioneering role model who selflessly mentors younger faculty. She also salutes all the Latino Faculty Council members for creating a network of positive support that stretches beyond departmental boundaries. Through this network she met Professor Avelardo Valdez, and has since been asked to join his team in the Office for Drug and Social Policy Research.

Another valuable aspect of UH for Alcantara is its unique placement in the fourth largest city in the U.S. She says, “The energy of Houston as a large city creates relationships that extend the borders of the university into the city itself. That excitement translates into the classroom and into research.”

Alcantara’s awards and honors stretch back to early 1980’s and begin with the Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) Honors Research Program. More recent honors are an Alcohol Training Grant Affiliate at UT-Austin, a NIH-funded Grant Writing Group, through the Office of the Vice President at UT-Austin, and being named an Imaging Center Affiliate also at UT-Austin. In addition, Alcantara has been awarded fellowships and training grants, such as the Waggoner Center Faculty Research Fellowship at UT-Austin, the Chancellor’s Fellowship at the University of California at San Diego, and the Department of Neurobiology Training Grant NRSA.

Alcantara has also been awarded research grants from the prestigious National Institute of Health/National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, as well as from the National Institute of Health/National Institute of Drug Abuse, as well as from other important funding organizations.

In reflecting upon her commitment to her field, one of Alcantara’s touchstones is the fact that “the science that we’re doing is to help people.” She continues. “In fact, as a community we are very susceptible to clinical disorders. However, people can turn to the scientists for hope. If science can help people, for instance, help adolescents not to binge drink alcohol when they are young, or help identify the genetic and environmental factors that put us at risk for alcoholism or drug addiction and develop early intervention programs, then there is more hope for all of us. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else. I love teaching and I love science. I feel very privileged to be in this position where I can help people through research.” 



AAP-UH Program Update: Spring 2009

The program began its spring semester by admitting ten new students: Jaime Alvizar, Priscilla Benitez, Jonathan Contreras, Fatima de Leon, Anthony Garza, Cynthia Medina, Abraham Reyes, Karen Saldana, Ricardo Saldana and Nanette Silva. Farewells were said to the December 2008 graduates: Diego Almazan, Dennis Perez, and Vanessa Perez.

The fall job site visit took place at the office of the Houston Rockets and was hosted by Mr. Gersson Rosas, an AAP alumnus and the current Director of Player Personnel for the Houston Rockets. Rosas spoke to the students about his own experiences while in college, and about using an internship as a crucial steppingstone while building a career. The students also received information about internships for the Houston Rockets.

AAP-UH sponsored two of its students to attend the Society of Mexican American Engineers and Scientists (MAES) Symposium and National Hispanic Career Fair in Las Vegas, Nevada, October 23-25. These two students were Harold Gallego and Cruz Carrasco.

On November 20, 2008 ninety students from McReynolds Middle School visited UH. Many AAP students volunteered in order to make the day more meaningful for the visitors by giving personal testimonies about the importance of education and of attending college. AAP students also hosted walking tours of the campus.

Please see the Kudos section for the list of the twelve AAP-UH students who made the Honor Roll for the fall 2008 semester. ❏



AAP group that attended the Houston Rockets job site visit.



Group of AAP students during the MAES Conference in Las Vegas.



McReynolds Mentorship Program visiting the UH campus.



AAP-High School Program Update: Spring 2009

The AAP-High School students participated in SAT preparation workshops in both Math, and Reading and Writing at Austin High School, in addition to their other required tutoring sessions during October 2008. The guest speaker for the fall was Dr. Jerome Carter whose specialty is Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. The students volunteered to help deliver Thanksgiving meals to the elderly on Thanksgiving Day.

The spring semester began with a tutoring session at Austin High School on January 12, 2009. The spring two-month long SAT preparation workshops also began in January. These classes

are held once a week and are crucial in preparing the students to score well on these standardized tests. All AAP-HS students are required to take the SAT test on March 14, 2009.

There will be one job site visit in the spring semester and one guest speaker who works in a profession that the students might wish to enter. The students will end the semester with a Leadership Retreat on May 29, 2009.

Please see the Kudos section for a list of the six AAP-HS students who made the Honor Roll in the fall 2008 semester. ❏



*AAP students discuss
scavenger hunt.*

*Priscilla Benitez (mentor) and
Nery Gamez during a tutoring
session at Austin High School.*



AAP students in SAT workshop.

*AAP students at the
Galleria's Polar Ice rink.*



Two New CMAS Staff: Yolanda Arreguin and Ruben Morales



Yolanda Arreguin

Yolanda Arreguin is a Program Coordinator working with Rebeca Treviño in the Academic Achievers Program-UH. Arreguin assists in student advising and monitoring student academic performance. She also helps in recruitment, fundraising, and event coordination.

Her background is in the marketing field and she graduated from Texas A&M with a B.S. in Development, with a concentration

in Marketing and International Commerce. Before her attendance at Texas A&M, she assisted her family in Mexico run the family corporation. She controlled a portion of the business and successfully managed it until her decision to attend college in the U.S. After her graduation, she worked as an assistant brand manager for AIEn Americas where she assisted in the management, promotion and direction of marketing and service activities. In this capacity, she participated in the production of television commercials, promotional jingles, print and radio ads for a national launch and the continuous advertising of product lines. Her next job was with Billetel Debit MasterCard®, where she was a marketing manager.

She says, “Working for CMAS has given me the opportunity to interact with students and encourage them to continue their higher education. When I grow old, I want to be able to look back and know that I did something that actually made a positive difference in someone’s life. The last year of my life has been the most rewarding. I have reconnected spiritually and also been encouraged in my love of knowledge. Rebeca Treviño has allowed me to work in a program that changes students’ lives.” ❌

Ruben Morales is a Special Programs Counselor for the Academic Achievers Program at Austin High School. He is responsible for coordinating all aspects of the program: recruitment, mentoring, applications, student meetings, workshops, guest speakers, and leadership retreats. Ruben took over these duties after his graduation from UH with a B.A. in Mathematics and a minor in Dance.



Ruben Morales

Ruben began his association with the program over six years ago as a high school student at Austin High School. From his graduation there, he was accepted at UH in AAP. While completing his college degree, he was hired for the important job of a mentor for AAP students still in high school. Ruben credits Maria Cobio, the previous Special Programs Counselor in charge of AAP-High Schools, for helping him continue to build his career profile. For instance, Maria helped him attain organizational skills, not only for his career, but in his personal life. He says, “I was not previously aware of the amount of work that it takes to coordinate the student meetings, the workshops, the guest speakers, and the Leadership Retreat, but I am learning bit by bit.”

Ruben says, “When I was in high school [and a member of the program], I used to think what I might do if I were running the program. Later, when I was a mentor, I loved helping the younger students with academic and personal problems. Knowing that I was making a difference made me very happy. Now, this is my dream job. I love the students and I want to help them as much as possible. It is a blessing every day to come to work knowing that my job is to help the forty AAP students at Austin achieve academic excellence and teach them about college. I never thought I would be where I am, but I am grateful.” ❌



UH Board Member *continued from page 1*

Labor (DOL), Department of Homeland Security-Citizenship and Immigration Service (DHS-CIS), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Monty's expertise is handling labor issues with Hispanic workforces.

Monty's strong sense of community coupled with his legal expertise has resulted in numerous affiliations. A representative list of these are: Board Member for the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic Alliance for Progress (HAP), Hispanics for Opportunity, Progress and Education (HOPE), Greater Houston Restaurant Association, 1998-2002. He is on the Board of Advisors for the Hispanic Alliance for Progress Institute, and is a Board Certified Specialist in Labor and Employment Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. Additionally, he is Outside Counsel for the Mexican Consulate in Houston on labor issues and General Counsel for the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans.

Monty has been invited to address the AAP-UH participants during the Annual Leadership Retreat. In reflecting upon the message he hopes to communicate to the students, Monty says, "I simply wish to share my experiences. It's important that the students see someone who has been able to get a degree and attain a certain measure of recognition. I had role models. There was a young lawyer who greatly inspired me. I also looked up to people like Ben Reyes and Roland Garcia. When you see a Latino in a high position, it personalizes success for you. I've also been helped by people, such as Michael Olivas. He interested me in immigration law and higher education law. I hope to do the same for other students in these same areas."

When asked to reflect on UH's role in a city with the Latino

population already reaching major proportions, Monty points out that while Latinos have "impressive population numbers, we are lacking in certain other important numbers, e.g. voting participation, graduation rates, four-year completion rate for college." He continues, "We need to conquer some of these achievement milestones. We must address issues, such as the high school dropout rate."

As Monty looks ahead to his tenure as Regent, he mentions the importance of the attainment of a Tier I status for UH, due in part to the UH's placement in the largest city of Texas and its high minority enrollment. "We need UH to be a Tier I university. Latinos will be the beneficiaries because UH has more Latinos in our system than the two other Tier I schools." Thus, the Latino undergraduates, graduate students, research assistants, and faculty will benefit from the additional funding at a Tier I university.

Monty acknowledges the "outstanding results" achieved by the CMAS programs, particularly in the areas of student graduation rates and leadership. He says that long before he started becoming acquainted with CMAS, he had been impressed by a long list of impressive products of its programs, such as James R. Rodriguez, Giovanni Garibay, Carol Alvarado, and others associated with its support, such as Lupe Fraga and Roman Martinez.

Monty urges all of us to take to heart the lesson that can be learned from the impressive results at CMAS. He says, "The older I get, the more I side with the 'nurture' side of the argument in 'nature vs. nurture.' Once our own students get the nurturing – as in the CMAS programs – they meet and exceed goals. For CMAS' limited budget, they produce outstanding results. I'm looking forward to get to know CMAS and its programs better." 

From the Director *continued from page 1*

Marc Anthony Martinez is an only child in an extended family of very few high school graduates, and even fewer college graduates. He says that when he was growing up he cared very little about grades. Things began to turn around for him in the fifth grade when he received some negative feedback from his family. He changed schools and started working hard to earn good grades. He credits his father and the AAP for giving him direction. He now aspires to major in Marketing with a minor in Media Production.

In this issue we also feature Jacob M. Monty, the fourth Latino to serve on the University of Houston Board of Regents. His story is one of determination as evidenced by his finishing his undergraduate schooling in less than two years. He went on to earn a law degree from the University of Houston, and is now a successful attorney with his own law firm focusing on employment and immigration law. He was appointed to the University of Houston Board of Regents in 2008 by Governor Rick Perry.

Also in this issue are articles about two Latino faculty members. Adriana Alcantara is a psychologist who earned her Ph.D. in Biological Psychology from the University of Illinois. Her specialization is biopsychology, the study of how the

functions of the brain influence behavior. She is especially interested in the part of the brain that influences addictive behavior.

Estevan Azcona is the CMAS Visiting Scholar for the 2008-09 academic year. He earned his Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from the University of Texas at Austin in 2008. He specializes in Mexican and Latin American music and culture, with a particular interest in the music of social movements. He is also a musician and plays the bass, the *guitarrón*, and the *jarana*. He is one of only five Mexican American ethnomusicologists in the United States.

Also, featured in this issue are two new CMAS employees: Ruben Morales and Yolanda Arreguin. Ruben Morales is the Special Program Counselor who oversees the AAP at Austin High School. Yolanda Arreguin is a Program Coordinator for the AAP at the University of Houston. We welcome Ruben and Yolanda to the CMAS family. We are proud of their accomplishments. We also take great pride in honoring the other talented and hard-working Latino faculty and students, and our own inspiring Latino Regent, Jacob M. Monty, who are featured in this newsletter.

Tatcho Mindiola, Ph.D.
Director

KUDOS

Congratulations to the following Academic Achievers Program students who made the Honor Roll at the end of the fall 2008 semester at UH:

Diego Almazan, Maritza Argueta, Eva Briones, Pedro Cervantes, Yael Lara, Karen Perez, Vanessa Perez, Yury Solis, Guillermo Velasco, Maricela Villanueva, Celia Zamarripa, and Jennifer Zamarron.

Congratulations to the following Academic Achievers Program students who made the Honor Roll at the end of the fall 2008 semester at Austin High School:

Homero Benavides, Candelario Berrones, Nancy Contreras, Guadalupe Garcia, Maria Lugo, and Vivian Williams.

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