



Dennis Reynolds, Ph.D.

Dean and Barron Hilton Distinguished Chair

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Dear Hilton College Team:

Provost Chase has begun my second five-year review. As occurred last time, you will receive a survey from the Provost's Office. This year, however, the Provost has asked me to provide you with a summary of the College's accomplishments for the five-year period to accompany the survey. Since we review our achievements each year at our *State of the College* gathering, I have compiled our accomplishments discussed during our annual meetings on the following pages. Here we go:

2020-2021:

- Despite the lasting impact of the ongoing pandemic—one of the most disruptive events in recent history—we proactively pursued strategic opportunities that strengthened our upward trajectory as a leader in hospitality education and research.
- We put the finishing touches on our 50th Anniversary, which we celebrated in 2019, with a nice addition to our endowment of almost \$800,000.
- As co-chair of the University of Houston's Strategic Plan, I provided leadership that helped shape the University's future direction and priorities, which created a strong foundation for the University's path through 2027 and beyond.
- We faced the economic challenges of our San Antonio program and made the difficult decision to close it, saving us thousands of dollars in just building expenses. Throughout the difficult process, our top priority remained (as it does today) our students. I am particularly proud that we ensured every San Antonio student who wanted to complete their degree was able to graduate.
- We finalized plans for the renovation and expansion of our hotel, the creation of the *Center for Student Success*, and the new home for *Cougar Grounds*. These developments enhance our students' experience by providing next-level support services and contribute to our strong sense of community.

2021-2022:

- As we embarked on this academic year, we stayed our course, hoping the pandemic would soon end. We knew the year ahead would be financially



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challenging and operated the hotel creatively, striving to have adequate occupancy to cover expenses. Thanks to some innovative management and tremendous support from Hilton Worldwide, we made it!

- We used this time to start our renovations throughout the College (made easier with most University folks working remotely).
- Thanks to funding from the Conrad Hilton Foundation, we upgraded our classrooms with state-of-the-art technology, which made them a model of innovation for the University. These enhancements, costing over \$150,000, empowered faculty to implement advanced innovative pedagogies as we seamlessly transitioned back to face-to-face learning.
- Most notably, all faculty and staff worked collectively to prepare for the new normal.

2022-2023:

- The summer of 2022 highlighted the culture of excellence we have fostered for our faculty as they once again earned multiple awards at the Annual ICHRIE Conference. This marked an impressive three-year streak of research achievements.
- We continued investing in our College, finishing the classroom renovations and adding a new digital alumni wall.
- Fall 2022 provided the opportunity to officially open the incredibly innovative *Center for Student Success* and new state-of-the-art *Cougar Grounds*.
- This also afforded us time to expand our *Industry Archives*, funded by the Hilton Foundation, to house the late Barron Hilton's records and memorabilia.
- We launched our inaugural student-focused fall event, *Corks and Forks*, which was very well-received by our alumni. This would serve as the foundation for our future fall wine-and-food-centered events and has evolved from a marketing event into a profit-producing, student-learning experience.
- We broke new ground by introducing a robotic server in Eric's Restaurant—the first in Houston. This innovation not only inspired cutting-edge applications within the industry but also received international acclaim with 3.2 million social-media hits and notable increases in sales.
- After raising external funding, hiring a market-research firm, and working collectively over an eight-month period, we officially changed the College's name to the **University of Houston Conrad. N. Hilton**



College of Global Hospitality Leadership. The name was data driven and included input from more than 30 face-to-face interviews and 350 surveys targeting faculty, staff, alumni, students, industry partners, and hospitality deans and directors from around the world. We received overwhelming support, including a unanimous vote from the Hilton College faculty, approval from the Conrad Hilton Foundation, and internal approvals from the University of Houston committees as well as the Board of Regents. Our new name will serve us well for decades to come.

- Finally, we celebrated the epic ribbon cutting for our renovated and expanded hotel. President Khator's speech and the celebration that followed highlighted the College's huge accomplishment.

2023-2024:

- This year was the culmination of years of dedicated effort, commitment to innovation, and strategic decision-making.
- Thanks to the rebound of the hospitality industry and our considerable and pioneering efforts toward recruiting, we achieved substantial growth in enrollment, including an increase of 98.4% in applications from first-time-in-college (FTIC) students along with a 17.9% increase in enrolled FTIC students. We also saw a first-year retention rate of 86.2% and a six-year graduation rate of 70.6%, which exceeded the University's metric.
- We fully embraced the College's innovative strategic plan, which introduced a groundbreaking online BS degree in 2024 and set the stage for the launch of our cutting-edge online Doctorate in Global Hospitality Leadership in fall 2025.
- We launched the *Hospitality and Innovation Analytics Lab*, which is another key part of our provocative future.
- Our other earlier initiatives began producing tangible results including record-setting hotel revenue and unprecedented sales in *Cougar Grounds*.
- We—according to many alumni—had one of the most memorable *Gourmet Nights* in recent history.
- We finished the academic year with the completion of our IT and facilities improvements in the classrooms and the entire building, including new audio systems and electrical outlets accessible to all students in the classrooms. We created a new doctoral-student research



space, installed critical components to improve our elevator systems, and upgraded signage throughout the College.

2024-2025:

- We started this academic year with much to celebrate, including the realization of our strategic vision. First and foremost, we closed fiscal-year 2024 in the best financial condition we've seen since the College's inception. We covered the year's cost of the revenue bond used to repay the hotel renovation and expansion, and secured cash reserves to cover shortfalls we may face in future years.
- To celebrate this success, we embarked on a joint faculty and staff retreat at *Harvest for the Hungry*, which was a bonding experience and gave the College a chance to give back to the community.
- We also continued our momentum in enrollment. Our FTIC applications exceeded last year by 37.5% and FTIC enrollment increased by 72.7%. We also graduated another cohort of doctoral students. We launched the program in 2015 and once again witnessed a 100% placement rate for our newly minted Ph.D.'s.
- We identified a new strategic alignment of our leadership team and promoted Dr. Cristian Morosan as our new Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and Dr. Ki-Joon Back as our new Senior Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies and Dr. Mary Dawson as our new Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.
- This also marked the release of our latest *Annual Report*, which purportedly was our best.
- Eric's Restaurant and Bar remains a vibrant hub that showcases who we are and reflects our values and identity. The reimagining of this signature space is set to take place in the summer of 2025.
- Concurrently, we've begun the remake of Hall of Honor. Opening in April 2025, the new *Hall of Honor Interactive Museum* will be unlike anything the University has ever seen and will continue to underscore our unique place in hospitality education.
- For students, we redesigned the student public area with new furniture and a custom-made LED Donor Wall. It's pretty impressive.
- In terms of faculty, conference presentations and citation rates continued to increase this year. It is also important to note that research productivity over the last 10-year period has increased by 53%. Since 2015, the College has also seen an incredible increase in the number of



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faculty who have received University teaching and research awards, as well as Teaching Innovation Program Awards!

- Today, we are planning the latest improvements to our Massad Family Library, including a new large meeting space replete with computer stations and a new student-meeting room.
- Despite some challenges with the University's fundraising arm, we are finishing the last five years with some impressive endowments and gifts. Specifically, we've raised over \$12 million to increase our endowment, further securing our financial future. Most recently, I secured external funding to cover the considerable cost of designing Eric's Restaurant and have already garnered a considerable amount to cover the cost for the construction.
- This will unquestionably be another era for the history books.

In closing, I must underscore that these are *our* accomplishments—our approach to shared governance and unified leadership is what makes Hilton College special. Today, our hotel is setting new records in terms of sales and guest satisfaction. *Cougar Grounds* is widely seen as the hot spot for the University with correspondingly strong sales. Our business office is a well-run machine. Our IT department is the envy of the University. Communications and marketing are better than at any other time in our history. Our facilities crew, often working behind the scenes, is nothing short of amazing. Our alumni management is setting new heights. And, of course, our undergraduate student recruiting, advising, and career development continue to cement our College as the best in hospitality education. The same can be said of our graduate office. And the faculty, well, we are defining the future of hospitality research and education. Finally, we are lucky to have very strong support from the President and the Provost.

In a nutshell, we are truly blessed and have a very bright future ahead of us...