Background

The University of Houston-Downtown is a commuter campus located in the heart of Houston, serving 14,610 students

- UHD is nationally designated as a Hispanic and Minority-Serving Institution
  - 42% Hispanic
  - 26% African-American

- 88% of the incoming class of 2013 demonstrated financial need via the FAFSA or TAFSA
Student Success through Community Engagement

- **2,680** students enrolled in service learning courses
- **8,480** students engaged in community service
- **67,536** Community Service Hours performed by UHD students
- **5,504** hours of service by **403** faculty and staff!
- **82,000** individuals served through UHD’s community efforts!
- Courses with community engagement:
  - **2007-2008: 111**  
  - **2012-2013: 486**
Background- Strategic Plan 2020

- Improve first-year retention rates for first-time-in-college freshmen;

- Provide at least one high-impact experience for all students during each year of their four-year degree program;

- Increase first-time in college freshman six year graduation rate to 28% by 2020.
Presentation Objectives

- Develop a multi-disciplinary service learning project that can be implemented during a summer bridge program to build on developing student bonds.
- Be transparent in connecting service learning and civic engagement curriculum to the local community and students daily lives to help students in understanding why giving is part of good citizenship.
- Provide students with service-learning credits on their co-curricular transcript.
Summary of Relevant Literature

- Mitchell (1997) found that first-generation students spend more time working and less time studying than other students.
- Hodges and Payne (2006) found that motivation increases when students are socially integrated into college with a sense of belonging.
- Kuh (2008) while historically underserved students benefit the most from engaging in education purposeful activities, they are the least likely to participate in high-impact activities; this makes finding strategic ways to incorporate these experiences into the classroom critical for this population.
Establishing University Collaboration

Student Activities
- UHD Sustainable Community Garden

Center for Public Service & Family Strengths
- Service-Learning

Academic Majors & Faculty Partnerships
- Natural Sciences
- Business Marketing

Community Partners
- Buffalo Bayou Partnership
- Volunteer Houston
STAR Program

• Mission

*Improvement of UHD services to first-time-in-college students by providing strong support for academic readiness, transition, retention, and graduation*

• Five-year, Title V grant funded by the US Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education Institutional Service developing HSI Programs

• Three Major Components:
  • Welcome Institutes (Orientation)
  • College Acculturation & Personal Success (CAPS)
  • Summer Fast Track Institute (SFTI)
Summer Fast Track Institute

- Designed to decrease the number of first-time-in-college freshmen needing developmental Reading, Writing, and/or Math
- Three week, 12 day program
- Benefits include
  - Free TSI Assessment re-test
  - Weekly stipends to cover food and transportation
  - A College Success Skills Course
  - Building a sense of community among peers, faculty, and staff prior to the start of the semester
Service Learning Curriculum

- Mini-learning experiences with hands-on and experiential activities
- Faculty representation from multiple disciplines
  - Engineering Technology
  - Biology
  - Business Marketing
- High touch experiences
- Transparent to allow students to connect the experience to their everyday lives
On-Going Student Projects

**UHD Sustainable Garden**

Students learned what a sustainable garden was and how UHD’s garden will help the Houston community. Soil samples were gathered to give students a hands-on opportunity to learn about environmentally safe farming practices.

**Campus Partners**

- Center for Public Service and Family Strengths
- College of Sciences and Technology
- College of Business
- Student Activities
- Student Government Association
On-Going Student Projects

**Buffalo Bayou Service Project**
Students working together to beautify and clean "Houston's Heart" Buffalo Bayou collecting litter and trash during a down time when few courses are offered on a Friday morning.

**Campus Partners**
- Center for Public Service and Family Strengths
- Student Government Association
- Student Activities
On-Going Student Projects

A Visit from St. Nicholas Packing Party & Distribution

A yearly, two-part, event hosted by Volunteer Houston during which community members stuff 8,000 holiday backpacks for low-income students. Students participated in both the packing and bag delivery to a local elementary school where they also made seed clay bowls that can be planted in a garden.

Partners

- Volunteer Houston
- Center for Public Service and Family Strengths
- Freshman Seminar Instructors

Students from Summer Fast Track Institute and a section of a partnering Freshmen Seminar course at the St. Nick’s Packing Party

UHD students at the Volunteer Houston annual donors recognition reception. UHD was presented with an award for their donations of time and resources.
On-Going Student Projects

Graduation

Students served as door greeters welcoming students and their families, answering questions regarding seating, and passing out graduation programs as guests entered Minute Maid Park.

Partner

- University of Houston-Downtown’s President’s Office
Costs

- **Sustainable Gardening Project**
  - Materials: Vegetables, Baskets, Saran Wrap, Labels,
  - Cost per student: $6.50; however, many materials are reusable
- **Buffalo Bayou Clean-Up**
  - None: SGA Sponsored event
- **A Visit from St. Nicks Packing Party & Distribution**
  - Donation of 1,000 pencils: $235.00
  - Donation of Planting Soil: $10.00
- **Graduation**
  - None: Programs provided by the President’s Office
Assessment

- Qualitative Assessment through narrative reflection
  - Key element of service learning
  - Promotes critical thinking
  - Increases understanding of key concepts
- Letters to Self
  - Most important thing learned
  - Why important
  - How the experience affects personal, professional or educational goals
Student Reflections

“It opened my eyes to different aspects of the university I had not seen before...as a future engineering major it was exciting seeing what would be involved later on in my educational career...” Larry Rotimi, Sustainable Gardening Project

“The program has helped me figure out that I may want to become a civil engineer. By having professions in that field tell me information about what is needed in order to have a career in that field has helped me make a decision” Dajah Parish, Sustainable Gardening Project
Student Reflections

“..this helped me realize that putting something to work outside of class can be enjoyable. By attending this event I gained more experience on how it feels doing something for people that are really in need of things” Yesenia Rivera, Project St. Nicks

“I got to talk to other people from the university that I haven’t before and it’s nice to form those friendships and have something in common. This helped me try to be more interactive with other people and I think that will help me in what I want to do because I’m usually the quiet person in the group. This was a really nice experience for me and it made me want to volunteer more and help my community”. Frank Ortiz, Project St. Nicks
Implications for Practice

- Relationship Building
- Sense of Accomplishment & Empowerment
- Understanding the Importance of Involvement
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Writing Skills
- Social Responsibility
Implications for Practice

- Larry Rotimi
  - Summer Fast Track Institute participant
  - SGA Representative
  - Common Reader Selection Committee
  - 4.0 GPA

Larry pictured with Star Program Director, Katrina Borders, Director of the Center for Public Service and Family Strengths, Dr. Bezette-Flores, and UHD President, Bill Flores, at the Summer Fast Track Institute closing ceremony.
Next Steps

- Co-Curricular Transcript
  - Students will be awarded credits in OrgSync
  - Upon graduation students will have a university transcript AND a co-curricular service transcript with all service learning hours

- Convocation
  - Involve all incoming freshmen not just those participating in the Summer Fast Track Institute