



# DIAMOND FAMILY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

▶ JUNE 2021



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# From the Desk of Kolby M. Robinson, LMSW

What a fast-tracked year this has been for our program, students, and University. But we have made it to the close of the second year (2nd Cohort) of students in the Diamond Family Scholars Program at the University of Houston.

Throughout this past year, we have learned so much about resilience, perseverance, and strength. And through it all we still stand. Our students were the strength of the program, and their resilience and perseverance did not go unnoticed. They took care of each other as well as the campus and community at large. Cohorts 1 & 2 took time to bond with each other (even through physical distancing) and have made strides towards ensuring an amazing start to the fall 2021 semester.

As we reflect on how far the program and its students have come, I am reminded of the words of Benjamin Franklin, “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” Our scholars are living proof that when an investment is made, you will see great return. They have taken all obstacles thrown their way and continued to flourish. They took control of the program and became its voice and face during the pandemic. Their ownership of the program and its success was the driving force in getting their professors to understand them more and reach out about becoming mentors for them and future cohorts of the program.

It has truly been, and remains, an honor to serve in a role that allows me to play a daily impact in their progress through college and to see them mature and gain independence over their lives one day at a time. As we move forward and continue to grow and expand, I intend on continuing this journey with the same vigor and hope for the remarkable things that lie ahead.

**Go Coogs!**

Kolby M. Robinson, LMSW

# Achieving Dreams

## **PROGRAM MISSION**

The Diamond Family Scholars Program is committed to creating a sustainable framework that supports Diamond Family Scholars in their pursuit of academic and social opportunities at the University of Houston through a strong network on campus, advising and programming that focus on academic and professional goals, and increasing college access, retention, and graduation among students who experienced foster care.

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

The progression of the program has us getting closer to our first cohort's graduation. While we are not there yet, we are remaining steadfast in accomplishing our other program goals:

1. Increase in the graduation rate of former foster care students from 37% to 80% from first year to fourth year of program
2. Create a sustainable housing and support network for students formerly in the foster care system
3. Improve postsecondary outcomes for students who have been traditionally underrepresented so that students are well prepared for careers.

Our ambition to create a sustainable housing and support network continues to be ongoing and successful with our connection with Student Housing and Residential Life (SHRL) being one of our largest and most active liaisons on campus. The support that SHRL provides to our scholars and staff is consistent, dependable, and always accommodating. Our students are active in their respective housing units and have relationships with staff there as well. SHRL has even become an employer for a few of our scholars!

## **DIAMOND FAMILY SCHOLARS PROGRAM AND THE URBAN EXPERIENCE PROGRAM (UEP)**

The Diamond Family Scholars Program is currently housed under the leadership of the Urban Experience Program (UEP) in the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services at UH. UEP was created in 1995 to support student success by expanding opportunities for educationally and economically underserved groups. Program activities include financial aid, internships, mentorships, and skills workshops. There also are social and community service opportunities, which connect students with others in both the university community and beyond. The primary goal of UEP is to serve the needs of the individual student.

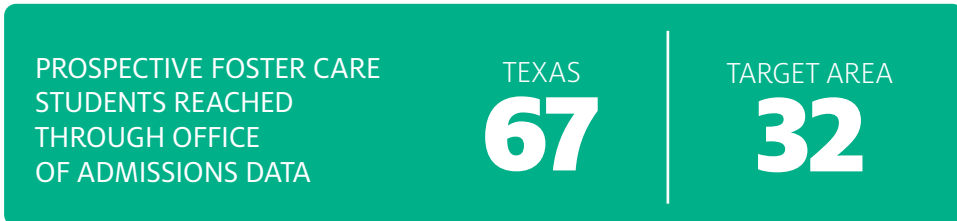
Being housed under UEP works in the best interest of our scholars as they direct access to peer mentors, a variety of workshops and additional financial support if needed. Both programs work together to ensure that students are maximizing their time towards achieving their goals.

# Fostering the Future

## METRICS FOR SUCCESS

As the program continues to grow and expand, we maintain our metrics for success and adjust as needed to meet the current needs presented in our world. If this global pandemic has taught us anything, it is the importance of healthy adjustment. In previous years we solely used the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid query to identify students from the University for a direct invite to apply, not yet knowing if these students have committed to attending the University. Our new data partnership with the Office of Admissions has proven to provide us with a more streamlined approach to identifying students that directly meet the qualifications of the program and who are committed to attending the University. The vast difference in the numbers allows for a more focused approach to the outreach we perform from an internal perspective.

## OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT



\* With the unique circumstances this year, our application process has been extended into July and Cohort 3 scholars have not yet been identified at the time of this report.

# Diamond Scholar Profile

During the 2020-2021, the Diamond Family Scholars Program continued to demonstrate impressive success during our virtual experience. The year brought us 12 students from colleges on campus including the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, the C.T. Bauer College of Business, and the Cullen College of Engineering.

## GENDER IDENTITIES



## SCHOLAR RACIAL IDENTITIES



GPA (GRADE POINT AVERAGE)  
CUMULATIVE TOTAL

3.3

HONORS COLLEGE

2 STUDENTS

DEAN'S LIST

4 STUDENTS



# Student Activities

## PROGRAMMING

This year, our programming was more student-led to allow students to be engaged even in the virtual world. Our students were hands on in selecting what we would discuss each month as a group. Some of our programming topics this year included:

- SEPTEMBER | VOTING AND HUMAN RIGHTS**  
 Students discussed requirements for registering to vote in Texas. They provided each other with a safe space to express a difference in viewpoints and continue to support each other.
- NOVEMBER | MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND THE HOLIDAYS**  
 Students discussed tips they each used to complete the semester strong and deal with the emotional overload that can come during the holiday season. They discussed plans for staying connected during the break and even celebrating the holidays together.
- APRIL | MEET THE DIAMONDS**  
 The students were FINALLY able to meet the Diamonds. The light hearted conversation and break from the norm was much needed. As always, the Diamonds' open nature allowed the students to be comfortable. They look forward to meeting in person in the fall.

## SERVICE

Another aspect of programming included the semester service projects. This year our students selected their own projects in the fall and spring semester in addition to attending the Fall College Day with the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) in November. In the fall, they participated in a food pick up sponsored by the Houston Food Bank in a response to the food insecurity experienced by many due to COVID-19. And in the spring, they participated in Gardening Day with the Target Hunger, which was started in 1989 as a way to combat hunger in inner city Houston by partnering with the Houston Food Bank to provide critical food assistance to the most vulnerable in our community.

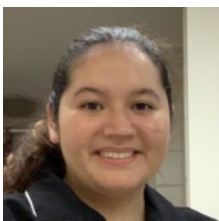




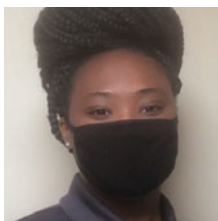
# Diamond Scholars Education and Academic Achievements

## INTERNSHIPS

As we grow, we have the privilege of watching our Scholars set goals and achieve them. This summer, two of our program participants have internships in New York with Marriott and Hilton!



ANDREA



IVY

## HONORS COLLEGE

We saw our student participation in the Honors College increase, and we now proudly have two students in the UH Honors College!

## PEER MENTOR SUCCESS

Our Peer Mentor, Dylan, surpassed all expectations and made it his responsibility that all the Scholars bonded and felt connected to the program through monthly, and sometimes weekly, bonding activities, including but not limited to pumpkin carving and movie nights.

## SCHOLARS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The journey through college can seem intimidating, especially as it relates to finding employment related to your field. But no worries there for us as Diamond Scholar Sean has secured a position at Clear Creek Golf Club as a Sales Associate as he pursues his degree in Sports Management! We are so proud of him!



SEAN

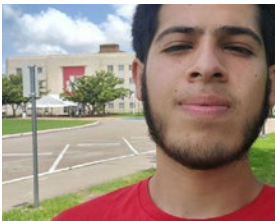


# Diamond Family Scholars Program Liaisons

Our focus with our campus liaisons this year was to ensure that our students did not lack any needs while the university shifted to a remote work environment. Our partners in Student Housing and Residential Life, Office of Admissions, Office of Financial Aid, Dean of Students, Women and Gender Resource Center, Center for Diversity and Inclusion and Counseling and Psychological Services, made sure our students experienced no insecurities and made the transition smooth! We cannot thank them enough for their dedication to student success.

## Student Spotlight:

NESTOR S.



*"I chose the University of Houston because it offered a great education without me having to go far from home. Especially knowing the reputation of our College of Business, I knew that UH would be a good school with many opportunities — it's just a matter of taking advantage. Also, something else that attracted me was knowing the connections I could make through networking over my journey as a Cougar. I tried stepping into it with an open mind and just tried to enjoy it as much as possible. Getting to UH and getting to see the diversity of mindsets was really great because it allowed me to interact with mindsets that I probably never would've otherwise. I'm excited to see what in-person classes will be like, with more people on campus and lots more opportunities for networking.*

*I want to become a financial advisor. I'm not sure whether I want to do it as a personal advisor or go towards the corporate side yet. The Diamond Family Scholars Program allows me the opportunity to not having to distract myself from school responsibilities to cover a financial expense I couldn't afford to cover at the moment. I'm grateful I can put my focus towards school thanks to the scholarship.*

*My advice to other students is to never give up and work towards your goals every day — not just when you feel like it. There were a lot of times of uncertainty this first year, but I promised myself to give it my best and never give up. Have goals and always keep them in mind; don't let having fun distract you from your goals."*

# The Diamond Family Emergency Fund

The Diamond's vision to establish the Diamond Emergency Fund ensures that University of Houston students who have experienced time in foster care have the ability to afford everyday necessities as well as avoid obstacles that could affect their education. This support may include transportation to campus, books needed for coursework, or the purchase of a cap and gown to participate in graduation.

By challenging the University to raise \$100,000 and creating this 1:1 matching opportunity, we look forward to ensuring there will be \$200,000 raised for this vulnerable population campus-wide.

A targeted matching gift table was created to identify potential corporate, foundation, and individual Diamond Emergency Fund philanthropic supporters. University Advancement has identified and solicited several foundations and individual supporters whose philanthropic giving aligns with the Diamond Family Scholars' mission and goals.

Initial conversations for support have been initiated with additional family foundation prospects such as The Enrico & Sandra di Portanova Charitable Foundation, Faye L. and William L. Cowden Charitable Foundation, and Jack H. and William M. Light Charitable Trust.

The University is on its way to achieving the \$100,000 fundraising challenge to support the Diamond Emergency Fund. University Advancement has raised \$60,977 through various outreach efforts and has \$35,000 in outstanding pending solicitations. The Urban Experience Program and University Advancement continue cultivating and engaging donors who have previously supported programs that align with the Diamond Family Scholars program.

A Diamond Emergency Fund application has been created and linked to the Diamond Family Program webpage. The application was shared in both the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 academic semesters with all current UH Students who meet the qualifications.

