



Graduate students in Dr. Monica Perales's *Research in Public History* class search University of Houston archival records for exhibit items. These boxes represent a mere fraction of the physical and digital materials students considered over two semesters. Shown left to right, Stephon Boykin, Rahil Asgari, and Alec Story. Photo courtesy of Monica Perales.

Agents of Change: Celebrating Innovation at UH's Centennial, *A Collaborative Exhibit Bringing the 100 Years of Stories Project Full Circle*

By Mary Manning

In the fall of 2020, the Center for Public History (CPH), Houston Public Media (HPM), and UH Libraries embarked upon an exciting three-year project, *100 Years of Stories: Documenting a Century at the University of Houston (UH)*,



UH began as Houston Junior College in June 1927 with evening classes at the San Jacinto High School building.

Photo courtesy of UH Libraries Digital Collections, ark:/84475/d071676w142.

leading up to the university's centennial. Funded by UH friend and patron Carey C. Shuart, the project features a collaborative approach to storytelling in which the UH Libraries played a vital research support role in the project's goal of collecting, sharing, and preserving the



The Roy G. Cullen Memorial Building was the first building completed at UH's permanent campus site in 1939. Designed by architects Alfred C. Finn and Lamar Cato, the building is believed to be the first constructed with air conditioning on a U.S. higher education campus. It is pictured here with the Reflection Pool in the foreground.

Photo courtesy of UH Libraries Digital Collections, ark:/84475/do2252j7646.

stories of the university's people and institutions that have defined our city and the region.

Work on the project began in 2020 just as the country entered the pandemic lockdown. During this phase, the UH Libraries supported CPH's *Houston History* magazine staff and students as they researched and outlined stories about UH students, alumni, faculty, administrators, and institutions for ten video, television, and radio spots produced by HPM, under the program title *100 Years of Houston*. UH Libraries Special Collections provided virtual research assistance and trained CPH researchers to use the archival finding aid databases, Digital Collections, and Audio Video Repository. With the reading room closed to in-person visits, UH



Originally occupied in 1946, Veterans Village provided temporary trailer housing to World War II veterans, who came to UH under the G.I. Bill, and their families.

Photo courtesy of UH Libraries Digital Collections, ark:/84475/do0989r273z.

Special Collections staff provided the students with digitized research materials for their outlines and assisted HPM's manager for Media Production, Fujio Watanabe, in finding additional visual content for the videos.

During the project's second phase, the student researchers switched their focus to creating 100 Years of Stories content that would appear in the *Houston History* magazine over the next two years. Classes resumed on campus, and Dr. Debbie Harwell, the magazine's editor, taught undergraduate courses, in which students learned to conduct oral histories and write public-focused, academically researched articles. Special Collections staff supported the effort by providing instruction on conducting research in the archives and welcomed students back into the reading room. The Special Collections staff also provided digitized images that students selected to illustrate their published works.

In 2023, 100 Years of Stories entered its third year and its final phase, culminating with a student-created exhibition in the UH MD Anderson Library.

So far, this article has focused primarily on the role UH Libraries Special Collections played in the project's first two years. However, I would be remiss in not mentioning the critical role of the newly created Libraries' Preservation and Reformatting Department (PARD), which in 2023 took over the digitization of images, moving and still, along with other vital preservation functions. Moreover, PARD played a mammoth role in the exhibit creation: digitizing content, fabricating and installing, as well as guiding and constructing a corresponding online display that will launch in 2024. Dean Athena Jackson and the Libraries Administration, Development, and Communications Departments have also provided crucial support for the 100 Years of Stories project.

Texas Southern University (TSU) dancers perform on the KUHT television program *People are Taught to be Different*. Proposed by Dr. Henry Allen Bullock, the program was developed through a collaboration between TSU and KUHT. The twelve episodes first aired in 1958 and explored experiences common to all humanity.

Photo courtesy of UH Libraries Digital Collections, ark:/84475/do87032448d.



The Exhibit

The exhibit *Agents of Change: Celebrating Innovation at UH's Centennial* is a student-created exhibit done in collaboration with UH Libraries and CPH. It focuses on people associated with UH who led the way in creating positive change at the university and in the community, and how the university itself became more accessible and diverse across time.

Public history graduate students in two of Dr. Monica Perales's classes curated the exhibit as part of their coursework—giving them real-world experience to add to their resumes and prepare them for careers as public historians. Perales, Harwell, and University Archivist Mary Manning

form the curatorial leadership team, planning the exhibit, working with partners across campus, and supporting the students' work.

This exhibit builds upon the scholarship of students who worked on *Houston History* articles and the Houston Public Media video, television, and radio spots in earlier phases of the project. Through their coursework, Perales's students learned to conduct research using UH Special Collections and materials from other archives. The students developed an exhibit focus, generated an exhibit title and narrative, selected objects for the exhibit, developed a layout, and drafted item labels.

The exhibit explores three themes, UH's founding, expansion of buildings and programs, and the university's impact on the community. The exhibit's story starts in 1927 when working Houstonians sought access to higher education that fit their needs. They advocated for themselves, took their concerns to Houston Independent School District superintendent E. E. Oberholtzer, and the forerunner to UH, Houston Junior College, was born.

The exhibit narrative continues with the New Deal and the G.I. Bill, which propelled growth on campus through physical expansion and increased enrollment. With this expansion came greater diversity in the 1960s, when the student group Afro-Americans for Black Liberation (AABL) demanded equal rights and forever changed UH. UH met their demand for an African American studies program, making it one of the nation's first.



Lynn Eusan and Gene Locke, leaders of the student organization AABL, whose "10 Demands," presented to UH on February 7, 1969, called for the creation of an African American Studies program, which university administrators began planning that same year.

Photo courtesy of UH Libraries Digital Collections, ark:/84475/do48128b61d.



UH President Marguerite Ross Barnett displays her Cougar spirit with the UH mascot, Shasta. The first woman and first African American to serve as UH president, she is noted for establishing dynamic programs, community networks, and successful fundraising campaigns.

Photo courtesy of UH Libraries Digital Collections, ark:/84475/d063827C390.

Students, alumni, faculty, and administrators have led the way as agents of change by increasing opportunities for UH and Houston's diverse population. Alumni such as Graciela "Gracie" Saenz, Maria Jimenez, Yolanda Black Navarro, and Phyllis Frye became tireless activists on campus and in their communities beyond campus. With the arrival of UH System Chancellor and UH President Renu Khator in 2008 came another period of accelerated growth on campus, including the new Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine, educating a diverse body of medical professionals to serve our diverse city.

CPH students illuminate these contributions and much more in their exhibit *Agents of Change: Celebrating Innovation at UH's Centennial*.



Gracie Saenz and U.S. Representative Ken Bentsen, Jr. meet with President Bill Clinton during his visit to Houston after enacting NAFTA.

Photo courtesy of Gracie Saenz.



A member of the UH College of Medicine's inaugural class, Maya Fontenot observes Dr. Steven Starks. The curriculum integrates students into clinical rotations during their first year, which is unique.

Photo courtesy of the Tilman J. Fertitta College of Medicine.

A *Houston History* magazine launch and exhibit opening is slated for September 27, 2023, in the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Pavilion at UH. The exhibit will remain on display on the second floor of the MD Anderson Library until May 31, 2024.

The Libraries will continue to support the 100 Years of Stories project by launching an online exhibit and by preserving and providing access to the oral histories created as part of the historical research. As 100 Years of Stories lights the path to the UH centennial celebration in 2027, UH Libraries looks forward to future collaboration with the Center for Public History and Houston Public Media. **HH**

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Planning the exhibit spanned two semesters and involved making tough choices on what to include. Graduate students Samantha de León, Cady Hammer, and Olabode Shadare, seated left to right, work with Dr. Monica Perales to determine which categories and stories to feature.

Photo courtesy of Devin Darden.