

TRIBUTE

BRIGHT FUTURES BEGIN AT SUNRISE

An immersive summer experience is opening doors for nursing students to explore research, gain confidence and make an impact in their field





DEAN'S MESSAGE

New opportunities, continued commitment to excellence

I am excited to share that The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio will be integrating with The University of Texas at San Antonio on Sept. 1, 2025. Taylor Eighmy, PhD, the sixth president of UTSA and our current acting president, will be president of the unified institution. This merger will provide our School of Nursing with many new resources including an Honors College, which brings opportunities for seamless collaborations and growth.

I am also proud of the many initiatives of UT Health San Antonio's School of Nursing that are already bringing about great success for our students and faculty. For instance, this edition of *Tribute* highlights our Foster Care Center of Excellence, a student mentorship program, the school's ambulatory nursing practice and our Nursing Advisory Council.

Karen Schwab, PhD, APRN, CPNP-PC, PMHS, who oversees the Foster Care Center of Excellence, appeared in front of the state legislature this year to share information about the program. The school's ambulatory nursing practice is overseen by Ken Miller, PhD, MJ, RNB, CFNP, FAAN, FAANP, who ensures that the standard of care for advanced practice nurses is maintained at all clinic sites. You will also meet the new chair of our Nursing Advisory Council, Terri Edlund, and several Alumni Council members.

The School of Nursing's Office of Nursing Research is led by Lixin Song, PhD, RN, FAAN. She has many years of National Institutes of Health-funded research in the field of oncology. As the vice dean of research, she and other

faculty mentors advise faculty on grant submissions. The office also supports faculty with a mock review of grants prior to submission. Likewise, research faculty mentor PhD students on their dissertation work, preparing them for a position as a nurse scientist on faculty in schools of nursing and in facilities that have achieved Magnet designation by the American Nurses Credentialing Center.

Only with exposure and experience can students begin to understand the concepts and importance of nursing research. One opportunity nursing students have is through our SUNRISE program, which offers an intensive summer immersion experience engaging in faculty-mentored research. This initiative is funded through our Office of Student Success by a U.S. Department of Education grant, overseen by Vanessa Meling, EdD, MBA.

As you learn more about the work of the School of Nursing in the pages that follow, I hope you will consider donating to support our continued success. Contact Anna Chowdhury at ChowdhuryA@uthscsa.edu for information on how you can make an impact.

Sonya R. Hardin

Sonya Renae Hardin, PhD, MBA/MHA
APRN, FAAN
Dean, School of Nursing



 **TRIBUTE ONLINE**

See the online version of *Tribute* for additional stories about UT Health San Antonio School of Nursing programming and our faculty and alumni at magazines.uthscsa.edu/schools/tribute.

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ALUMNI COUNCIL MESSAGE



ON THE COVER
SUNRISE students shine bright in this year's cover image, captured during the School of Nursing's annual Faculty and Student Research Showcase. Surrounded by rays of sunlight, the photo celebrates the first cohort of undergraduate mentees to present their research alongside faculty mentors — a bold new chapter in nursing scholarship and discovery. **Read the full story on page 14.**



Excellence in nursing education and veteran care

The School of Nursing and Audie L. Murphy Memorial Veterans’ Hospital have received national recognition with the Exemplary Academic-Practice Partnership Award from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. The award highlights their long-standing collaboration to enhance nursing education, workforce development and veteran care.

Since its launch in 1997, the partnership has created an integrated educational model that prepares students for real-world nursing. A key program is the Dedicated Education Unit, where students train alongside VA nurses, gaining hands-on experience. Over 400 students have participated since 2012. Graduates can continue their training through VA-STEP, a competitive summer program providing 400 hours of paid clinical experience, followed by the VA Nurse Residency Program.

Recognized as a national model, this partnership has led to exceptional nurse retention rates and ensures over 200 clinical placements annually, strengthening the future nursing workforce.



Master of Science in Nursing Program launched

A new Master of Science in Nursing degree program has been launched by the school. Directed by Megan Lippe, PhD, MSN, RN, ANEF, FPCN, FAAN, the program is designed to provide nurses with comprehensive knowledge and practical skills in curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies through the Nursing Education track.



Nationally recognized for dementia support

The Caring for the Caregiver Program at UT Health San Antonio’s School of Nursing has earned national recognition in the 5th Annual Maude’s Awards for its outstanding support of dementia caregivers. The program was honored in the “Supporting Care Partners” category for its education, training and outreach efforts.

Led by Roxana Delgado, PhD, MS, the program addresses critical caregiving needs in South Texas, offering access to health digital literacy for caregivers, memory cafés and the Dementia Friendly San Antonio Advisory Council, and conducting a monthly educational series and virtual dementia training.

Caring for the Caregiver was one of three organizations awarded \$25,000 for its dedication to empowering caregivers through education, confidence-building and community support.

School of Nursing faculty and staff recognized for their service and excellence

DIRECTOR, DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE PROGRAM’S NURSE ANESTHETIST TRACK



Steven S. Kertes, DNP, MSN, RN, was appointed director of the new Doctor of Nursing Practice Program’s Nurse Anesthetist Track. Effective Feb. 3, 2025, the retired Army colonel brought his distinguished background in military medicine, education and research leadership, which includes experience as a consultant to the U.S. Surgeon General for anesthesia nursing and as director of the U.S. Army Graduate Program in Anesthesia Nursing.

REVIEWER, COMMISSION ON COLLEGIATE NURSING EDUCATION



Cynthia O’Neal, PhD, RN, has been selected as a reviewer for the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. Due to her background in nursing education, extensive

practice experience and familiarity with program development and accreditation standards, she will serve the profession by critically evaluating nursing programs.

NELMS-BERG DEPARTMENT EDITOR AWARD JOURNAL OF PEDIATRIC HEALTH CARE



Cathy Woodward, DNP, APRN, CPNP-AC, FNP-B, received the *Journal of Pediatric Health Care’s* Nelms-Berg Department Editor Award at the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners Annual Conference. The award is presented for excellence in department leadership, reviewer dedication, author mentorship and willingness to contribute to the journal’s mission.

mHEALTH SCHOLAR NIH-MHEALTH TRAINING INSTITUTE



Jisook Ko, PhD, RN, has been selected as a mHealth Scholar for the NIH-mHealth Training Institute. This opportunity will allow her to develop her expertise in mobile health (mHealth) technologies, methodologies and research practices.

2025 INDUCTEE SAN ANTONIO WOMEN’S HALL OF FAME



Danet Lapiz Bluhm, PhD, RN, MSCI, FAAN, ANEF, professor and director of International Programs was selected as a 2025 inductee into the San Antonio Women’s Hall of Fame. She was honored for her exceptional leadership in health care and higher education, as well as her longstanding service and advocacy efforts that have positively impacted communities across San Antonio and beyond.

UT Health San Antonio Presidential Excellence Awards

TEACHING EXCELLENCE — SUSTAINED



Adelita Cantu, PhD, RN, FAAN, received a 2025 Presidential Excellence Award for Teaching Excellence — Sustained. Awardees exhibit a depth of pedagogical excellence that has been sustained for 10 or more years and have been nationally recognized for innovative approaches that have been embedded in the educational practice in the discipline. Cantu was also unanimously elected to serve as president of the Texas Physicians for Social Responsibility.

STAFF TEAM EXCELLENCE — INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

The School of Nursing’s Student Success Center employees were recognized with a 2025 Presidential Excellence Award for Staff Team Excellence — Instructional Support for their noteworthy and distinctive contributions to the university by serving its missions of education, research, patient care and community engagement, and demonstrating agility, collaboration and innovation.

Julian O. Banuelos, academic success coach

Camille C. Garcia, management analyst
Evelyn Michelle Kosalka-Pena, MEd, program coordinator
Benjamin David Martinez, MEd, academic programs coordinator–lead
Barbara Pearl Masch, MEd, writing coach
Vanessa B. Meling, EdD, MBA, associate dean
Sara M. Mithani, PhD, assistant professor
Rose Mary Padilla, administrative assistant–senior
Angela M. Watts, PhD, director, student success
Sabrina C. Zertuche, MA, writing coach

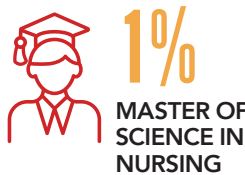
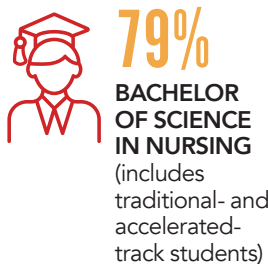
DEAN'S REPORT

EDUCATION: 2024–2025 ACADEMIC YEAR

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



ENROLLMENT



FIRST-TIME PASS RATE *

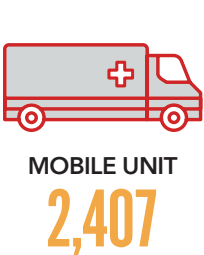
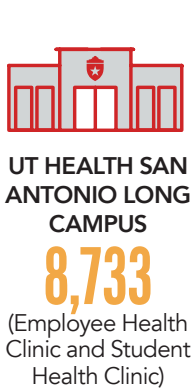


*NATIONAL COUNCIL LICENSURE EXAMINATION



PATIENT CARE: FISCAL YEAR 2024

TOTAL PATIENT APPOINTMENTS



TOTAL PATIENT APPOINTMENTS FY24



RESEARCH: FISCAL YEARS 2021–2024

RESEARCH FUNDING BY FISCAL YEAR

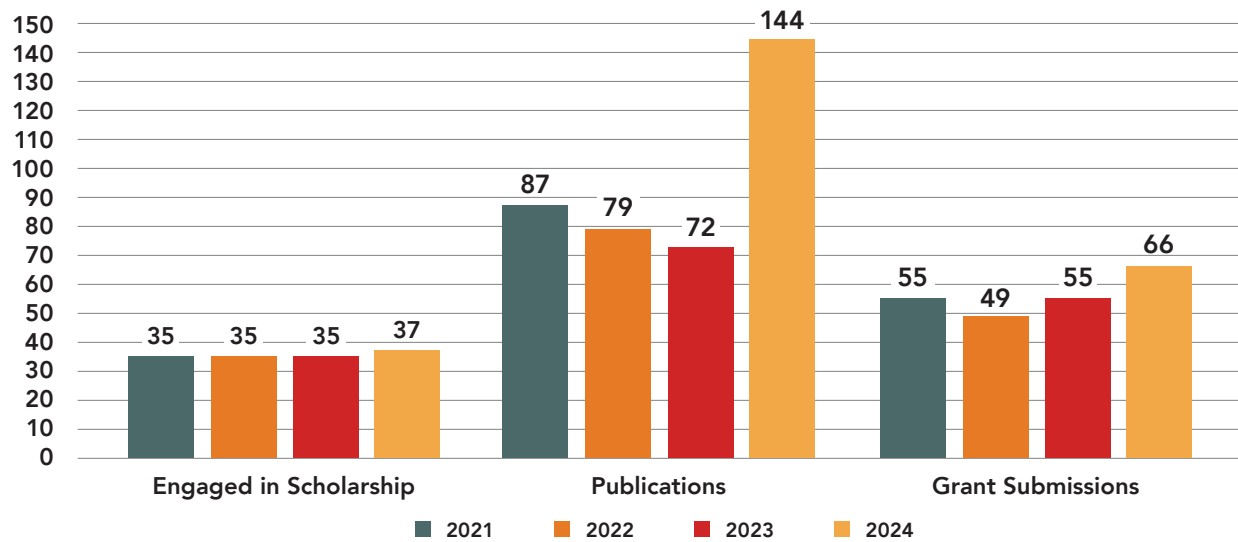
FY21 = \$15,603,060
FY23 = \$43,626,051

FY22 = \$39,142,198
FY24 = \$23,115,848

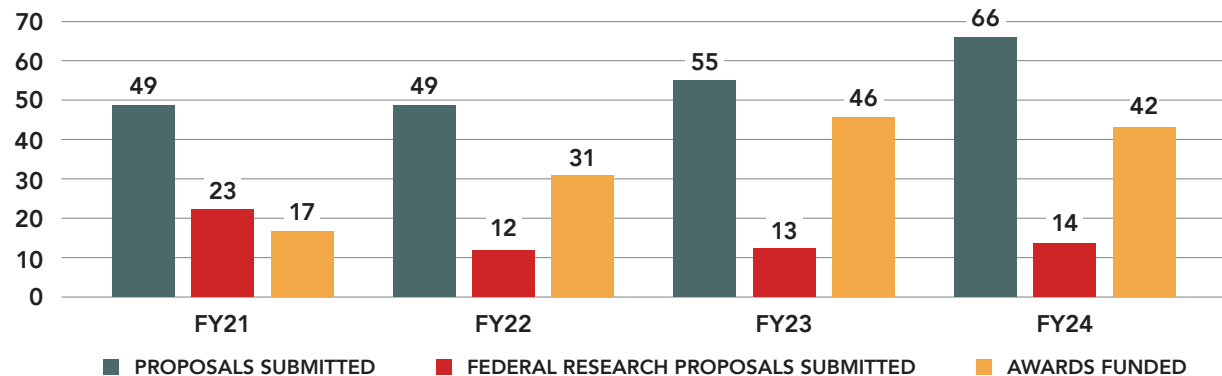
TOTAL RESEARCH FUNDING FOR FY21–FY24



FACULTY SCHOLARSHIP BENCHMARKS FY21–24



SPONSORED PROJECTS (EXTERNAL) FY21–24



DEVELOPMENT: FISCAL YEAR 2024



\$2,253,116
TOTAL PHILANTHROPY



114
NUMBER OF ALL DONORS




\$936,465
TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS
(current and endowed)


SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

SEMESTER	# OF APPLICATIONS	# OF AWARDS	AMOUNT AWARDED
FALL 2023	325	128	\$335,422
SPRING 2024	400	86	\$175,325
SUMMER 2024	209	58	\$88,796
FALL 2024	332	149	\$270,888
TOTAL	1,266	421	\$870,431


NOTABLE GIFTS



\$100,000
to establish
The Allen Dale
Saulsberry
Endowed
Scholarship in
Nurse Anesthesia
from Allen D.
Saulsberry



\$50,000
to the Ruth
Ann Baldwin
Endowment
for Nursing
Education from
Gary Baldwin



\$50,000
to the Ruth
Ann Baldwin
Endowed
Nursing
Scholarship from
Gary Baldwin



NURSING SPOTLIGHTS

Shining a light on faculty who have been recognized by the San Antonio Nursing Consortium for their excellence in patient care, patient safety, research, leadership, education and community service

2024 BEST 25 NURSES OF SOUTH CENTRAL TEXAS

JAMES A. CLEVELAND
PHD, MSN, RN



A retired U.S. Army Nurse Corps officer with 28 years of service, Cleveland is a distinguished leader in nursing education and simulation. Since joining the School of Nursing in 2009, he has transformed clinical training as director of the Center for Simulation Innovation, earning international accreditation. A passionate mentor, Cleveland champions student success while advancing trauma care, interprofessional education and caregiver support. His leadership in shaping health care education and commitment to veterans and all students exemplifies his dedication to the profession and community.

DEBORAH JENNINGS
DNP, MSN, RN, CENP



Jennings is a dedicated nurse leader, educator and advocate with over 20 years in nursing experience, including a decade in senior administration. As a clinical assistant professor, she integrates her leadership experience to mentor future nurses and champion health care access. Honored also with a 2024 Texas Nurse Iimagemaker Award, she is an enthusiastic advocate for foster youth, community health and policy reform. Through education, service and compassionate caregiving, Jennings exemplifies excellence in nursing, inspiring students to lead with integrity for patient-centered care.

2024 TOP 50 NURSES OF SOUTH CENTRAL TEXAS

Bertha Flores, PhD, APRN, WHNP-BC,



is a bilingual and bicultural nurse leader with over 40 years of experience, an associate professor at UT Health San Antonio and a VA program nurse. As a dedicated educator, she has mentored students at all levels while leading initiatives to improve cancer and geriatric care for veterans. As site PI on major cancer-prevention grants, her work has significantly increased screening and vaccination rates in rural communities. Her leadership in translational science, commitment to ethical practice and dedication for mentorship and advocacy make her a distinguished honoree, recognized for her contributions to research, education and health care access.

Rozmin B. Jiwani, PhD, APRN, ACNS-BC, DipACLM,



an associate professor and researcher, has dedicated 30 years to nursing, advancing chronic disease management, aging research and mental health interventions. She develops tailored and mobile health solutions to enhance quality of life through behavioral lifestyle interventions worldwide. Since 2020, she has also taught graduate students at Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan. An eager mentor and leader who champions person-centered care, Jiwani has secured major grants and published extensively. Honored for her research and mentorship, she continues shaping health education, lifestyle medicine and innovative interventions that empower patients and students.

Sherry Megerle, MSN, RN, LNCC,



is a respected nurse leader and educator known for her clinical expertise, legal nursing insight and professionalism. She serves as treasurer and community service chair of the Philippine Nurses Association of San Antonio, where she leads outreach and Alzheimer's education initiatives that directly support local communities. Megerle is a skilled mentor and advocate for ethical nursing practice, bridging bedside care, policy and education with compassion and clarity. Whether she's guiding peers or leading health events, she consistently uplifts the nursing profession. Her poise, integrity and purposeful service make her a powerful force in advancing nursing excellence.

STEPPING STONES TO STABILITY

Children in foster care often face instability. Through a growing network of clinics, the School of Nursing is building something these kids can count on — a path to better health

BY JESSICA BINKLEY LAIN

In just five years as a designated Foster Care Center of Excellence, the School of Nursing's Wellness 360 pediatric practice at UT Health San Antonio has expanded to six locations across South Texas, with a seventh clinic in development, providing vital health care to children in foster care and their families.

"It's a center, but a center spread out," said Karen Schwab, PhD, APRN, CPNP-PC, clinical associate professor and director of Wellness 360 pediatric services for the School of Nursing. "It's really an infrastructure we're building in the region so these kids can have a stable medical home, even if their placement changes."

Superior HealthPlan designated UT Health San Antonio as a Foster Care Center of Excellence in December 2019. The School of Nursing's Wellness 360 is one of only 10 such centers in Texas and the only one in South Texas. It remains distinct as the only nurse-led and managed Foster Care Center of Excellence in the state. →

An evolving collaboration

The School of Nursing's Wellness 360 serves the Texas Department of Family and Protective Service's Region 8, where there are about 3,300 children in foster care. Since its designation, the program has expanded significantly to meet the needs of this population.

When it first became a Foster Care Center of Excellence, the nursing practice served 55 foster children; today, that number has grown to over 880, accounting for nearly 25% of the foster care population in the region. In 2023–2024 alone, the clinic conducted 4,800 visits and prevented 396 urgent care visits.

The program initially operated from the School of Nursing's on-campus clinic, offering primary care to foster families. Over time, community providers sought partnerships, leading to on-site clinics at foster care facilities. In 2022, the school secured a four-year federal grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration to fund access to community-based health care for foster care children and their families across Region 8, allowing for expansion to six locations, with a mobile unit further extending care.

"It's so rewarding. And it's unfolded very organically," said Schwab. "It's kind of like crossing a river by hopping from rock to rock. We just keep jumping to the next one, and we're always amazed the next rock is bigger and more stable."

Accessible health for all

A key priority has been making health care more accessible and convenient for foster families, who are often facing challenges that make traditional health care hours and processes difficult.

"We do everything we can to make it easy to reduce skipped appointments and gaps in health care," Schwab said. "So, instead of requiring multiple appointments for different concerns like asthma or ADHD, we strive to address all issues in one visit to ease the burden of taking time off work or arranging transportation."

By providing in-house labs, the need for off-site visits is eliminated. Collaboration with behavioral health professionals ensures families can access necessary services without extensive travel. Offering extended hours and the ability to see multiple siblings at once also help to reduce logistical challenges.

Addressing the unique needs of foster children

Foster children often experience a range of complex health challenges. Many enter the system with chronic or untreated physical conditions, while others face developmental delays or significant mental health concerns.

Schwab explained that 35% of foster youth have ongoing physical health needs, 60% experience developmental delays and 90% have mental health

conditions, often stemming from trauma. Older children, in particular, are more likely to exhibit PTSD-related behaviors as a result of their experiences.

"Children in foster care often experience a higher number of adverse childhood events. Entering into foster care is unfortunately a process that is inevitably going to cause some level of trauma," she said.

Frequent placement changes can further disrupt a child's well-being. On average, each relocation results in a six-month setback in their education, compounding the challenges they already face. Many endure multiple placement transitions, failed foster home placements or even unsuccessful adoptions, making stability in health care even more critical.

With multiple clinic locations, the School of Nursing's Wellness 360 provides continuity of care despite these disruptions. A child who receives treatment at one clinic may later visit another, where staff recognize them and maintain seamless medical records. Improved communication between locations ensures that children do not miss specialty appointments or critical follow-ups. In group home settings, on-site nurses and nurse practitioners provide immediate health support, and after-hours care allows continued access to medical guidance outside of standard clinic hours.

A model for the future

Schwab and her team envision their work becoming a model for foster care health programs

beyond Texas. Too often, health care is overlooked in placement decisions, even though placement changes can significantly impact a child's well-being.

"We hope to create a model that improves health care for foster youth, not just in Texas but beyond," said Schwab. "We are finally in positions where we can bring the health care perspective to the table and ensure it is considered in decisions about a child's well-being." ■

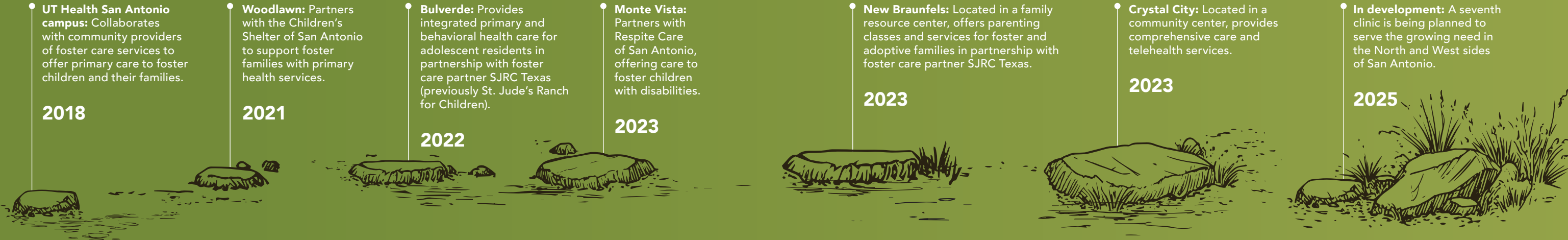
"It's kind of like crossing a river by hopping from rock to rock. We just keep jumping to the next one, and we're always amazed the next rock is bigger and more stable."



— Karen Schwab, PhD, APRN, CPNP-PC

One step at a time

A timeline of UT Health San Antonio School of Nursing foster care centers and services formed in partnership with community providers



BRIGHT FUTURES BEGIN AT SUNRISE

An immersive summer experience is opening doors for nursing students to explore research, gain confidence and make an impact in their field

BY KRISTEN ZAPATA

For many undergraduate nursing students, research may seem like an advanced academic pursuit — something reserved for those chasing doctoral studies or aiming for careers in academia. But at the UT Health San Antonio School of Nursing, one mentorship-driven program is changing that perception.

Through the Summer Undergraduate Nursing Research ImmerSion Experience (SUNRISE), faculty mentors are guiding students beyond the classroom, giving them hands-on experience in discovery research, evidence-based practice and quality-improvement projects.

The program begins with an orientation that introduces students to research activities and helps them build communication, networking and presentation skills, along with a sense of belonging. Each week, students participate in structured development sessions that strengthen their abilities while nurturing personal

and professional growth. The program helps students contribute meaningfully to health care advancements, made possible through the combined support of dedicated faculty mentors, program leadership and the school's Student Success Center.

A faculty member who embodies the spirit of this initiative is Kelly McGlothen-Bell, PhD, RN, IBCLC, FAWHONN, an assistant professor and nurse scientist with a deep commitment to both research and mentorship. For her, guiding students is not only about academic growth, but also about empowering them to see themselves as researchers and changemakers in their communities.

The power of mentorship

Bell's journey with the School of Nursing began in 2010 as a BSN student, where she was first introduced to the value of research. Mentored by faculty members who shaped

her understanding of nursing's role in health care innovation, she carried those lessons into her PhD studies and now applies them as a mentor herself.

"For me, mentorship is about paying it forward," she said. "I was fortunate to have amazing mentors who helped me understand how research drives better outcomes for families and communities. Now, I have the opportunity to do the same for my students."

That impact goes beyond the classroom. According to Sara Mithani, PhD, RN, director of SUNRISE, the goal is to introduce undergraduate nursing students to experiences that prepare them for leadership in both clinical practice and research.

"Nurses make a big difference with hands-on patient care, but they also play a crucial role in shaping policies and advancing evidence-based practices," Mithani said.

SUNRISE allows students to gain exposure to

research methodologies, policy development and the process of health care improvements, making them well-rounded professionals before they even graduate.

Research with a purpose

One of the most compelling examples of this mentorship in action is Bell's work on breastfeeding among families impacted by opioid use disorder — a project she is undertaking alongside Deana Naser, who just graduated this May.

"Deana had a strong interest in breastfeeding and maternal health," Bell shared. "She wanted to understand how opioid exposure in utero affects an infant's ability to breastfeed and how we, as health care providers, can better support these mothers and babies."

Through the SUNRISE program, Naser has played an active role in analyzing data, reviewing infant feeding behaviors and co-authoring



Deana Naser, BSN, RN (left), with her SUNRISE mentor Kelly McGlothen-Bell, PhD, RN, IBCLC, FAWHONN.

research publications with Bell. More importantly, she has learned how ethical, community-driven research can find gaps in patient care protocol and improve it.

"Most studies talk about what health care workers see in infants with neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome, but no one really asks the moms," Naser said. "They're the ones taking their babies home, experiencing the full picture. Our research gives voice to their experiences, helping us understand how to better support them as caretakers."

Through this experience, Naser has gained clinical insight and a deeper appreciation for the learning process — one that thrives under Bell's strong mentorship.

"Dr. Bell and I would have a brainstorming session, after which she'd allow me to take the lead and bring the idea to life," she said. "I get to do it, and she gives feedback, which to me is the perfect way of learning. I can try and figure it out, get the feedback I need and then fix it. She's always supportive — everything is constructive. I always feel like it is a very safe learning space. She's just always there as a resource for me."

The opportunity to prepare to publish research as an undergraduate is a rare and valuable experience, setting students apart as they move into their careers.

"If you had asked me a year ago if I'd see myself writing a full paper, I would have said, 'No way.' But now, here I am, leading the paper I'm working on. It makes me feel like I really can do what I set my mind to," Naser said.

Overcoming imposter syndrome

While the academic rewards of research are clear, the personal growth students experience through mentorship is just as significant. Many students struggle with imposter syndrome — feeling as though they don't belong in the research world.

"One of the biggest challenges students face is seeing themselves as researchers," Bell

explained. "Many think research is something reserved for 'other people,' but in reality, we are all researchers at heart. Nursing is about asking questions, seeking solutions and improving patient outcomes."

By working directly with faculty mentors, students like Naser safely develop confidence in their abilities, realizing that they, too, can contribute to groundbreaking research that shapes the future of health care.

"Starting anything new is always a challenge, and you never really know what you are doing in the beginning," Naser said. "Then the self-doubt starts: 'Is this really something I could do? I am sure there are more experienced people who would do this easily.' Those thoughts are always at the back of my head. But Dr. Bell has been great about that — she's always supportive, always encouraging. And I've learned that research isn't black and white. It's not about getting a 'right' answer, it's about figuring things out and making discoveries. That realization has helped quiet that imposter syndrome."

This aspect of the program is particularly important given the wide range of backgrounds and experiences of students at the School of Nursing. Its population reflects the richness of South Texas, with many coming from families with limited access to educational resources.

"We want students to feel like they belong in the world of research," said Angela Watts, PhD, director for student success. "That sense of belonging is what keeps them engaged and encourages them to push forward."

Sustaining the future

Despite its success, the SUNRISE program faces an uncertain future. The APOYO: Supporting and Advancing Student Nurses in South Texas grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which provides the program funds, will expire in two years, leaving a funding gap that could impact the ability to continue SUNRISE at its current scale.

"Currently, the APOYO grant fully funds the SUNRISE scholars," explained Vanessa Bográn Meling, EdD, MBA, associate dean for admission, student success and engagement and principal investigator of the grant. "This covers their stipends, research materials and travel for professional conferences. However, once this grant ends, securing new funding will be essential to continue providing these transformational opportunities."

Another area lacking funding? Faculty mentors. While faculty members dedicate time and expertise to guiding students, they receive no additional financial support for taking on mentees.

"We hope to secure ongoing funding not only for our students but also for the dedicated faculty mentors who make this program possible," Meling added. "Their mentorship is essential, and investing in faculty support would enable us to grow the program and create even greater opportunities for both students and researchers."

With continued funding and growing interest from students, the SUNRISE program is poised to expand its reach and impact.

"The power of mentorship is not just in one guiding light, but in the constellation of support that surrounds a student," Mithani noted. "It is the village of mentors — including peers, professionals and community leaders — who collectively shape students' experiences and opportunities."

For faculty members like Bell, the goal remains clear: Empower students, build confidence and ensure the next generation of nurses is equipped to lead.

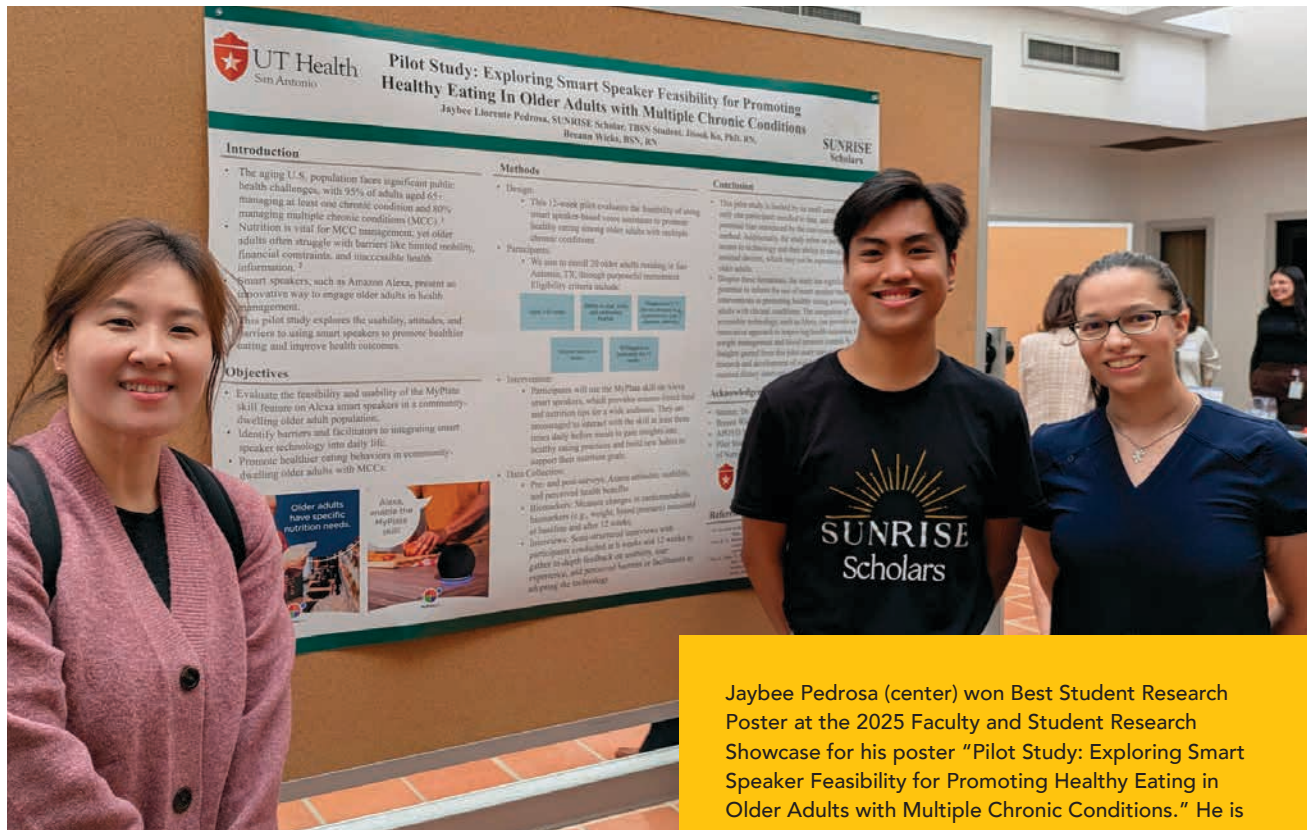
"If you mentor students, the work continues," she said. "It's not about personal recognition — it's about making sure that the next generation of nurses and researchers have the skills and passion to keep improving health care for our communities." →

"The power of mentorship is not just in one guiding light, but in the constellation of support that surrounds a student. It is the village of mentors — including peers, professionals and community leaders — who collectively shape students' experiences and opportunities."



— Sara Mithani, PhD, RN, director of SUNRISE





Jaybee Pedrosa (center) won Best Student Research Poster at the 2025 Faculty and Student Research Showcase for his poster “Pilot Study: Exploring Smart Speaker Feasibility for Promoting Healthy Eating in Older Adults with Multiple Chronic Conditions.” He is pictured with Jisook Ko, PhD, RN (left), and doctoral student Breann Wicks (right).

Pedrosa’s 12-week pilot study evaluated Amazon Alexa’s MyPlate skill as a tool to promote healthier eating among older adults. Early findings suggest smart speakers could offer an accessible way to support nutrition goals and manage chronic conditions.

SUNRISE STUDENTS SHOW INNOVATION, COLLABORATION

The School of Nursing’s Office of Nursing Research and Scholarship hosted its annual Faculty and Student Research Showcase in January, bringing together undergraduate and doctoral students and faculty in an inspiring display of scholarship and innovation.

This year’s event was particularly noteworthy, marking the first time that nursing students from the Summer Undergraduate Nursing Research ImmerSion Experience (SUNRISE) presented their research alongside faculty mentors.

SUNRISE is an eight-week paid research mentorship program designed for undergraduate nursing students in their fifth and sixth semesters on the traditional Bachelor of Science in Nursing track. While the program provides students with a structured introduction to research, faculty members like Jisook Ko, PhD, RN, see its benefits extending well beyond the classroom.

“In this program, I’ve found that students are more motivated than I expected,” said Ko, an assistant professor and nurse scientist. “They

come in with curiosity, and as they engage in research, they realize they have real contributions to make. The showcase is a chance for them to see how their work fits into the bigger picture.”

Jaybee Pedrosa, now a rising eighth-semester nursing student and Ko’s first SUNRISE mentee, said the experience has been transformational.

“The SUNRISE program has been one of the most meaningful parts of my nursing education at UT Health San Antonio. It gave me a space to explore the power of research in shaping better patient care while also helping me grow both personally and professionally,” he said.

A platform for growth

The Faculty and Student Research Showcase was provided as an opportunity for students to present their work and a place to gain confidence, engage in interdisciplinary discussions and envision the future of nursing research.

“My student Jaybee was thrilled to present his work and even won Best Student Research Poster,” Ko said. “He told me, ‘I made it, and I’m really proud of myself!’ Moments like that reinforce why these opportunities are so valuable.”

For many researchers, presenting their work can feel intimidating, but the showcase offered a safe and supportive environment for them to practice and refine their skills.

“Attending national conferences can be expensive, and not all students have the resources to go,” Ko explained. “But this event provided a space where they could share their findings, receive feedback and gain motivation for future projects.”

Pedrosa echoed this sentiment, noting how the event deepened his understanding of the role research plays in advancing nursing practice. “Participating in the showcase deepened my appreciation for how research is truly at the heart of nursing. It’s not just about data or numbers — it’s

about asking the right questions, thinking creatively and finding new ways to solve real-world problems,” he said.

Looking ahead

With continued enthusiasm from students, faculty and leadership, the School of Nursing research showcase is proving to be a cornerstone event for creation, collaboration and mentorship in nursing science.

“I hope we can hold this event more than once a year,” Ko said. “Seeing students engage with each other’s research, learn from faculty and feel a sense of achievement — it’s an experience that can truly shape their academic and professional futures.”

Ko said that, thanks to programs like SUNRISE, students learn the value of nursing research and are actively contributing to it, gaining the skills and confidence to drive change in health care long after they graduate. ■



SUNRISE TRIP TO D.C.

SUNRISE scholars often leave the program with a broader perspective on what a nursing career can be. Through site visits and hands-on experiences,

students meet nurses working in research, policy and hospital administration — roles they may have never considered before.

“We took [the 2024]

SUNRISE cohort to Washington, D.C., where they met nurse scientists at the National Institutes of Health, witnessed research in action and even spoke with a nurse working for a U.S. senator,” shared Vanessa Bográn Meling, EdD, MBA, associate dean for admission, student success and engagement. “The experience was transformative. Several students told us, ‘I never realized I could be part of shaping public policy as a nurse.’”

This exposure is intentional, designed to expand students’ career aspirations and highlight the full scope of nursing’s impact.

MENTORS, MISSIONS *and the making of a nurse*

BY ORITH FARAGO

Guided by experienced preceptors, School of Nursing students gain hands-on training through a unique nurse-led care model serving the San Antonio community



Brittany Lents, MSN, APRN, CPNP-PC (right) mentored Alina Lundblade (left) during her pediatric rotation.

Students at UT Health San Antonio's School of Nursing are receiving critical hands-on training in outpatient care by participating in clinical rotations via Wellness 360, the school's ambulatory clinical practice. The practice's 14 clinical sites, which include four adult, seven pediatric and three behavioral health clinics throughout San Antonio, are all based on a progressive practitioner-run model.

As part their hands-on experience in the clinical setting, students work with preceptors, or mentors, who provide the perfect blend of expertise and guidance in a variety of specialties — from pediatrics and family care to psychiatric mental health and adult gerontology acute care.

"At UT Health San Antonio, many of the nurse practitioners also teach, so they're excellent teachers," said Alina Lundblade, BSN, RN, a student pursuing her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree, or DNP, to become a family nurse practitioner. Family nurse practitioners specialize in preventive and primary care services.

"They're really eager to work with us. You

may be doing something with one and the other one may walk in and say, 'Hey, there's a really interesting patient, or I'm going somewhere interesting tomorrow. Do you want to come with me?' So, you get really unique opportunities to learn and see things differently. It opens up your perspective, so down the road, when you're faced with things, you're better prepared," said Lundblade.

These real-world clinical rotations are also beneficial for the students' mentors, said Brittany Lents, MSN, APRN, CPNP-PC, a nursing clinical assistant professor. Lents served as Lundblade's mentor at the pediatric Wellness 360 clinic, located at the School of Nursing.

"I believe [mentoring] is really helpful for us on the clinic side because our students [enable us] to reach more patients," Lents said. "Our students, a lot of times, have great past experiences that they bring as a benefit into the clinical experience. So, I always learn from students, and I love that aspect of being a preceptor."



In fiscal year 2024, Wellness 360 provided 32,460 patient visits across its clinical services, including behavioral health, the Green Wellness Program and the Pediatrics North Hub.



Providing needed services

Thanks to partnerships with the Housing First Community Coalition — a nonprofit organization that seeks to develop housing for San Antonians — and Health Resources and Services Administration grants, nursing students can see firsthand how the Wellness 360 nursing model helps those in need.

“Our clinics mostly serve [the] uninsured, underinsured population,” said Maria Saldiva, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, assistant clinical professor at the School of Nursing. Lundblade is currently doing a clinical rotation at a Wellness 360 clinic where Saldiva is the primary nurse practitioner.

“If the patients do not have insurance for Wellness 360 services, their services are covered through grants and other funding. That’s really important for the students to see that we can access funds and grants to be able to serve the community in Bexar County and beyond,” Saldiva said.

Nursing students enrolled in a postgraduate program — whether pursuing a doctorate or postgraduate certificate — are required to be licensed nurses to participate in these graduate-level programs.

“Many of our [graduate] students have been nurses who have been working in the hospitals around here for a long period of time, and they’re still working in those hospitals,” said Kenneth Miller, PhD, MJ, RN, CFNP, FAAN, FAANP, associate dean for ambulatory services at the School of Nursing. “When they finish their degree, most of them go back to the same hospitals they were working at and become primary care providers there, or they’ll go out into the San Antonio area and work in clinics.”

Students pursuing their Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees also rotate through the School of Nursing’s ambulatory practices, particularly the pediatric practice, said Heidi Worabo, APRN, FNP-BC, FAANP, associate professor, clinical.



Left to right: Candace Martinez, medical assistant; Anita Rincon, medical assistant; Maria Saldiva, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, assistant clinical professor; and Roy Aguilar, medical assistant, serve patients and manage students who rotate through the School of Nursing’s Wellness 360 clinic located at San Antonio College.



Building experience for the future

Despite her experience as a registered nurse in pediatric oncology at Methodist Children’s Hospital, Lundblade still had butterflies when she started her clinical rotations through the university’s ambulatory practices, she said.

“It took me a few days, and then I realized how equipped I already was, and how I already knew how to talk to patients and to recognize things that I didn’t realize I already knew how to do as a registered nurse,” Lundblade said.

During Lundblade’s pediatric clinical rotation with Lents, she, like other students training in the clinical setting, experienced firsthand the role of a provider by reviewing patient charts, conducting wellness exams, making diagnoses, determining treatment plans and completing patient charts — all under a learning environment guided by a trusted mentor. Through clinical rotation experiences at different Wellness 360 locations and with different mentors, Lundblade has built an expanded toolkit of knowledge for her future as a family nurse practitioner.

“[This real-world experience] is changing the way that I think and it’s building off of what I already know,” Lundblade said. “It’s making me look at [nursing] differently and use what I already know differently, and it will make me a better provider.” ■



“Many of our [graduate] students have been nurses who have been working in the hospitals around here for a long period of time, and they’re still working in those hospitals.”

— Kenneth Miller, PhD, MJ, RN, CFNP, FAAN, FAANP

Advocates in *action*

The Nursing Advisory Council channels community connection, personal passion and a generous spirit to uplift future nurses and the faculty who guide them

BY KRISTEN ZAPATA

For decades, the Nursing Advisory Council at UT Health San Antonio's School of Nursing has served as a dedicated bridge between the school and the greater San Antonio community. Established by former Dean Patty Hawkins, the council was formed with a vision to connect the School of Nursing with influential voices in the region and advocate for the next generation of nurses.

Its mission has evolved over the years, but its core purpose remains steadfast — champion the School of Nursing, strengthen community engagement and directly support students and faculty in meaningful ways.

Rooted in support

The council is a community of San Antonians, many from the local corporate sector, who are committed to promoting excellence in nursing education. In 2024, it redefined its roles and responsibilities to closely align with the School of Nursing's goals.

"We are community advocates for the school, speaking with

business associates, friends and family about the school's impact and helping to create new opportunities of support for the school," said council Chair Terri Edlund.

Edlund, a longstanding supporter of UT Health San Antonio who has personally benefited from nursing care, said this support includes strengthening community ties, identifying opportunities for the school's leaders to engage with the community and identifying ways to increase financial support through annual membership donations, space-naming prospects and special events.

The council's history of being a driving force for linking key organizations and individuals with the school was evident through its annual luncheons, which raised substantial funds for nursing scholarships and faculty research.

"The luncheons were a vehicle for educating the public about the School of Nursing and the need for support," said former council Chair Deborah "Debby" Hepburn. "Some attendees

continued to include the school in annual contributions or provided endowments."

While large-scale fundraising events like the luncheons are now primarily managed by the university's development team, the advisory council continues to play an essential role in generating support through smaller, more personal gatherings.

A recent cocktail event hosted by Edlund and her husband raised \$10,000, proving that community-driven efforts remain a powerful force for change.

"We are always looking for ways to generate consistent financial support," Edlund said. "It's an ongoing effort, but we know the impact is real."

Advisory council members also actively promote the school's excellence, encouraging the region's leaders to invest in nursing education.

"Our members are informed advocates," Hepburn noted. "We not only seek financial support, but also work to raise awareness of the high-quality education and research happening at the School of Nursing. It attracts quality faculty and staff and recruits students through a variety of forums."

Direct impact

Beyond advocacy, the council plans to take a more active role in the lives of nursing students. One of its newest initiatives will be to host meals during finals week, where council members serve and interact with students, offering encouragement as they navigate their rigorous studies.

"We want students to know who we are and that we care about them," Edlund shared. "We are rooting for their success."



The advisory council is also working to revive a beloved tradition that was previously led by the alumni relations team — providing encouragement cards to new nursing students throughout their first year.

"In the past, while friends and family were waiting for the White Coat Ceremony to begin, they were encouraged to write a note to their student. The notes are gathered and held to be distributed to students after exams during their fifth semester," Edlund said. "The council also plans to fill out and have available a supply of encouragement cards that can be given out to students who may not have had a friend or family member complete a card for them."

The council's fundraising contributions also create tangible opportunities for students to thrive.

"We steward emergency funds to help students in crisis, whether they needed assistance with rent,

car repairs or a new computer. Sometimes, that little bit of support makes all the difference in helping them complete their

"We want students to know who we are and that we care about them. We are rooting for their success."

— Terri Edlund, chair, Nursing Advisory Council

education," Hepburn shared.

Faculty members have also benefited from council-sponsored research grants, which serve as crucial seed money for innovative projects that might otherwise struggle to receive funding.

"Faculty often face challenges securing funding for research, especially at the early stages," Hepburn explained. "The council's support has provided an essential boost, allowing new projects to take root."

Looking to the future

As council members look ahead, their primary goal is to establish a sustainable source of financial support for the School of Nursing. While the strategy is still taking shape, members remain committed to leveraging their community connections to back the school and its mission.

Additionally, the advisory council aims to increase Dean Sonya Hardin's presence at community events, ensuring her message about the critical need to build a nursing workforce reaches a wider audience.

"She is a passionate speaker, and her message resonates with everyone," Edlund said. "We want to get her in front of as many people as possible because we will all be in a position to benefit from the services of a nurse."

Anyone interested in supporting the council's mission

has numerous opportunities to get involved. From attending hosted events to participating in student-alumni engagement initiatives, there are many ways to contribute to its vital network of support, "and we are always looking for new members," said Edlund.

To learn more about the Nursing Advisory Council, contact Terri Edlund at 210-601-2058 or at terriedlund88@gmail.com. ■

Answering the call to serve

The School of Nursing Alumni Council represents the voice of alumni and serves as an advisory group to develop initiatives at the school, department and program level. Three current representatives share why the council's work, and the nursing profession, are important to them.



Amir Zakaria, BSN ('18), a cardiology invasive nurse in the Cardiac Catheterization Lab at University Hospital, was previously a staff nurse II in the hospital's Surgical Trauma Intensive Care Unit. He has received numerous awards and recognition for his exceptional patient care while on staff.

Since Zakaria joined the school's alumni council several years ago, he has seen participation increase. In other volunteer activities, he served as chair of the Nurse Ethics Council at University Hospital and as co-chair of Corazón Clinic, which provides primary care to individuals who are homeless or uninsured. Zakaria credits his involvement with the clinic as what got him into nursing.

"It really opened my eyes to more that I could do to help others," said Zakaria. At that time, he was winding down his business of 28 years in the retail and wholesale garment business.

"All the stars finally lined up, calling me into this field," said Zakaria. A "calling" is what he considers nursing.

"I don't think of it as a job." For Zakaria, the best thing at the end of every day is feeling like he made a difference. "Working in the [catheterization] lab, I literally feel like I am saving lives through our interventions."



Odette V. Denisa, BSN, MSN ('12), APRN, ACNP-BC — an inpatient and outpatient nurse practitioner specializing in cardiovascular and thoracic surgery — currently assists electrophysiology with Arrhythmia Associates of South Texas, part of the Baptist Medical Network.

"I support the electricians of the heart," said Denisa. In addition to her various cardiology positions, Denisa has served in pulmonary critical care and sleep medicine within the Baptist Health System.

For Denisa, serving on the alumni council provides an opportunity to give back.

"The school opened doors for me and gave me great training and confidence, so I want to bring more support to this network."

Denisa, who also serves as vice president of San Antonio Nurses in Advanced Practice, said volunteering provides an opportunity to help students and recent graduates understand the value of the profession and the responsibility to keep up with the newest diagnostic tools and best practices in managing disease.

Even routine actions show service to others, said Denisa. For instance, she believes in timely and accurate charting. "I always finish my notes on a daily basis, no matter what, because I know others are waiting for the recommendations, and this directly impacts patient care."



Retired Lt. Col. Jerry Gonzales, RN, BSN ('73), MS, was among the first graduates of the School of Nursing.

A native of San Antonio, Gonzales had joined the U.S. Air Force as an aeromedical technician in 1967, not knowing then what he wanted to do. After shifting services to join the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, his assignments took him to places like New Jersey and Washington, D.C., as well as a station hospital in Germany where he served as chief nurse.

Requesting a return to San Antonio to be near his aging parents, Gonzales agreed to first fulfill a one-year unaccompanied tour as chief nurse in South Korea. Along the way of his military journey, Gonzales and his wife had two children, and he earned two master's degrees in health care administration.

While Gonzales retired as chief nursing officer from Brooke Army Medical Center in 1998, his career and volunteer service in health care and military capacities has continued to this day with his current service on the school's alumni council.

"I wanted to share my experience with others and do what I can to help mentor today's nursing students, particularly veteran students," said Gonzales. "There are so many career and service opportunities available in this field." ■

Lead. Serve. Inspire.

Dear fellow School of Nursing alumni,

What a joy it was to gather with so many of you at our recent alumni reception! The energy in the room reaffirmed what I've always known: Our alumni community is strong, passionate and eager to make a difference.

On behalf of our Alumni Council, I invite you to stay engaged with the School of Nursing through opportunities that fit your life and passions. However you choose to stay involved — be it mentoring students, attending or hosting events, supporting online outreach or precepting — you're making a meaningful difference in the future of nursing. When alumni unite, we create lasting change for our school, our patients and the communities we serve.

We're especially excited to continue growing our forever.uthscsa.edu platform, called Forever San Antonio, as our dedicated digital space to connect, collaborate and give back. We would appreciate your feedback after using this platform.

Want to support our mission right now? Scan the QR code below to make a gift and help advance initiatives such as the Caring for the Caregiver program, student scholarships and alumni outreach. Together, we can amplify our impact.

Thank you for being part of a legacy of leadership, service, compassion and inspiration. Let's keep the momentum going!

Respectfully,
Lorraine R. Barton, DNP, APRN, CPNP-PC
Class of 2003 and 2018
Alumni Council Chair



GET AND STAY CONNECTED!

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- @uthealthsalumni

EMAIL: alumni@uthscsa.edu
PHONE: 210-567-3051
WEB: makelivesbetter.uthscsa.edu/alumni

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The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio
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