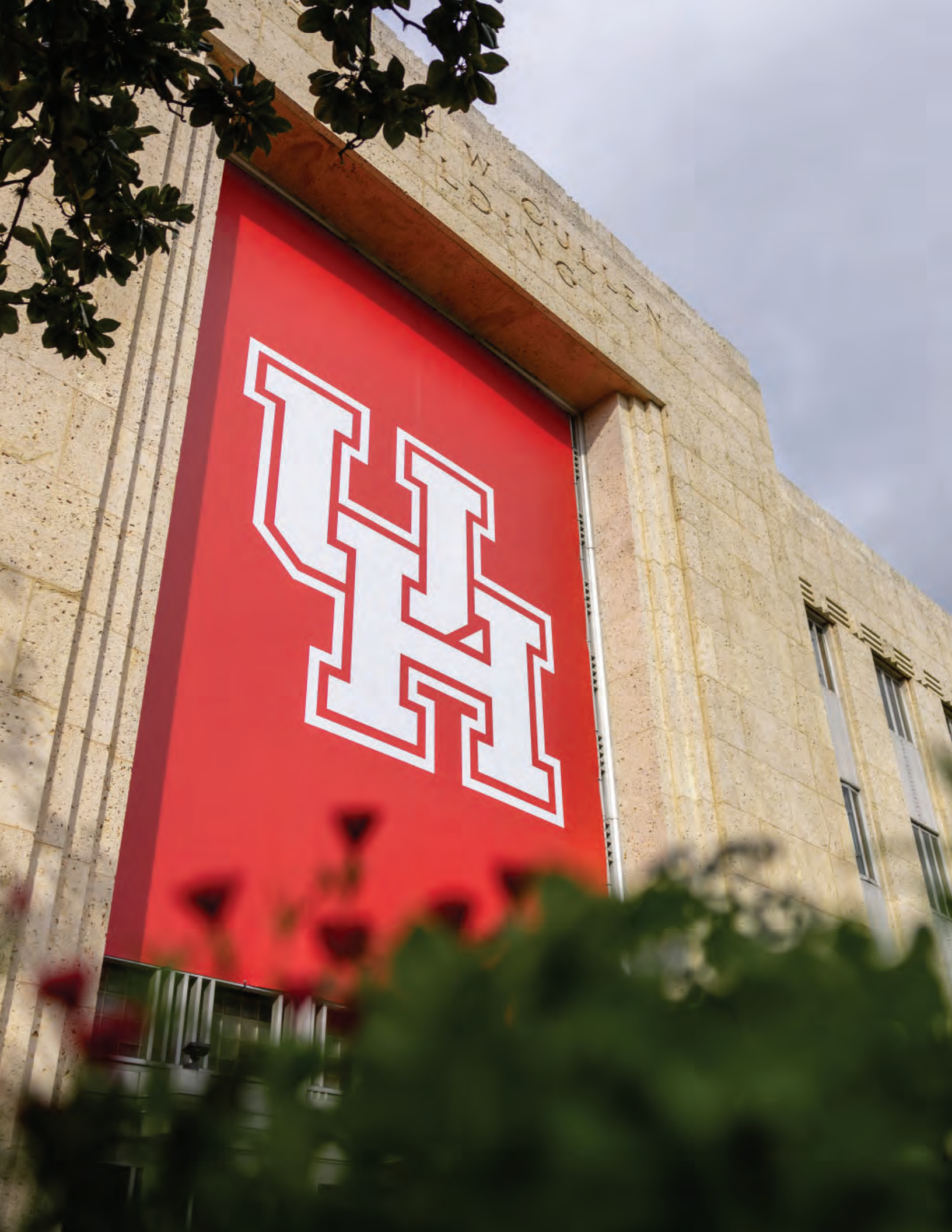




Hobby School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON



2024 IMPACT REPORT



A Message from Dean Granato



As we reflect on 2024, we are proud to see the school's transformative growth, including national recognition and an elevated reputation. Our students achieved significant milestones, with a record number of graduates at the **spring commencement**, including the first cohorts of public policy undergraduates and Master of Public Administration students. Additionally, a dozen **Leland Fellows** participated in Washington, D.C. internships, gaining invaluable insight into federal policymaking and public service.

Our **Civic Houston Internship Program** had a standout year, with 92 students contributing nearly 1,000 volunteer hours to community and voter education initiatives. A new cohort of **Next Generation Leadership Academy** students joined a national network of future public service leaders. Hobby School students also took part in a daylong symposium hosted by The Texas Tribune, where they facilitated discussions on democracy and civic engagement. Our new agile education curriculum, which integrates experiential learning in government and tabletop exercises, further enhanced students' preparedness for complex challenges in public service.

The year also saw the celebration of local leaders at the **2024 Public Officials of the Year Awards** by the Master of Public Administration program. Our collaboration with the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University brought 21 universities together for The Volcker Alliance's Next Generation Service Corps leadership retreat.

Looking ahead, we are excited about breaking ground on a new **state-of-the-art building**. With innovative learning spaces, research hubs and collaboration zones, it will shape public policy education at the University of Houston for generations.

Through interdisciplinary teaching, innovation research, student training and immersive learning opportunities, we are preparing tomorrow's leaders for impactful careers across various sectors. Thank you for your continued support in helping the Hobby School flourish. You are an integral part of this transformative journey.

Warm regards,

Jim Granato

Dean, Hobby School of Public Affairs
University of Houston

A Message from the Provost

The Hobby School of Public Affairs exemplifies the University of Houston's mission to prepare students to lead and make a meaningful impact in our communities. Through rigorous academic programs, hands-on policy research and community engagement, the Hobby School equips future leaders with the skills to navigate complex challenges and drive positive change.

This important work is a testament to the enduring legacy of Bill Hobby, whose vision for public service continues to inspire students and faculty alike. From advancing policy research to fostering civic engagement, the school plays a vital role in shaping the future of our region and beyond.

I am grateful for the dedication of Dean Jim Granato, the faculty and the students who embody the university's commitment to excellence and service. I look forward to seeing the continued impact of the Hobby School's efforts.

Diane Z. Chase

Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
University of Houston

A Note from the Chair

It is my privilege to chair the Hobby School Advisory Board, a group of local community leaders invested in advancing student success and shaping the future of Houston. Together, we support the Hobby School in empowering students and alumni to be at the forefront of effective government and civic leadership and to resolve complex and evolving challenges in public service.

Over the past year, we have welcomed Curtis Huff and Beth Madison to our ranks to amplify our mission throughout our region. We have leaned into our culture of collaboration, which has helped us reach new heights in a dynamic city. This is seen through record numbers in programs, joint research efforts and national networks. The Hobby School's continued growth and success depend on its collaborative approach and the community's support.

Looking ahead, we are excited about plans for a new building. This investment matches the Hobby family's commitment to the highest ideals of public service and ensures that the Hobby School remains a beacon of excellence at the University of Houston for future generations.

Ashley Smith

Chair, Hobby School of Public Affairs Advisory Board

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EMPOWERING EDUCATION: VALUE-ADDED LEARNING

Student success is at the heart of the Hobby School mission. Experiential learning opportunities are available on and off campus in government, nonprofit and private offices and electoral campaigns. In addition to their internships and apprenticeships, students learn in the field, volunteering throughout the community to address vital community issues.

REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Graduate candidates like **Michelle Gabriel** can redefine their goals by using research and leadership opportunities such as the **Social Economy and Enterprise Academy (SEEA)**. After a career as a high school counselor, Gabriel wanted to broaden her influence in the public sphere. She found that in the Master of Public Policy program and through her selection into the funded summer internship, matching public affairs and economics students with area nonprofits to fulfill research and data analysis projects.

“SEEA was an excellent opportunity for hands-on experience, allowing me to do real work for a nonprofit. My class assignments exposed me to working in policy on a theoretical level, but collaborating with a team and working through the process has been invaluable. Through the Center for Civic and Public Policy Improvement affordable housing initiative, my team and I researched appraisal values in various Houston districts and analyzed the growth in those areas.” – **Michelle Gabriel**

22 undergraduates and graduate candidates worked in groups to perform research and data analysis for Asia Society Texas, East Harris County Empowerment Council, Center for Civic and Public Policy Improvement and Workforce Solutions. The co-curricular partnership with the UH Department of Economics benefitted from funding from Workforce Solutions, a workforce development service connecting people with employers.



AGILE LEARNING CHAMPIONS

The Hobby School is rising to the challenges of a rapidly changing world by leading conversations and initiatives to prepare its graduates to face the evolving demands of a global marketplace.

Dean **Jim Granato** convened students, faculty, practitioners and experts for an inaugural dialogue to further integrate theory and practice to meet tomorrow's public service workforce needs.

Granato was joined by Hobby School's **Sunny Wong** and **Peter Koelling**, former Texas state Rep. **Garnet Coleman**, Austin Bleess of the City of Jersey Village and public affairs education leaders Angela Evans and Ed DeSeve. Evans and DeSeve provided context around agile government and public service professionals as force multipliers with transferable skills.

Koelling and Wong introduced **Teaching Cities**, municipal partnerships with the cities of Bellaire and Friendswood using curriculum and professional development opportunities to further the school's agile learning outcomes. The apprenticeships allow students to gain on-the-job experience solving real problems in local government. City of Friendswood apprentices are graduate candidates **Melky Ortiz** and **Kaia Ding**. Graduate candidates **Kimberly Argueta** and **Aenya Fike** are apprentices with the City of Bellaire.

"This [Teaching Cities] internship has allowed me to see class concepts play out in real-world scenarios, helping me better grasp the material. Professionally, this apprenticeship has provided me with meaningful and relevant experience that I can apply to future opportunities." – **Kimberly Argueta**, Master of Public Administration candidate

Koelling also coordinated tabletop exercises as part of the Master of Public Administration capstone project during which several Hobby School graduate candidates took on the roles of city leaders in a mock setting. The scenario tested the students' problem-solving and administrative management skills on budget decisions and priorities, infrastructure challenges and various interdepartmental dynamics. To help guide the activity, the MPA director invited David Hawes of Hawes Hill and Associates, LLP, Sydney Hargroder of the City of Iowa Colony and Hobby School Professor of Practice **James Thurmond**.

"Participating in this tabletop exercise provided a great perspective into the complexities of public administration, from addressing urgent infrastructure needs to managing the economic impact of major events within the constraints of limited budgets. This experience reinforced the importance of collaboration, adaptability and strategic problem-solving in crafting decisions that balance immediate priorities with long-term goals." – **Celeste Padilla**, Master of Public Administration candidate



STUDENT INFLUENCERS

Initiated in 2022, the undergraduate degrees in public policy provide mission-oriented students with leadership development opportunities and training in ethics, communication and writing. Public policy student **Juliana Hernandez** is embracing the blended coursework in social sciences, critical thinking and qualitative and quantitative analysis to prepare for an impactful career.



Hernandez started her Hobby School journey as a **Civic Houston Intern** in the district office of U.S. Rep. Sylvia Garcia. She was also a Civic Houston Intern at Air Alliance Houston, contributing to community engagement and research on environmental regulation and protection. The flagship internship program, open to all University of Houston majors, boasted 92 undergraduates who completed part-time internships in government offices, nonprofits or electoral campaigns during the spring and fall semesters. In the fall of 2024, a record 56 undergraduates took part in the Civic Houston Internship Program led by **Jessica Ruland O'Connor**.



Hernandez is a double major in public policy and political science. Her commitment to public service earned her the **Spring 2024 CHIP Award**. She later served as a Harris Fellow in Harris County's Department of Economic Equity and Opportunity, where she worked on early childhood education initiatives, including drafting policy memos.

"A typical day as a Harris Fellow involved policy research and writing. During meetings, I presented projects to my team and supervisors. My most notable project was researching and writing policy memos for the Early Childhood Initiatives programs that support children and their families across Harris County." – **Juliana Hernandez**

Following her internships, Hernandez continued her leadership development as a **Next Generation Leadership Academy** member and was named a **2025 Hobby Fellow** in the office of state Rep. Armando Walle, working full-time as a legislative aide in Austin during the 89th Texas Legislature.



FOSTERING THE NEXT GENERATION

The Hobby School team played host to **The Volcker Alliance's Next Generation Service Corps** leaders and directors in 2024. Representatives from 21 member universities took part in a three-day retreat at the University of Houston and Texas Southern University to share best practices, build relationships and lay the groundwork for future planning. NextGen Service Corps is a network of programs at universities across the country that inspire and prepare students to serve their communities and nation through a comprehensive leadership development program that incorporates curriculum, experiential learning, student-led projects, mentorship and hands-on training.

The **Next Generation Leadership Academy** at the University of Houston, led by **Emily Janowski**, has welcomed three cohorts of students focused on careers in public service and social impact. To expand its Houston footprint, the Hobby School has partnered with the recently established program at the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University.

In the summer, The Volcker Alliance sponsored a student and an alumna from the Hobby School cohort to attend a multi-university excursion to Washington, D.C., to explore public service careers. **Alexander Westerbeck** and **Emily Cruz** engaged in professional development activities, visited federal agency offices and networked with peers and program alumni working in the D.C. area to learn about their career trajectories and various public service pathways.



“My favorite session was hearing about the Environmental Defense Fund’s work for our community. It was especially fascinating because I hope to work in a nonprofit role in the future. I want to see and make a direct impact. Meeting with the people at the EDF reminded me of all I can accomplish after graduation and taught me that change within our society happens by working together.” – **Alexander Westerbeck**



Started in 2022, the Next Generation Leadership Academy is part of a national network coordinated by The Volcker Alliance for undergraduates seeking innovative careers rooted in public service and social impact. The Hobby School welcomed 11 new students, including Juliana Hernandez, to the 2024-2026 Next Generation Leadership Academy.



Harris Fellows are assigned to Harris County offices as full-time interns to support various county government operations over the summer semesters. Juliana Hernandez joined the program’s fourth cohort of undergraduates and post-baccalaureates. Harris Fellows develop their public service experience through meaningful work on constituent services, research, policy analysis, communications, community outreach and special projects while building professional networks.

AWARDS



CAREER-DRIVEN

In 2024, Hobby School Next Generation Leadership Academy member **Nikita Harris** received the national **Paul A. Volcker Government Internship Award**. Harris was selected from among NextGen Service Corp students from around the country. The recognition is inspired by the legacy of The Volcker Alliance's founding chairman, Paul A. Volcker, who was known for his lifelong commitment to the public good.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ENTHUSIAST

Cullen Watkins was chosen as the **Fall 2024 Civic Houston Internship Program Award** recipient for his accomplishments and dedication to public service. Watkins is a public policy major with a minor in entrepreneurship. Born in Houston and raised in Chicago, Watkins involved himself in local Illinois campaigns during high school, where his passion for politics and policy took root. He contributed to policy work on substance abuse prevention and treatment through the Mayor's Office of Homeland Security and Public Safety as a Civic Houston Intern. Watkins considers substance abuse a key to broader social issues such as crime, homelessness and economic prosperity. On campus, Watkins has been an active Young Conservatives of Texas member, served as president of the United Sobriety Alliance and was named a **2025 Hobby Fellow** in Austin in the office of Texas state Rep. Charles Cunningham.



NEXT LEVEL STUDENT

Vincent Fumey-Nassar was selected for the **2024 Democratic Erosion Consortium Research Fellowship Program**. The undergraduate public policy student trained in dataset coding and gained hands-on experience by analyzing and enhancing the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset and contributing to additional research and policy-focused projects. The 10-week remote program provided a \$5,000 stipend and one week of in-person training in Washington, D.C. The DEC is a research, teaching and policy collaboration with over 60 universities co-directed by Hobby School Associate Professor **Jessica Gottlieb**.



This cross-university team works collaboratively on projects addressing global incidents of democratic erosion, drafting policy briefs, conducting quantitative analyses or contributing to programming in the consortium.

CAPITOL EXPERIENCE



Edward Berning
U.S. Senator Ted Cruz

A dozen University of Houston undergraduates and post-baccalaureates experienced Capitol Hill as **2024 Leland Fellows**. Named for the late humanitarian **Mickey Leland**, congressman for the historic 18th Congressional District until he died in 1988, the Washington program led by **Jessica Ruland O'Connor** sponsors students to work as full-time interns in federal offices.

Edward Berning's opportunity to work as a congressional intern in the nation's capital with the office of U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz was a step toward his career goal of working in policy and politics. He later applied this experience to grassroots outreach efforts and other political campaign work with the Ted Cruz for Senate Campaign.

Leland Fellows researched legislation, collaborated with other offices and interacted with constituents. They experienced government during the presidential election season while building the

valuable skills, knowledge and networks vital for emerging leaders seeking to make a difference through public service.

"In school, I learned how bills become laws and how the legislative process works, but the program gave me an in-depth look into legislation, how to read it and the opportunity to touch and research the legislation being introduced. I enjoyed researching bills, but my favorite parts were my experiences in Washington, D.C. I met like-minded people and made connections on and off the Hill. This internship gave me insight into what policies might interest me most." – **Edward Berning**

The 2024 cohort included first-generation college students and graduates, former Hobby School interns with a variety of academic interests, such as public policy, political science, economics, energy and sustainability, human development, laws, values and policy, marketing, national security, phronesis, public leadership, Spanish and sociology.

Cruz Almonaci Vargas, Edward Berning, Daniel Boyd, Camila Flores Reyes, Myriam Grajeda, Miguel Gutierrez, Gabriela Hamdieh, Marie McGrew, Winnie Pham, Marissa Rendon Rebollar, Rohit Shajan and Dawn Treviño.



PUBLIC SERVICE PROFESSIONALISM



The 2023-2024 Certified Public Manager program cohort, co-directed by the Hobby School's **Emily Janowski** and professional executive management consultant **Arquella Hargrove**, was the largest, with nearly 50 participants representing almost 20 municipal, county and nonprofit entities. The executive training provides a comprehensive course of study for public sector managers to learn and apply best practices while strengthening their professional networks. Upon completing the 14-month program, graduates earn the nationally recognized professional credential of CPM.

EDUCATION MILESTONE

Graduating with a degree from the Hobby School means students are ready to lead in careers anchored in civic engagement, public service management and data analysis.

Dean **Jim Granato** conferred 45 degrees at the spring 2024 commencement, marking a special milestone with the inaugural class of six undergraduates earning degrees in public policy and first-time Master of Public Administration graduates walking the stage under the Hobby School banner. The Hobby School launched the bachelor's program in the spring of 2022 to complement graduate degree offerings in public policy. 10 were two-time Coogs, nine completed graduate certificates and two earned dual graduate degrees. Notably, 13 are members of Pi Alpha Alpha, a prestigious honor society in public affairs and administration.

Texas state **Rep. Armando Walle**, a proud two-time Coog, delivered the commencement address. Rep. Walle has long advocated for the Hobby School and has hosted and mentored numerous Hobby Fellows and Civic Houston Interns in his Houston and Austin offices.

Among the featured graduates were student speaker **Enrique Garcia** (MPP '24) and 2024 Garnet Coleman Award for Student Excellence recipients **Cruz Almonaci** ('24) and **Andrea Duhon** (MPA '24). Hobby School Alumni Association President **Leonard Chan** (MPA '09) delivered the alumni address.

Whether enhancing their current roles or exploring new avenues, Hobby School graduates are poised to make a difference in public, private and nonprofit sectors.



Hobby School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON



6

Undergraduates

45

Graduates

13

Pi Alpha Alpha

9

Graduates
Certificates

2

Dual Graduate
Degrees

HAIL TO THE CHIEFS

By Jeannie Kever

Passion for public service is more than a buzzy slogan around the Hobby School. Consider it an unofficial mission statement, a trait to be nurtured as students learn to translate passion into action. For many, that starts with the Civic Houston Internship Program, or CHIP, which offers internships with local government offices, nonprofits, campaigns and other mission-driven organizations. **All politics is local.**

“CHIP really was life-changing for me,” said Edith Santamaria, who interned at City Hall in 2015 and now is chief of staff to a member of the Houston City Council. “It connected the dots.”

Santamaria is one of three Civic Houston Intern alums now serving as chief of staff to a Houston City Council member. She, along with Russell Etherton and Hugo Mojica, spoke with the Hobby School about their careers in public service.





CALL TO SERVICE

YOU SPENT YEARS WORKING WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING BAKERRIPLEY, BEFORE COMING TO CITY HALL. WHAT LESSONS FROM YOUR TIME AS A CIVIC HOUSTON INTERN HAVE STAYED WITH YOU?

“What I learned in the CHIP program was the importance of building relationships. Some of the people I met on the Parker campaign, I still know. Those relationships will come back to support you for the rest of your life. It has been true for me since I was a CHIP intern. Every step of the way, there was someone in that campaign I could ask for advice, for a recommendation, to help with an application for a different job. I was hoping to be part of something. CHIP made that happen, and it kept going.”

PEOPLE TALK A LOT ABOUT THEIR PASSION FOR PUBLIC SERVICE. HOW DO YOU DEFINE THAT?

“I think you are called to public service. My family is a public service family, in the sense of working in the church, with community organizations. That has been the North Star for me, to be in service to the most vulnerable and to help people live the lives they want to live. I would do Meals on Wheels at Thanksgiving with my aunt. I saw her giving all she could. Sometimes, that was going out and protesting; sometimes, it was quietly making turkey sandwiches and having them delivered.”

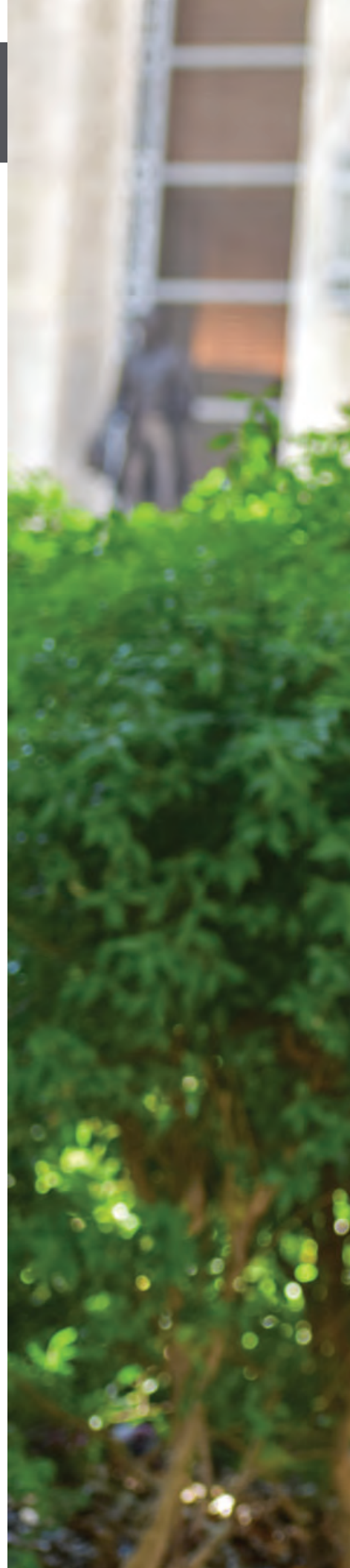
CHIEF OF STAFF IS AN INTENSE JOB. WHAT’S THE BEST PART OF YOUR ROLE AT CITY HALL?

“It’s incredibly important to make sure everyone is working together. No one can work in a silo. For the councilmember, it’s about translating his vision into actionable steps we can take. That’s fun, and it makes me look forward to coming to work every day. It’s scary because, at the district level, you affect the lives of 250,000 people every day. Little decisions can have enormous consequences. I go back to my mission statement: to be of service to the most vulnerable and help people live the lives they want to live.”

How it started...

CHIP Intern: 2009 Annise Parker for Houston mayoral campaign

Education: BS in Political Science, University of Houston





Russell Etherton

**Chief of Staff, Houston City
Councilmember Mario Castillo**



Hugo Mojica

Chief of Staff, Houston City
Councilmember Twila Carter

YOU'VE WORKED AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, FOR NONPROFITS, EVEN FOR THE HOUSTON ASTROS. WHAT LESSONS FROM YOUR TIME WITH CHIP HAVE STAYED WITH YOU?

"Hobby School opened doors for me through the internship. It gave me a perspective on what local government is. When you're here, you see every aspect, from making sure residents' trash is picked up on time, streets are fixed, all the local services we sometimes take for granted. Whenever you have an issue, that's where you run to try to get it fixed. The city has given so much to me, so I want to give it back through public service. The jobs I've had, they're not really a job. They have been an extension of who I am."

PEOPLE TALK A LOT ABOUT THE PASSION FOR PUBLIC SERVICE. HOW DO YOU DEFINE THAT?

"For me, public service has always been ingrained. It's part of who I am. I was born in Nicaragua. I am the definition of the American Dream. Who would have thought a kid from a Third World country could work for the Houston Astros? I have four championship rings. How did I get to this point? I'm blessed. I see my life as an opportunity to give back."

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HELP SHAPE THE NEXT GENERATION OF PUBLIC SERVANTS?

"If you are a people person, if this is something you want to do, helping others get the services they need, this is an honorable calling. We need to move the next generation into the halls of City Hall. I've been involved with LULAC for a number of years. I'm president of LULAC Council 402, and a former district director. Education has opened the doors to everything for me, and at LULAC, our focus has been education, raising scholarship funds. Sometimes we don't do enough to mentor students that want to be in this field, making sure students know about the possibilities, that this is a field that's rewarding. You make a difference in the lives of so many when you are involved in public service."

How it started...

CHIP Intern: Former City Councilmembers Martha Wong and Gabriel Vasquez, 1999-2000

Education: BS in Political Science, University of Houston, master's degree from University of Miami, Master of Public Administration, Florida International University

LOCAL LEVEL IMPACT

YOU'VE WORKED AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, FROM CITY HALL TO COUNTY, STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES. WHAT LESSONS FROM YOUR TIME WITH CHIP HAVE STAYED WITH YOU?

"I learned a lot about the inner workings of local government and getting down in the weeds. Things are not always as easy as they seem on paper. You sometimes have disagreements, which isn't a bad thing, but you learn. It was very eye-opening, the amount of work that goes into running a city. But at the end of the day, it's all to help the people who live here, the taxpayers. We're here for the people."

PEOPLE TALK A LOT ABOUT THEIR PASSION FOR PUBLIC SERVICE. HOW DO YOU DEFINE THAT?

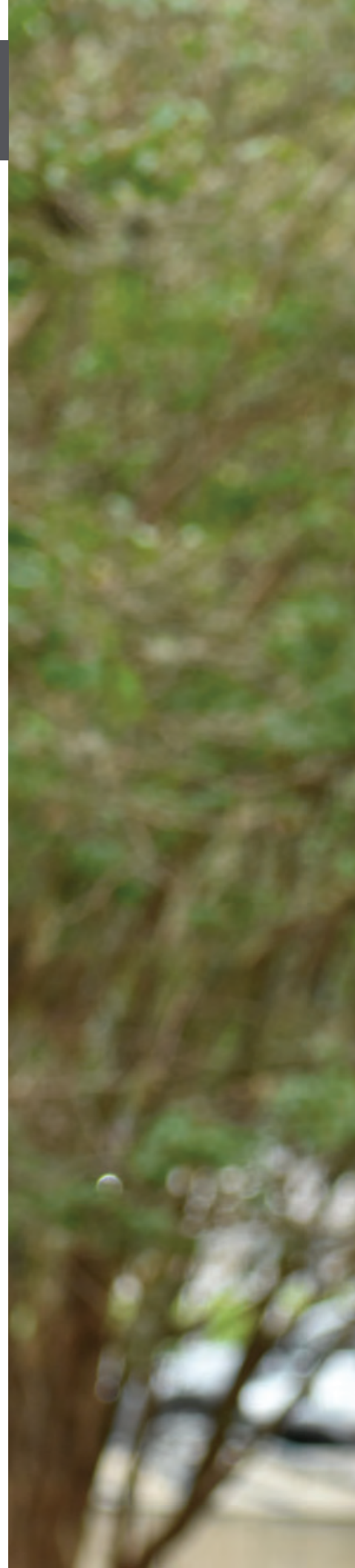
"It's working to improve the lives of others. We've had several natural disasters this year. We're not technically first responders, but we act like first responders, making sure our constituents are informed through social media, newsletters, and any form of communication we have and immediately after bringing resources to them. I've always had a passion for helping others. As a young college student, I wasn't sure how to connect that with my career goals. But I knew the disparities I would observe driving to campus, driving through the Third Ward. When you see communities that don't have the same resources, you start to question why. Then, I learned about CHIP and worked with the city council. I realized I could do everything I was thinking about at the local government level. I have worked at every level of government. I came back to the local level, and it's where I feel I can make the most impact. I see the community members we are helping. There's nothing like it."

CHIEF OF STAFF IS AN INTENSE JOB. WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF YOUR ROLE AT CITY HALL?

"No day is the same. One day I'll be doing a food distribution. The next morning, the council member and I will do a walkthrough on a drainage project with Houston Public Works to make sure that the community doesn't flood. At the end of the day, I still have to come back and do the desk work, but we are out in the field, serving our residents."

How it started...

CHIP Intern: Former Houston City Councilmember Robert Gallegos, 2015
Education: BS in Political Science, Master of Public Policy, University of Houston





Edith Santamaria

**Chief of Staff, Houston City
Councilmember Joaquin Martinez**

U.S. Fulbright Scholar Bound for Australia

Technology policy expert **Chris Bronk** will travel halfway around the globe this year to broaden his academic perspective and share expertise as the **2025 Fulbright Distinguished Chair** in Cyber-Information-Influence at the Defence and Security Institute at the University of Adelaide.



The associate professor's work centers on cybersecurity education, influence campaigns, information geopolitics in national security, international conflict and public diplomacy. Bronk was one of five University of Houston faculty members selected for the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program who will expand their worldviews and bring new insights back to Houston.

"The Fulbright is an academic bridge between our country and the world," said Bronk, who will spend 2025 in Australia. "It connects research programs and helps us to share our work with faraway colleagues. This, in turn, allows us to construct a global reputation in scholarship and establish international collaborations."

Bronk launched the "Science, Economics and Technology for Houston" lecture series in the spring, welcoming economist and former White House security advisor Daleep Singh to the University of Houston Law Center. The top international economics advisor to former President Joe Biden discussed the intersection of economics and global geopolitics, economic sanctions as a bipartisan tool and deploying economic statecraft. The series is a partnership among the Hobby School, the Center for International Studies at the University of St. Thomas and the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University to convene thought-provoking public lectures and assemblies on national security issues. The campus visit was partly sponsored by CORBU.

Grant Enhances Faculty Expertise

Hobby School Assistant Professor **Blake Heller** was awarded the **National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship** for the 2024 academic year. The competitive fellowship supports exceptional scholars conducting postdoctoral studies in critical areas of education research. The fellowship will significantly enhance Heller's research opportunities through professional development, funding and mentorship from senior scholars.

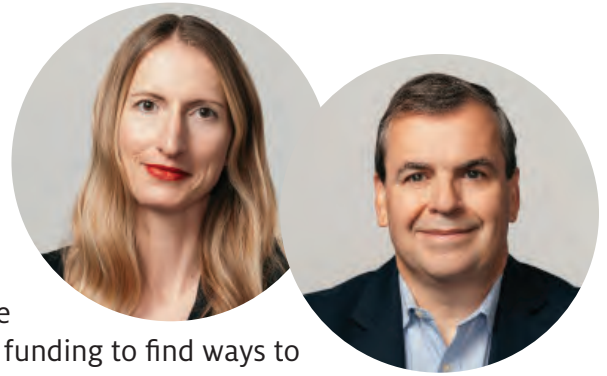


The \$70,000 grant allows Heller to dedicate himself to his research focus on applied policy analysis and a range of education policy topics, including alternative academic pathways, adult training and immigrant language skills.

"During my fellowship, I will develop a series of studies exploring the modern role of high school equivalency credentials in higher education and the labor market," said Heller. "High school equivalency credentials represent the primary second-chance pathway for uncredentialed adults to meet minimum requirements for many jobs or educational opportunities. Accurately understanding the role of these credentials in the 21st-century educational ecosystem and economy can help uncredentialed adults, adult education providers and policymakers assess how and where to focus their scarce resources of time, effort and money." - **Blake Heller**

Applied Research

In 2024, researchers from the Hobby School made significant strides in collaborative efforts to advance energy policy and technologies. The Center for Public Policy's **Gail Buttorff** and **Pablo Pinto** lead two of the three University of Houston projects awarded funding from the U.S. Department of Energy's early-stage research initiative. The projects are part of the DOE's \$17.5 million funding to find ways to make the most of the nation's energy resources.



In addition to their research contributions, Hobby School faculty and staff play an integral role in UH Energy forums throughout the year, providing expertise in the energy transition and its social and environmental implications. Buttorff moderated "The Gulf Coast Hydrogen Ecosystem: Opportunities and Solutions," exploring the Community Benefits Plan—a DOE initiative emphasizing environmental justice and community engagement in the energy transition.

The Hobby School reinforced its commitment to fostering a skilled workforce through its involvement in the summer Data for Energy Transition camp, a National Science Foundation program designed to prepare students for careers in energy data science. In its second year, the program featured contributions from Hobby School faculty Pablo Pinto, Gail Buttorff and **Sunny Wong**, who led the public policy module alongside Research Associate **María Pérez Argüelles** and Research Assistant Professor **Agustín Vallejo**.

Together, these initiatives reflect the Hobby School's ongoing leadership in public policy research, its collaboration with other university departments and government agencies, and its commitment to informing policy leaders and educating the next generation of public service professionals.

Leveling Up

Nora Reikosky joined the Hobby School as the 2024-2025 Elizabeth D. Rockwell Center Visiting Professor on Ethics and Leadership. The University of Pennsylvania post-doctorate in education and political science teaches an undergraduate course on contemporary political philosophy and policy. Her research focuses on the role of wealthy plutocratic actors, like philanthropists and philanthropic corporations, in shaping the priorities and purposes of public education.



New Assistant Professor **Valentine Gilbert** teaches undergraduate economics and policy analysis and theory and practice to students interested in public policy. He brings a research focus on urban and public economics, specifically on housing affordability and understanding the geographic and distributional consequences of changes in housing supply and costs to the Hobby School roster of faculty experts.

Pauline Lemaire is a visiting researcher at the Center for Public Policy. The postdoctoral researcher from the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway focuses on authoritarianism and political participation, with an emphasis on Rwanda. She has a doctoral degree in comparative politics and two master's degrees in democracy building and international relations from the University of Bergen. The native of France works with the research staff on Hobby School projects and furthers her own research on transnational information control.

SURVEYING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE



In 2024, the Hobby School conducted comprehensive election research, providing valuable insight for policymakers, elected leaders and the public. Through strategic partners and innovative methodologies, Hobby School primary investigators **Renée Cross** and **Mark P. Jones** and researchers produced a series of reports informing public discourse on Texas' evolving political landscape.

A highlight of the 2024 research is the culmination of **Texas Trends**, a five-year panel study with Texas Southern University's Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs examining the state's changing populations and political opinions. The partnership yielded critical data on voter intentions, candidate favorability and issues such as the resilience of the Texas power grid, immigration, climate change and housing.

Hobby School election research also delved into the **2024 Texas primaries**, weighing voter preferences for presidential candidates, U.S. Senate and local offices. Researchers analyzed Texans' opinions on school choice and the impeachment trial of the Texas attorney general. The findings provided a snapshot of the electorate's priorities and offered crucial insights for understanding the state's political dynamics.

The **Texas Votes** reports sought to answer two questions: Would Texas remain a Republican stronghold, and what issues were driving voter decisions? The survey included an oversample of Harris County voters to capture key issues for local and statewide policy discussions, including statewide races, Harris County election, election integrity and public attitudes toward electricity infrastructure.

Hobby School researchers surveyed **Harris County's 2024 primary election** voters to understand their preferences for candidates, including races for district attorney, sheriff and U.S. Senate. The research offered a deep dive into the role Harris County played in shaping the state's overall outcomes.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS: BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Mutually beneficial partnerships help expand the Hobby School footprint in research, student leadership and public policy education. Because policy plays an integral role in daily lives, collaborative projects intertwined with entities such as UH Energy, UH Department of Economics, UH Law Center, UH Department of Political Science, The Volcker Alliance, The Texas Tribune and Texas public policy schools are multiplying the school's influence in the academic and public sphere. In 2024, the Hobby School embarked on and continued several projects aligned with its mission to empower the next generation of public leaders and provide applied research to inform policy and decision-makers.

HARNESSING TEXAS POLICY AND POLITICS

In February, the Hobby School co-hosted “We the Texans: A Symposium on the State of Democracy,” one of a series of daylong symposiums around Texas examining the state of democracy. The event convened various experts in multiple fields to explore civic engagement and policy issues. The symposium started with a conversation about democracy at a national level and then turned to Texas-specific topics. Master of Public Policy/Master of Social Work candidate **Lorenzo Salinas** discussed how young Texans positively impact their communities beyond the ballot box on a panel with Alvin City Councilmember Joel Castro and Rice University alumna Vivian Zheng. Hobby School students facilitated roundtable discussions reflecting on key takeaways from the panels and how Texans can best tackle the state's problems through community initiatives and innovative and collaborative solutions.

Students, staff and alumni were immersed in thought-provoking conversations at the **2024 Texas Tribune Festival** about what it means to be a Texan through the lens of relevant policy issues, from climate change and infrastructure to immigration and the economy. It was an opportunity to engage with peers and speakers, ask questions and return to campus inspired and empowered by diverse ideas and perspectives.



Dean Jim Granato took part in a panel at Texas Southern University to discuss training the next generation of public service leaders alongside Michael O. Adams from Texas Southern University's Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs, Karabi C. Bezboruah from UT Arlington's College of Architecture, Planning and Public Affairs, JR DeShazo from The University of Texas at Austin's LBJ School of Public Affairs and John B. Sherman from Texas A&M's Bush School of Government and Public Service. The statewide leaders in higher education exchanged insights and information with students, experts and alumni about their shared mission, student recruitment and other topics related to the evolving public policy landscape.

FROM THE LECTERN

Prominent speakers, artists and leaders highlighted Hobby School programming in 2024, including a new podcast, returning hour-long talk show and 2024 lecture series, “The Future of Democracy in America.” The fall series, sponsored by the **Elizabeth D. Rockwell Center on Ethics and Leadership**, examined the political climate in the U.S. during the presidential election year.

American journalist and acclaimed author **George Packer** described a nation grappling with profound challenges, an unprecedented political landscape and a possible roadmap for addressing the country’s deep-seated fractures, injustices and divisions.

Former U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development **Julián Castro** shared his experiences from San Antonio City Hall to the White House, giving an insider’s perspective on the nation’s pressing issues. His was also the featured **2024 Elizabeth D. Rockwell Distinguished Lecture on Ethics and Leadership**.

Former U.S. Rep. **Adam Kinzinger** recounted his time in Congress and shared his hopeful vision for the country’s future during the final lecture to close out the series after the November election. The former Illinois congressman discussed the election outcome and detailed his perspective on American democracy.

The Elizabeth D. Rockwell Center, led by **Daniel Engster**, also welcomed two prominent figures in the fields of art and policing. Multidisciplinary artist **Samora Pinderhughes** and sociologist **Michael Sierra-Arévalo** covered subjects in structural violence and restorative justice.



HOBBY TALKS AND TAKES



Hobby School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

HOBBY TALKS

Hobby School digital programming expands the school's access to thought-provoking discussions and encourages cross-disciplinary dialogue on relevant issues.

Hobby Talks is a new podcast series from the Hobby School produced in partnership with the Center for Student Media at the University of Houston. Hosted by Dean **Jim Granato**, the podcast features timely conversations on politics and policy with experts, scholars and those guiding the most complex challenges facing the region and state.

The inaugural episode launched in November with former Illinois congressman **Adam Kinzinger** discussing the presidential election outcome, his public service journey and the future of American democracy.

“Hobby Talks offers another programming option for our audiences seeking important viewpoints and expertise in an easy-to-consume podcast platform,” said Hobby School Executive Director of Communications and Marketing **Victoria Cordova**, who produces the series. “As our reach continues to grow, so does the demand for new ways to meet our community where they are.”

The Hobby Hour returned with an array of speakers and topics, including a dive into Latino voters and the 2024 elections, the impact of immigration on the economy, inflation's role in the 2024 elections and an intimate one-on-one conversation with the late Sylvester Turner, former mayor of Houston.



COMMUNITY TIES

The Hobby School's ties to the community are profound and wide. Its graduates and former interns are working at all levels of government and in public service positions across the state and country, applying their leadership, ethical and academic training to their professions. Its public outreach seeks to engage communities based on the lessons of its founder and greatest champion, Bill Hobby, former lieutenant governor of Texas for 18 years.

CELEBRATING BILL HOBBY

The Hobby School community celebrated the legacy of the school's namesake and the public launch of "Bill Hobby: A Life of Journalism and Public Service," the latest biography on the great statesman. The book chronicles his life and impact and his significant contributions to Texas as a journalist, lawmaker, philanthropist and public education leader. Historians **Don Carleton** and **Erin L. Purdy** described Hobby's commitment to a transparent and efficient government that worked to better the lives of all Texans, his pragmatic and collaborative leadership style rooted in integrity, and the extensive research and interviews that led to the book's publication.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

In April, the Master of Public Administration program recognized four public service leaders whose professional practice reflects the values held by the graduate program by improving their communities through dynamic problem-solving and ethical leadership at the 13th annual awards luncheon. These local leaders have laid the groundwork for public service in the Houston area to solve issues through collaboration, reaching beyond departments and individual cities to other jurisdictions and sectors with government, nonprofits and corporate partners.



Jersey Village City Manager **Austin Bleess**; Fort Bend County Homeland Security and Emergency Management Coordinator **Greg Babst**; Memorial Villages Police Department Board Commissioner **James Huguenard**; and Director of the City of Houston Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement **Olivera Jankovska**.



MPA candidates **Dahlia Chaudhury** and **Elissa Miller** were recognized with the **2024 Kathleen P. Rubinstein Best Paper Award**.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS



The 2024 Hobby Leadership Award winners, Certified Public Manager **Terry Lynch** and former Hobby School intern **Hugo Mojica**, were honored for making a difference in their professions and communities at the school's annual Student and Alumni Mixer in November. Lynch is the police chief for the City of Wharton. He has spent much of his career in policing and five years as a Wharton city councilmember. He was recently elected to serve as a Wharton County Junior College trustee. Mojica works for the City of Houston as the chief of staff for Houston City Councilmember Twila Carter. His professional career spans working for municipal, nonprofit and private agencies.

MEDIA MATTERS

The Hobby School had **2,104 news citations** in the past fiscal year, including coverage of the primary elections, Texas Trends and Texas Votes surveys and opinion editorials on school vouchers, teacher policies at Houston ISD and electricity service reliability authored for the Houston Chronicle. Data from the reports was widely covered in influential media outlets such as The New York Times, Newsweek, CBS NewsF, Crossroads Today, The Center Square, MSN, Newsmax, RealClearPolitics, Texas Tribune, Texas Standard, Texas Monthly, Texas Public Radio, Houston Chronicle, Houston Public Media, The Dallas Morning News, KHOU TV, KPRC TV, WFAA TV, San Antonio Express-News and KTRH AM, among others.

Hobby School faculty members and researchers contribute to conversations on topics that impact public policy and address Texans' opinions on issues of importance to the state and nation.



Hobby School experts share data-driven analysis and expert opinions on a wide range of policy issues. Senior Executive Director **Renée Cross** is a political analyst for Houston Public Media's "Houston Matters with Craig Cohen" and a regular source for regional and Texas politics for local, state and national media. Along with Senior Research Fellow **Mark P. Jones**, Cross co-wrote an op-ed about electric grid accountability in the Houston Chronicle. Dean **Jim Granato** and Associate Dean **Sunny Wong** discussed new federal policies in an op-ed for the Houston Business Journal, and Associate Professor **Blake Heller** delved into GED college-readiness designations and their potential to serve as a pipeline to achieving postsecondary education in an op-ed for Inside Higher Ed.



Listening to our Stakeholders

Leonard Chan

Alumni Board President **Leonard Chan** (MPA '09) is part of Hobby School's growing influence in the greater community. The Houston Fire Department accreditation manager has leveraged his graduate education to become an active leader and mentor. Chan was elected president when the **Hobby School Alumni Association** and the **MPA Alumni Association** merged in 2023. As he delivered the alumni address at the 2024 Hobby School commencement ceremony, Chan advised graduates to keep learning, making connections and staying engaged.

"Graduation should mark the starting point, not the end point, of your career. The Hobby School experience built the foundation, but patience is needed to make a lasting difference in any field. Read the trade journals, listen to subject matter experts and lean on fellow alumni for support to keep learning."



BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS



Two Hobby School Advisory Board members enjoy deep ties to the University of Houston. **Matthew Moseley** graduated with a Master of Public Policy from the Hobby School in 2022 and was awarded the Garnet Coleman Award for Student Excellence. Since 2020, he has been chief of staff for the Harris County Intergovernmental and Global Affairs Department. Moseley says his education and training from the Hobby School prepared him to provide reliable policy insights to meet the challenges of a dynamic, evolving Harris County.

Katherine Summerlin is an experienced public service professional and senior staff analyst with the City of Houston Public Works, Transportation and Drainage. She was introduced to public service and local government as an intern in the Hobby School's Civic Houston Internship Program. The two-time UH alumna earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a graduate degree in public administration and dedicates her time to community and professional organizations.



The Hobby School Advisory Board helps to guide the school's efforts and shape the future of its teaching, research and civic engagement activities. With leadership and experience from a broad range of public and private expertise, the board serves as strong ambassadors of the school's mission in the community.



Former Civic Houston Interns Daniel Santamaria, Traci Buttram and Katherine Summerlin

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Faces, Places and Purpose





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