

## PRESS RELEASE

### News from the University of Houston-Downtown

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#### For Immediate Release

## UHD Hosts 200 High School Students for Buffalo Bayou Service Project Harmony Public Schools and Taylor High School-Alief join STEM service-learning event as part of Global Youth Service Day

HOUSTON (April 22, 2015) – Approximately 200 high school students from Harmony Public Schools (HPS) and Taylor High School-Alief (THS) joined undergraduates at the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) Friday for a day of service and hands-on learning for the Buffalo Bayou Service Project.

As a part of Global Youth Service Day, the students took morning walking tours along the bayou with natural science professors and discussed flora and fauna found in Buffalo Bayou. The student teams then analyzed collected water samples and learned about invasive species in Buffalo Bayou by examining them under microscopes set up along the shore.

Students performed chemistry experiments with Tyra Hessel, Ph.D., associate professor of chemistry, and Eszter Trufan, Ph.D., assistant professor of chemistry. The students then rotated to experiments in field biology with Michael Tobin, Ph.D., assistant professor of biology, and made observations in environmental microbiology with Gabriela Bowden, Ph.D., assistant professor of microbiology, who later gave a presentation to participants on the microbiome. Students also took walking tours of the bayou hosted by Brad Hoge, Ph.D., associate professor of geology and science education.

“UHD’s Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning is proud to partner with HPS and THS in this high-impact, community engagement project that ignites young students’ passion for the sciences, while also beautifying Buffalo Bayou,” said Bill Flores, Ph.D., president of UHD. “This day of service introduces students to exciting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and highlights the importance of giving back to the communities where we live and work.”

In the afternoon, UHD Professor Poonam Gulati, Ph.D., hosted a Science and Society Symposium, in which UHD students in her general microbiology and immunology courses conducted oral and poster presentations on topics of interest to high school students, including the meningitis vaccine, probiotics, food safety, bioremediation, obesity and the immune system, and allergies.

Following the research presentations and educational skits performed by UHD undergraduates, natural science faculty members interacted with the students and shared interesting findings from their own research on a variety of compelling subjects.

Several UHD faculty members played integral roles in organizing and leading the day of service, including Lisa Morano, Ph.D., Gulati and Brad Hoge, Ph.D.

Throughout the day of service – which included the University’s annual “Ed’s Bayou Cleanup Project,” named for UHD’s mascot, Ed-U-Gator – UHD students gathered trash and recyclable materials from the bayou and its surrounding areas to both clean and protect the environment near campus.

“The Harmony students and staff enjoyed a great day of hands-on learning with the UHD students and faculty,” said Julie Norton, director of communications at Harmony Public Schools. “Everyone left with a new appreciation for the Buffalo Bayou, microbes and microorganisms, and the educational opportunities available at UHD.”

“I had a great time with my school at UHD,” said Raven Tate, a student at Harmony School of Science-High Sugar Land. “I was thoroughly interested in the topics at hand and it was a very hands-on experience. We learned about the admissions process and the campus and got to talk to students and get a true perspective about the college experience. I left the field trip with core knowledge about the environment.”

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**Photo Cutline 1:**

Eszter Trufan, Ph.D., assistant professor of chemistry at the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD), conducts a science experiment with high school students during the Buffalo Bayou Service Project late last week.

**Photo Cutline 2:**

Faculty members from the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) guide Houston-area high school students through science experiments during the University’s annual Buffalo Bayou Service Project.

**About the University of Houston-Downtown:**

UHD, founded in 1974, is one of four distinct universities in the University of Houston System, and is the second largest university in Houston and the 15<sup>th</sup> largest four-year, public university in Texas. One of the most ethnically diverse universities in the country, UHD ranks 33<sup>rd</sup> nationally for graduating Hispanic students with bachelor’s degrees and 37<sup>th</sup> nationally for graduating African-American students with bachelor’s degrees. Approximately 2,000 students graduate from UHD each year. For more information about UHD, please visit [www.uhd.edu](http://www.uhd.edu).